

**Apartheid: resistance and acquiescence.  
St Paul's Theological College, Grahamstown, 1973-1985**

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*Abstract*

In this article, I shall analyse the response of St Paul's Anglican Theological College in Grahamstown, South Africa, to the sociopolitical issues that unfolded in that country from 1973 to 1985. I shall argue that the College's response was one of resistance and, sometimes, acquiescence to some of the policies of apartheid and to the impact of these policies on the South African population. I shall illustrate that the racial tensions that sometimes surfaced to a certain extent reflected the fact that the College was a microcosm of wider society, a society characterised by the tensions, contradictions and paradoxes inherent in apartheid.

**Introduction**

In recent times, some South African church historians have focussed on historical studies of the Federal Theological Seminary (Fedsem), largely because of its ecumenical significance and the political aspects of its life which, in the 1960s and 1980s, made national headlines.<sup>1</sup> Chichele Hewitt's (Hewitt was the College's last warden) earlier study dealt with the future of theological education in South Africa; in this study, Hewitt focussed on how St Paul's College had been part of the wider changing scene in the years before 1976, throughout 1989 and up to 1994.<sup>2</sup> His later work, a brief history

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Philippe Denis, 'The Rocky Road to Unity: The Worship Quarrel at FEDSEM in the 1980s', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, May 2006 Vol. XXXII, No. 1; 'FEDSEM Ten years Later: The Unwritten History of an Ecumenical Seminary', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 117, November, 2003. Graham Duncan, 'The Prehistory of the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa: A Study in Ecumenical Ancestry', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, September 2006 Vol. XXXII, No 2; See also Graham Duncan and Philippe Denis, *The Native School that Caused all the Trouble: A History of the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher James Chichele Hewitt, 'A History of St. Paul's College', *College of the Transfiguration Journal*, First Anniversary Issue (February 1994), 38-46.

of the College – from its founding in 1902 to its closure in 1992<sup>3</sup> – does not, however, sufficiently address the issue of the College's response to apartheid. Also, while Philippe Denis's study on "Seminary Networks and Black Consciousness" show the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement on tertiary institutions associated with the training of black clergy it, too, is silent on the influence of Black Consciousness on St Paul's Theological College.<sup>4</sup>

During its lifetime, the Anglican provincial St Paul's Theological College in Grahamstown may not have occupied the political limelight as did Fedsem but, to a certain extent, some of the activities of its students (and sometimes its staff) certainly had political ramifications.

In this article, I will highlight some of these activities. In this article, I seek to address the issue: how did St Paul's Theological College respond to the political tensions and conflict that unfolded in South Africa from 1973 to 1985? More specifically, I will illustrate how some of its students (and sometimes its staff) sometimes resisted and sometimes submitted to apartheid policies. In this case, the expression "resistance to apartheid" will imply the stance or actions taken by the student body or a staff member or individuals that directly or implicitly opposed or undermined a specific aspect of apartheid.

In his work, *Domination and arts of resistance: hidden and public transcript*,<sup>5</sup> James Scott makes the observation that sometimes, but not always, resistance takes subtle forms, forms that are implicit in symbols or the icons of power. In this article, I shall argue that, at times, resistance by individual students or a group of students manifested itself in a struggle against such symbols and icons (in this case, of apartheid power). I shall also argue that acquiescence entailed collaboration with apartheid policy – directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly. In other words, acquiescence involved certain (white) students and staff either refusing to take a position that was critical of apartheid policy or tacitly failing to support the cause that worked to dismantle apartheid. For practical purposes, I have drawn from the experiences of only a few students and staff members.

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<sup>3</sup> "A History of St. Bede's and St. Paul's", in John Suggit and Mandy Goedhals (eds.), *Change and Challenge*, Marshalltown: CPISA, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Philippe Denis, 'Seminary Networks and Black Consciousness in South Africa in the 1970s', *South African Historical Journal*, Pretoria: UNISA, vol. 62, Issue 1, 2010, [www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02582471003778417](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02582471003778417) accessed 25/07/13.

<sup>5</sup> James Scott, *Domination and Arts of Resistance: Public and Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

### **The symbolic significance of its location**

The trust deed for the former St Paul's Theological College reads:

*Know all men by these present that whereas in the year of our Lord One Thousand and Nine Hundred and Two the Bishop of Grahamstown establish a residential Theological College for the training of European candidates for the Sacred ministry, and allowed the said College to use, during and for his successors' pleasure, certain ground situated in Grahamstown...*<sup>6</sup>  
(emphasis original)

Ambiguous as the wording 'certain ground' may appear nonetheless, by this proclamation, on 1 October 1902 Edward Cornish, the Bishop of Grahamstown established St Paul's Theological College as a diocesan institution on the premises where the College of Transfiguration (COT) is situated today. Cornish was responding to the resolution of the Provincial Synod of 1876 that each diocese establish a diocesan theological college.<sup>7</sup>

Michael Weeder, the dean of St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, and a former student of the College (1983-1985), picturesquely captured the significance of the College as "a comfortable white enclave on the hill above Rhodes University ... well integrated into the social fabric of the town ... formed part of the power of private schools, the university and to some extent, the governing local authorities and even less so, the farming community".<sup>8</sup> In some respects, its life, which was closely linked with these educational institutions, distinguished St Paul's Theological College as a symbol of an elitist white ecclesiastical power. In 1910, the College acquired its status as a provincial college that trained clergy for the Anglican Church in South Africa.<sup>9</sup>

The "power" of St Paul's College, to which Weeder alluded, lay deep in its long tradition of white power, privilege, traditions and ethos and, by extension, the white establishment in the church – which, in turn, reflected white political dominance. St Paul's College was "powerful" precisely

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<sup>6</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, ACT X, Constitution and Trust Deed of St Paul's College, AB 2568 B4, 1983-1986.

<sup>7</sup> See Philippe Denis, "The Beginnings of Anglican Theological Education in South Africa, 1848-1963", 520, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 63, 03/07/2012, 516-533. [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0022046910002988](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0022046910002988), Accessed 22/07/13.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Mbaya citing Michael Weeder (Response to a Questionnaire) in 'The contribution of the Anglican Church to theological education in South Africa: the Case of St. Paul's Theological College, Grahamstown, 1980s-1990s'. (forthcoming) *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>9</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, ACT X, Constitution and Trust Deed of St Paul's College, AB 2568 A, 1902-1992.

because, symbolically, it contrasted with black institutions which, by political design, were denied similar privileges, and thus disempowered.

### **The throes of change: the 1970s**

#### *Under the wardenship of John Suggit: 1965-1975*

In 1970s, the charismatic renewal swept through nearly all the mainline churches, including the Anglican Church in South Africa,<sup>10</sup> which meant that this renewal also influenced life at St Paul's Theological College. At the time, St Paul's was also experiencing changes in another area. For instance, Hewitt noted as follows: "All through the fifties and sixties apartheid was becoming more entrenched, and the College in the seventies had to face the issue of becoming non-racial."<sup>11</sup>

The first significant development occurred in 1973, when warden John Suggit (later professor at Rhodes University) appointed Zolile Escourt Mbali as the first black lecturer and chaplain. Suggit, recalling that episode in 2012, said that he believed that Mbali was the best qualified black priest to take up the position in the College.<sup>12</sup>

The life of Mbali itself symbolised the wider struggle taking place in the country. To circumvent the Group Areas Act, which separated blacks from whites, the College arranged that Mbali have a room in the College but reside in the black township of Joza in St Philip's Parish, where he served as an assistant priest.<sup>13</sup> So if the security police asked him where he lived, he could safely tell them that he lived in the township, thus avoiding the allegation that he and the College were violating the Group Areas Act.<sup>14</sup> Mbali recalls that, when driving to and from St Paul's, he often noticed a police van following him.<sup>15</sup>

According to Suggit, Mbali left the College in 1974 and went to work in Botswana where he married his English wife, Charlotte.<sup>16</sup> For Mbali, lecturing white students brought challenges. He said he felt that some of them resented being taught by a black lecturer and could not come to terms with

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<sup>10</sup> See Philippe Denis, 'The Rocky Road to Unity: The Worship Quarrel at FEDSEM in the 1980s', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, May 2006 Vol. XXXII, No. 1., 205.

<sup>11</sup> 'A History of St. Bede's and St. Paul's' in John Suggit and Mandy Goedhals (eds.), *Change and Challenge*, 1998, (CPSA: Marshalltown, 1998), 120.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Professor John N Suggit, Noordhoek, Cape Town, 26/10/12.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Professor John N Suggit, Noordhoek, Cape Town, 26/10/12; Telephone interview with Reverend Zolile Mbali, 22/11/12.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Professor John N Suggit, Noordhoek, Cape Town, 26/10/12; Telephone interview with Reverend Zolile Mbali, 22/11/12.

<sup>15</sup> Telephone interview with Reverend Zolile Mbali, 22/11/12.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Professor John N Suggit, Noordhoek, Cape Town, 26/10/12.

the fact.<sup>17</sup> Mbali got the feeling that he was just being tolerated; after the examinations, white students would have nothing to do with him.<sup>18</sup> (Mbali would tell them that those who did not take his lectures seriously would fail the examination on the subject at the end of the year.)<sup>19</sup> Mbali said he was conscious that, as the first black lecturer to be appointed at the College, he had to prove himself. He needed to succeed to pave the way for those who would follow him.<sup>20</sup>

As part of an ongoing process to reach out to the black community, Suggit and the staff arranged that, during Holy Week in 1973, they would visit St Peter's College in Alice and St Bede's College in Mthatha. In the aftermath of these visits, Suggit wrote about the experience in the *Doulos* thus:

Another change concerned Holy Week. Perhaps for the first time ever we spent Holy Week and Easter away from St. Paul's. There were many misgivings when it was first suggested. Half of the College, with the Sub-Warden, spent the time at St. Peter's, Alice, and the other half with the Chaplain and myself, spent the week at St. Bede's, Umtata. In both places friendships were made and renewed and we began to be aware of the frustrations experienced by black members of the Church, and of the need to express more adequately our oneness in Christ.<sup>21</sup>

That Suggit states that there were "many misgivings when it was first suggested" indicates the extent of the "success" of the apartheid, namely, that whites were uncomfortable about crossing racial boundaries to embrace blacks. It shows the extent to which racial isolation in the church and College had become "naturalised". Yet the courageous move by the College to reach out to the black residential colleges of St Peter's College and St Bede's College undermined the barriers imposed by apartheid.

Regarding St Paul's efforts in trying to build bridges with St Bede's, Suggit recalls that, one day, Alphaeus Zulu, then Suffragan bishop of St John's diocese (Mthatha), remarked that as "the African students studying at St. Bede's College came from a background intellectually different from that of their Europeans counterparts it would be unfair to rush or to bring them to get to grasp issues of racial unity, rather they be given some time to grapple

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<sup>17</sup> Telephone interview with Reverend Zolile Mbali, 22/11/12.

<sup>18</sup> Telephone interview with Reverend Zolile Mbali, 22/11/12.

<sup>19</sup> Telephone interview with Reverend Zolile Mbali, 22/11/12.

<sup>20</sup> Telephone interview with Reverend Zolile Mbali, 22/11/12.

<sup>21</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B 4.

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with these issues”.<sup>22</sup> Zulu’s remarks reflect the extent to which apartheid education and social circumstances constrained black students in Mthatha from entering into meaningful dialogue with their white counterparts from St Paul’s College in Grahamstown. St Paul’s efforts to reach out to St Bede’s students made a deep impression on one particular student, Charles van Heerden. After his experience at St Bede’s, in the College magazine, *Doulos*, Van Heerden wrote:

Now is the time; Christ is risen and alive now – so let us bridge the gap and believe that Christ is the King, and the King of all creation. Let us set out to do something about it and establish a multi-racial and even more radical, multi-racial ecumenical college, so as to learn from each other and experience the fullness of creation.<sup>23</sup>

Van Heerden’s sentiments for a racially integrated college remained a far-fetched dream. Asked to comment on this episode in 2012, Suggit recalled that St Paul’s College was very concerned about the need to build bridges with black communities, and recounted one of these attempts:

Every Friday – the staff and students missed lunch weekly on Fridays and took the food (groceries) to the township where the students distributed it to the people. [They] did not ask for permission to visit the township. These visits lasted one to two hours when the children were also taught even hymns such as “Joy”.<sup>24</sup>

Regular visits to the township where St Paul’s members of staff and students distributed food was one option available to the College, and gave the College an opportunity to witness the love of Christ to people who had been dehumanised by apartheid. Such visits could not go unnoticed by the government authorities. Thus Suggit recalls that: “One day, Mr Boast, a Location Superintendent, said, ‘I have been instructed to stop you from visiting the Township.’ So we stopped visiting the township but then made arrangements where food was still taken to the township to be distributed.”<sup>25</sup> Open visits and the distribution of food to the needy in the township were, of course, an indictment of the government. It is possible that some government officials

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Professor John N Suggit, Noordhoek, Cape Town, 26/10/12.

<sup>23</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, ACSA Archives, *Doulos*, 1964-1974, AB 2568 A 3.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Professor John N Suggit, Noordhoek, Cape Town, 26/10/12.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Professor John N Suggit, Noordhoek, Cape Town, 26/10/12.

were irritated by these actions, simply because the College made it clear that the government was responsible for the plight of black people.

The fact that the staff and the students stopped going to the township suggests that they capitulated to the authorities' demands. Their presence in the township was a more powerful symbol of Christian moral witness than their symbolic "presence" in the form of food (groceries).

### **Apartheid: mounting resistance**

#### *The Soweto uprising in 1976*

- Under the wardenship of Duncan Buchanan: 1976-1985

Having been sub-warden since 1966, in 1976 Duncan Buchanan (subsequently Bishop of Johannesburg) was appointed warden in the year of the Soweto uprising. How did this uprising influence St Paul's? Buchanan recalls, that in its aftermath, "St. Paul's acted for several weeks as a sort of staging house for the young...(mainly men) to gather themselves before moving on."<sup>26</sup> That the young men found the College a safe space suggests that the black community of Grahamstown had a degree of confidence in the College. Furthermore, by providing a safe haven for political activists, the College made it clear that it was critical of the apartheid policies that had caused destabilisation in the townships.

Notwithstanding the above, the 1970s saw the entrenchment of apartheid. Following the arrest of Steve Biko outside Grahamstown on 18 August 1977, the government banned Black Consciousness organisations.<sup>27</sup> Sean Greyling noted that "cases dealing with deaths in detention were heard in the Grahamstown Supreme Court".<sup>28</sup> The same year the College received its two African students, one of whom was Frederick Hendricks.<sup>29</sup> Similar developments took place at Rhodes University at the same time.<sup>30</sup> However,

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<sup>26</sup> Henry Mbaya citing a Response to a Questionnaire, Duncan Buchanan, 'The contribution of the Anglican Church to theological education in South Africa: the Case of St. Paul's Theological College, Grahamstown, 1980s-1990s'. (forthcoming ) *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>27</sup> Sean A. Greyling, *Rhodes University During the Segregation and Apartheid Eras, 1933-1990*, 1970, M.A. thesis, <http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1250/1/Greyling-MAthesis.pdf>, accessed 23/07/13.

<sup>28</sup> Sean A. Greyling, *Rhodes University During the Segregation and Apartheid Eras, 1933-1990*, M.A. thesis, Rhodes University, 2007, <http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1250/1/Greyling-MAthesis.pdf>, accessed 23/07/13.

<sup>29</sup> Response to a Questionnaire, Bishop Duncan Buchanan, 12/06/11. In terms of the government's racial classification, Hendricks would be classified as "coloured".

<sup>30</sup> See Greyling, *Rhodes University During the Segregation and Apartheid Eras, 1933-1990*, M.A. thesis, Rhodes University, 2007, <http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1250/1/Greyling-MAthesis.pdf> accessed 23/07/13.

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Hewitt noted that, when he came to the College in 1977, there were 50 students, that the numbers were maintained until they started dwindling after 1989.<sup>31</sup> Archbishop Bill Burnett provides some insight into the changes that took place in the College. By July 1978 he noted that: "And now we can thank God for a College full of Students and one which is increasingly racially integrated."<sup>32</sup> Graham Duncan attributed the changes in the racial orientation in the College in the 1979s to "a deliberate policy [taken by the Anglican Church] despite the constitutional and legal implications which necessitated change and defiance."<sup>33</sup> By bringing in coloured students in a predominantly white college, the Anglican Church followed a deliberate policy of defying apartheid's Group Areas Act and the Separate Amenities Act. The number of black students enrolled at the College increased throughout the 1980s. St Paul's received a number of coloured students (mostly from Cape Town) who were much more politically vocal than their predecessors. As it was, throughout the 1980s, Grahamstown started to experience higher levels of violence and police brutality. Greyling summarised the social climate in Grahamstown of that period as follows:

Between 1980 and 1981, Grahamstown was stuck with acute township violence. Thousands of children boycotted the schools and hundreds of workers went on strike. ... to curb the violence the White police men, in armed vehicles, were sent into the townships and resulted in further deaths from police brutality ... While White police entered the township during the day, members of the South African Defence Force executed operations at night. This was a precursor to the violence that would erupt in the mid-1980s.<sup>34</sup>

This context was to have a bearing on relationships in the College between white and black students, an issue to which I shall now turn.

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<sup>31</sup> Hewitt, 'A History of St. Paul's College', 38-46.

<sup>32</sup> William Cullen Library, ACSA Archives, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: AB 2568 A 4, News from St. Paul's, July 1978.

<sup>33</sup> Graham Duncan, 'The Prehistory of the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa: A Study in Ecumenical Ancestry', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, September 2006, Vol. XXXII, No. 2, , 91.

<sup>34</sup> Greyling, *Rhodes University During the Segregation and Apartheid Eras, 933-1990*, MA thesis, Rhodes University, 2007, <http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1250/1/Greyling-MAthesis.pdf>, accessed 23/07/13.



## **The crisis in 1982**

### *A mirror of the Group Areas Act*

- A “normal” community in an “abnormal” society

To a degree, the Soweto uprising and its aftermath put relationships between whites and blacks in a new perspective. Black youths became not only more assertive and more aggressive, but actually became militant in their attitude towards institutional racism.<sup>35</sup> In turn, whites became more insecure, more suspicious and more scared of blacks.<sup>36</sup> To a certain extent, the Soweto uprising was to cast a long shadow over relationships between whites and blacks in the country and, in this case, this was also true of relationships at St Paul's College.

The warden's report to the College Council in 1982 referred to the eruption of racial tensions, in fact, a racial crisis in the College. What caused this crisis? Among other issues, Buchanan alluded to the presence of black students in the College. In his words, this development was in response “... to the socio-political changes blowing in the society around the 1980s ... in a college which hitherto had been predominantly white”.<sup>37</sup> Throughout the 1980s, as apartheid became more entrenched, so black resistance mounted. This new development affected many aspects of life in St Paul's College.

Di Buchanan, Buchanan's wife, and Loraine Tulleken recalls that Buchanan “broke the law by admitting black students, and was harassed by the security police and bombarded with government warnings as a result. He decided that if push came to shove he would recommend to the church that it close the college rather than be forced to obey the law”.<sup>38</sup> They noted that “the police's Special Branch was breathing on his neck, and threatening dire consequences. Valuable lessons were learnt by staff, students and families”.<sup>39</sup> Buchanan's principled stance to have the College closed rather than obey the law reminds one of the position taken by the Anglican Church during the enactment of the Bantu Education Act in 1953, where the Church chose to

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<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/2342>, accessed 22/02/13.

<sup>36</sup> See <http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/2342>, accessed 22/02/13.

<sup>37</sup> See Henry Mbaya, citing Duncan Buchanan, Response to a Questionnaire, “The contribution of the Anglican Church to theological education in South Africa: the Case of St. Paul's Theological College, Grahamstown, 1980s-1990s” (forthcoming). *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>38</sup> *Sunday Times*, Obituary, 31/10/12. See also story of the College of Transfiguration,

<sup>39</sup> Obituary, *Southern Anglican*, Claremont: Uhuru Communications, December, 2012, vol. 35, 24-25.

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surrender its private schools rather than be forced to teach a curriculum that gave inferior education to black people.<sup>40</sup>

As far as the issue of permits was concerned, Weeder gives another perspective. He recalls that, when he asked Buchanan if the College had applied for permits for black students studying at St Paul's (as a whites-only college), Buchanan answered "not individually."<sup>41</sup> This answer suggests that the College did apply for "blanket" study permits for all black students.

Nonetheless, in his report to the College Council in October 1982, Buchanan outlined three aspects of the problem that led to the crisis. He asserted that:

We went through a real crisis of leadership in the College. The members of staff were not at one, being too distracted in many ways. The students complained that I was too much away (*in fact* no more than any other year), but it *felt* more because of their need to lean on someone.<sup>42</sup>

And then he continued to assert that other members of staff were away on study leave and another one was recovering from illness.<sup>43</sup> Disunity in the ranks of the staff due to issues relating to personal relationships, and the staff's regular absence from the College, created uncertainty in the College; also, there was a leadership vacuum which, in turn, created a gap in authority. Equally serious, according to Buchanan, was the weakness of leadership shown by the Senior Student, the person responsible for leading and guiding students on a regular basis. According to Buchanan:

But the Senior Student was, while good in many ways, too young and inexperienced for this job, and was consequently not able to give the sort of lead which we have usually had from the Senior Student.<sup>44</sup>

The leadership of the Senior Student was critical to the everyday running of the College; the Senior Student was responsible for providing guidance in terms of student welfare and student concerns, and was also responsible for advising the staff about student affairs. The Senior Student was sort of a "go-

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<sup>40</sup> Bob Clarke, *Anglicans against Apartheid, 1936-1996*, (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008), 87.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Michael Weeder, Deanery, Cape Town, 08/12/12.

<sup>42</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B 3, Minute file.

<sup>43</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B 3, Minute file.

<sup>44</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B 3, Minute file.

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between” between the students and staff. Weakness in the leadership of the Senior Student suggests a major breakdown in communication. The existence of a “power vacuum” contributed to the instability experienced in the College at the time.

Commenting on this episode in 2012, Philip le Feuvre, the future bishop of St Mark, the Evangelist, Limpopo, then a lecturer, said that “the situation was so difficult that any Senior Student would have felt out of his depth”.<sup>45</sup> However, in his analysis of the crisis, Buchanan identified another aspect of the problem as the diversity of the talented and gifted students who needed space to express themselves:

The last factor was that last year's final year class was one of the most talented and amazingly competent groups of people I have ever come across in this College. The result was that, with their burgeoning talent and leadership gifts, they really did not have enough space to express themselves – and so tended to turn inward, with some very fierce clashes of personality ensuing.<sup>46</sup>

Buchanan's observation appears to be supported by the experience of a coloured student who studied there between 1980 and 1982. This student made the following assertion:

Whites conveyed the attitude that we owed it to them to be at St. Paul's, they were doing us a favour. One year, a white student wanted to go to run the Comrades marathon, we said if he goes to do that - that meant that he was supporting apartheid policy. As a result of this he never went. One day I remarked during lecturer room that whites are racists and they were very furious, and one student tried to assault me and I had to run out of class.<sup>47</sup>

This shows that some students tried to challenge what they perceived as racism on the part of some white students. The College leadership was unable to handle these sort of incidents and this, in turn, led to increased frustration on the part of coloured, Indian and black students. According to the student quoted above, these incidents were engendered by white students' superior attitudes to blacks. He noted:

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Bishop Philip le Feuvre, Somerset West, Cape Town, 19/11/12.

<sup>46</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B 3, Minute file.

<sup>47</sup> Influenced by Black Consciousness Movement, this student regarded himself as black. Interview with anonymous, Cape Town, 12/12/12.

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As blacks, our experience was that white students conveyed the attitude that they could tolerate us only in fellowship during worship in chapel – while in other aspects of the life of the college they were unquestionably looking down upon blacks. We felt very strongly and insisted that we needed to address the issues here in the college and not out there. We had black caucus, which we used to meet regularly.<sup>48</sup>

The student went on to claim that:

When we arrived, St. Paul's was rigidly whites, they dominated every aspect of the life of the college ... they marginalised us. I remember one Easter Sunday where it was only whites who were involved in the service; even reading the Scriptures blacks were excluded that Sunday...it was almost as if we did not exist. I marched out of the service.<sup>49</sup>

According to Buchanan, however, what precipitated the problem was:

Ostensibly the desire of the black students to have a meeting together to formulate their grievances and to find some sort of clarity amongst themselves, a meeting was held with my approval and blessing. This sort of sectional meeting had never been held before, and the whites felt very threatened – and reacted in a very insecure way.<sup>50</sup>

It ought to be noted that, under the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement, many coloured and Indian students positioned themselves as blacks.<sup>51</sup> Blackness was a strategic construct to circumvent the policy of

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with anonymous participant, Cape Town, 12/12/12.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with anonymous participant, Cape Town, 12/12/12.

<sup>50</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B 3, Minute file.

<sup>51</sup> Informal discussions, Rev. Fr. Austen Jackson, 23/07/13, Stellenbosch, Cape Town. The same source also reminisced that Rubin Philip, the Anglican present bishop of Natal, was the secretary of the South Africa Students Organisation, a constitutive organisation of the Black Consciousness Movement. Hence from this stage onwards Black Conscious coloured and Indian students will be identified as blacks. As Philippe Denis showed, Black Consciousness was powerful force amongst coloured and black students in tertiary institutions see [www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02582471003778417](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02582471003778417), accessed, 22/07/13.

racial separation.<sup>52</sup> Yet there were other coloured and Black students who appeared not to align themselves with this ideology.<sup>53</sup>

As it was, black students' desire to meet by themselves with a view to presenting their grievances suggest their alienation from their white counterparts; they felt a sense of insecurity amongst whites, and to some degree there was a lack of communication between the two groups. In other words, black students attempted to "empower" themselves in a situation where they felt "disempowered". On the other hand, the fact that some white students felt threatened and reacted in an insecure way suggests their estrangement from blacks.

What caused the discord? Buchanan analysed the experience of the students in 1982 in these words:

My own view is that South Africa is so polarised, that students come into the College from our various "group areas" with appalling and often obscene caricatures of each other – and the breaking down of these is necessarily a painful and uneasy process, which more often than not requires an explosion to actually help people to see people and not two-dimensional cartoon figures.<sup>54</sup>

These misrepresentations led to racial tension which, according to Buchanan, was the consequence of blacks and whites living in the segregated racial areas in wider South Africa society. This adversely influenced relationships between students who, for the first time, had to learn to live together in the College as brothers and sisters in Christ. Buchanan blamed the racial "cartooning figures" of each other on apartheid's Group Areas Act which, in his view, distorted the different races' perceptions of reality.

Occasionally, incidences of racial violence perpetrated by the security police in Grahamstown or surrounding areas put a strain on these relationships – sometimes leading to anger on the part of some black students who, in turn, expressed hostility to their white counterparts. It certainly tested the College's very premises of priestly training: Christian love and fellowship.

Ironically, Buchanan acknowledged that racial "explosions" amongst blacks and whites were a necessary part of a painful process towards the breaking down of apartheid-imposed racial barriers. Indeed, Buchanan viewed these "explosions" as essential in the process of achieving racial harmony. In his report to the College Council in 1983, however, Buchanan

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<sup>52</sup> Informal discussions with Rev. Fr. Austen Jackson, Stellenbosch, 23/07/13.

<sup>53</sup> Informal discussions with Rev. Fr. Austen Jackson, Stellenbosch, 23/07/13.

<sup>54</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B 3, Minute file.

went further in his analysis of the racial explosion that occurred in 1982. He asserted: "Whatever else, I suggested [in my last year's report] was the cause, the College itself suffered from a crisis of leadership. The experience taught us much, not least that leadership is not something which can be taken for granted."<sup>55</sup> Here Buchanan refers not only to the leadership of the student body, but his own leadership and that shown (or not shown) by the rest of the staff.

Commenting on this episode in 2012, Steve Moreo, the Anglican bishop of Johannesburg, then the only black student in 1982 and Philip le Feuvre, a lecturer, attributed the crisis to the consequences of change in the racial composition of the College, this being an increase in number of black students.<sup>56</sup> This group, mostly from Cape Town, became more politically vocal, radical and activist in its orientation. The presence of this group of students effectively changed the ethos of the College which, hitherto, had been dominated by white lifestyles and white thinking.<sup>57</sup> During the weekly meetings held in the Common Room, Buchanan encouraged students to express their views on the current social and political issues. The views expressed by some black students sounded extreme and "left-wing" to white students, and tended to alienate these white students.<sup>58</sup>

The crisis needs to be put into a national context. In his book, *Anglicans against Apartheid*, Bob Clarke noted that the African National Congress characterised the years from 1982 to 1986 as the years of the "Total Onslaught", years which marked the final struggle against the white government and apartheid. In 1982, the archbishop of Cape Town, Philip Russell, warned that unless there was "radical change there would be increasing church-state confrontation" which would, in turn, pressurise the government to respond with increasing brutal force. He noted that there were detentions without trial and that, in Lent 1982, refugees from Cross-Roads camped in St George's Cathedral in Cape Town.<sup>59</sup> The Provincial Synod meeting in Port Elizabeth that year under his presidency condemned apartheid as totally "unchristian, evil and a heresy". The Synod also condemned the Mixed Marriages and Immorality Act, and forced resettlement.<sup>60</sup> Directly or indirectly, these events would not have left the College unaffected.

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<sup>55</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B 3, Minute file.

<sup>56</sup> Questionnaire/telephone conversation with Bishop Steve Moreo, 07/11/12; interview with Bishop Philip Le Feuvre, Somerset West, Cape Town, 19/11/12.

<sup>57</sup> Telephone interview with Bishop Steve Moreo, 07/11/12; interview with Bishop Philip Le Feuvre, Somerset West, Cape Town, 19/11/12.

<sup>58</sup> Telephone interview with Bishop Steve Moreo, 07/11/12; interview with Bishop Philip Le Feuvre, Somerset West, Cape Town, 19/11/12; Personal Reminiscences, 1984-87.

<sup>59</sup> Clarke, *Anglicans against Apartheid, 1936-1996*, 384.

<sup>60</sup> Clarke, *Anglicans against Apartheid, 1936-1996*, 384.

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From 1983 to 1986, Bishop Desmond Tutu served on the College Council and his views started to influence the direction taken by the College in the context of the racial tensions that had occurred in 1982. The report of the College Council, 28 February 1983 Minute 7, noted two important issues that Bishop Tutu raised:

(1) That,

In light of the events of last year [1982] [Bishop Tutu] raised questions of staffing and that it would be appropriate for a black member of staff to be appointed. The Warden responded that he is greatly concerned that this should happen and is in the process of negotiation with two possible members of staff in this regard.<sup>61</sup>

Tutu's concern, namely, that the College's fundamental problem was that there were no black lecturers, was perceptive. To remedy the situation, he recommended the appointment of a black lecturer as a matter of necessity, a concern which Buchanan said he shared and an issue which was already under consideration.

Tutu's recommendation reflects his penetrating insight into the problem of racial relationships. The absence of a black lecturer in a white-dominated college had alienated what few black students there were. After the departure of the first black member of staff, Zolile Escourt Mbali in 1974, no black lecturer had been appointed to replace him.

For Tutu, the presence of a black member of staff in a white-dominated context was critical as a "bridge" between black and white students. In the environment of racial mistrust that permeated throughout the College, which was a reflection of the national context, black students were more likely to confide in a black rather than a white lecturer. The next black lecturer was to be Fred Hendricks in 1984.<sup>62</sup> In this meeting Tutu also raised the issue of African languages.

(1) [He] also asked whether anything was being done about African languages. The Warden responded that he had always believed that this was a responsibility of the post-ordination training programme and should be dealt with at that level, if people needed to know a language; they were in a position to use it immediately.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, College Council Minutes, 28/2/83, AB 2568 B4.

<sup>62</sup> Information from Rev Fr. Austen Jackson. 22/07/13.

<sup>63</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, College Council Minutes, 28/2/83, AB 2568 B4.

In the light of the racial tensions at the time, Buchanan's answer was not very helpful because it seemed to suggest that the issue of African languages was not of immediate concern to the College, but was a matter for individual dioceses to deal with in post-ordination training programmes. Again, Tutu's remarks were perceptive – his question suggests that blacks were effectively excluded from a context that appeared to affirm only white culture in worship. By failing to accommodate African languages at that stage in its history, the College implicitly affirmed apartheid's language policy (at least, this is how it appeared). The fact that the College did not introduce the use of black languages in worship also suggested a denial of the affirmation of black students and, indeed, a failure to provide an opportunity for white students to be exposed to black languages.

The issue of African languages became increasingly important as the number of Africans in the College increased. For instance, in 1983, in the first year class of 63 students there were 4 black, 15 coloured, and 1 Indian student while, the following year, in the first and second year classes, there were 4 black, 13 coloured and 2 Indian students out of a class of some 60 students.<sup>64</sup> Moreo recalls that, during his time at St Paul's, he struggled on two levels: coming from a Tswana background he had been socialised into believing that whites were superior to blacks, while his school background of Bantu education tended to constrain him both academically and socially.<sup>65</sup>

Yet the racial explosions have to be put into the wider political context. They took place just six years after the June 1976 Soweto uprising. The episode marked a shift in perception and attitudes between the races, with blacks increasingly mistrusting whites.

#### **From 1983 to 1984**

In 1983, Gilmore Fry was appointed the first ever black senior student.<sup>66</sup> The appointment reflected the change in the College's demographics and racial outlook: coloureds, Indians and blacks increasingly were becoming more vocal. Meanwhile, with the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF), the year 1983 turned out to be a landmark in South Africa's political landscape. The Eastern Cape became one of the country's "boiling spots". The arrival, in 1983, of politically more conscious and more vocal coloured students from Cape Town, including Michael Weeder, Rogers Govender (from Durban), Alan Kanameyer, Leslie Adriaanse and Austen Jackson, ushered in an activist-oriented approach to sociopolitical issues that directly

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<sup>64</sup> Statistics from Allan Kanameyer, Dean of the Anglican Cathedral, Pretoria.

<sup>65</sup> Telephone interview and a questionnaire Bishop Steve Moreo, 07/11/12.

<sup>66</sup> Gilmore Fry, according to government designation of the day would be classified as "coloured".



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impacted on the College and, by extension, the country. Today, these people provide us with insights into a part of their life which they kept to themselves at the time. Govender and Jackson recall that:

A small group of black students, Michael Weeder, Rogers Govender, Austen Jackson, Alan Kanameyer and Leslie Adriaanse were like ring leaders in political activism in the college. [They] got interested in Marxism, especially the theory of historical materialism, and started having sessions on Marxism in the college given by Arshwin Desai from Rhodes University, subsequently it was learnt that somehow the police knew (through one student) in Grahamstown that ...[they] were receiving lessons in Marxist political theories.<sup>67</sup>

The students' involvement in Marxism is a reflection of the broader developments in the country, a national discourse characterised by the phrase "total onslaught" or "bringing down apartheid" and, in the 1980s, Marxism seemed to offer the tools needed to analyse and understand the power struggle in South Africa. Weeder said this involvement in Marxism was prompted by the need to understand the working class, why they were poor, and the need to read the Bible from the position of the marginalised.<sup>68</sup>

Weeder recalls that black students regularly met as a forum or a caucus (although this was not formally instituted) before the Common Room meetings held every Monday evening.<sup>69</sup> These meetings became crucial in forming and shaping a collective black opinion on issues before the Common Room College meetings.<sup>70</sup> Even though whites did not have an organisation of their own, black students also knew that white students were meeting informally at the same time. In 1983, the group of black students I am discussing here put pressure on the College to take a clear position vis-à-vis the UDF. Rogers Govender, the current dean of Manchester Cathedral, United Kingdom, then one of the leading students, remembers the experience thus:

Most of the rebellion came from blacks. In the college we had the opportunity to talk and discuss. In 1983 we had a huge political debate for 5 hours on whether St. Paul's College should join UDF in the Eastern Cape. After the debate, the Warden, Duncan Buchanan, supported the proposal justifying

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Rogers Govender and Rev Fr Austen Jackson, Parow, Cape Town, 11/10/12.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Michael Weeder, Deanery, Cape Town, 08/12/12.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Michael Weeder, Deanery, Cape Town, 08/12/12.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Michael Weeder, Deanery, Cape Town, 08/12/12.

it by citing the Biblical story of Cyrus of Persia who was used by God to save Israel. After debate the proposal was carried. In spite of the fact that the bishops did not approve of the college's position – as seen to be a political stance, however, for us the fact that we had discussed it as the college it gave us moral support.<sup>71</sup>

The influence of some politically conscious black and – to some extent – certain white students, in attempts to lead the College in a new direction were notable, but Buchanan's leadership was equally significant. By using biblical authority symbolically, Buchanan in effect legitimised and justified the decision to support the College's alignment with the UDF. By supporting the UDF, St Paul's openly identified more radically with the cause of black emancipation, thereby alienating some white students in the process. By taking this stance, St Paul's College positioned itself as the foe of the apartheid government. This move reflects the radicalisation of College "politics". However, this did not mean that all students saw themselves as members of the UDF.<sup>72</sup> In fact, not all black students were members of the UDF. Nonetheless, those who were involved participated actively in the UDF's structures in Grahamstown.<sup>73</sup>

### **Contestations over the symbols and icons of apartheid**

The Separate Amenities Act, which designated separate sport facilities for various racial categories, affected the College in a number of ways. The "temptation" or desire of some white students (and staff) to play with others on superior, whites-only, sports facilities became a contentious issue for debate in the Common Room, sometimes to the extent of causing a rift. Govender and Jackson reminisce:

The other highlight related to SACOS, South African Council of Sport in 1983, which took the position that there could be no normal support in an abnormal society. The College took a position that in terms of its multi-racial nature the College in solidarity with Blacks would not play sport on white facilities... some of the white students would say that we used to

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Rogers Govender and Rev Fr. Austen Jackson, Parow, Cape Town , 11/10/12.

<sup>72</sup> Informal discussions, Rev. Fr. Austen Jackson, Stellenbosch, 24/07/13.

<sup>73</sup> Personal Reminiscences, 1984-1986.

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make them cry and had taken it personally ... as they felt that the debates were hateful.<sup>74</sup>

Le Feuvre recalls that the College took a position that put it in solidarity with the oppressed majority, that white students (and staff) would not play sport on facilities from which blacks were barred.<sup>75</sup> He remembers, in particular, an episode where a white student invited a coloured student to accompany him to a movie in town only to realise subsequently that such an invitation was a humiliation or an insult to all black people who were prohibited from facilities reserved for whites. Le Feuvre concluded that it was because of such constraints that the College had to buy a television set to provide entertainment. Le Feuvre also recalls that another issue that caused tension was the white students' and staff's use of the Eagle Bus reserved for whites only (from Grahamstown to Port Elizabeth and vice versa).

According to Le Feuvre, whites felt that it was unfair for blacks to blame them for using the bus because they simply had no option: blacks could use taxis. Issues such as these became centres of the struggle between white and black students. Buchanan asserted that these issues reflected the wider struggle that was taking place in South Africa at the time. In his warden's letter of 1983, he wrote the following:

The situation in the country is very much reflected in the College. The differing attitudes focus never more clearly on the annual debate on sport policy. Do we play "non-racial" or "multi-racial" sport, this is not an exercise in semantics, but a matter of deep and agonising Christian concern. The question of playing teams which are not committed to a non-racial policy on fields which are available only by permit is a matter of agony to many blacks, yet often initially not even vaguely understood by most whites. The sensitivity with which this issue is dealt is often one of the marks of the College year.<sup>76</sup>

At the College Council held on 31 October 1983, the College's involvement in the life of the country came under the spotlight. The College was encouraged to be more involved in the communities, especially those disadvantaged through apartheid policies in the Ciskei. The Council minutes noted that: "Bishop Tutu raised the question of the *involvement of the College in the life of the Country* (emphasis original). He said that he was pleased that

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Rogers Govender and Rev Fr Austen Jackson, Parow, Cape Town, 11/10/12.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Bishop Philip le Feuvre, Somerset West, Cape Town, 19/11/12.

<sup>76</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 A 4, Wardens Letters, 1983-1991.

the College had been instrumental in organising a service for the 19<sup>th</sup> October even if it had been banned at a late stage.”<sup>77</sup>

The minutes further noted that Tutu “also raised the question of [the College] involvement in the Ciskei and wondered if it was possible to make some sort of statement in this regard”.<sup>78</sup> Yet, according to Buchanan, “the college was already involved in terms of resettlement camps and exposing people to ministry in that situation”.<sup>79</sup> More importantly, to strengthen and broaden the ministry among the poor in the Ciskei, the Council resolved to “add R2,000.00 on top of the R261.00 that the college had collected ‘to help people in Mdantsane’”.<sup>80</sup> For Tutu and others, the College’s critical involvement constituted symbolic, significant opposition to apartheid. It was a way of exposing the injustices of apartheid, injustices that manifested themselves in the poverty of rural communities in South Africa (such as those communities who lived in the Ciskei).

The year 1983 was dominated by “Tricameral politics”. Designed to give very limited powers to coloured and Indian populations, the Tricameral Parliament was created to entrench the political power of the white section of South Africa,<sup>81</sup> thereby further marginalising the black majority. Govender and Jackson recall that:

In 1983, Hendrickse came to the Coloured Township in Grahamstown where he addressed people in the hall. [We, that is, Govender, Jackson] and Michael Weeder, clad in our black cassocks, went to the meeting.<sup>82</sup> After Hendrickse’s speech, during question time, then Mike [Weeder] being persistently nudged by Olivia Forsyth, [who subsequently turned out to be an apartheid operative], indicated by the show of his hand that

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<sup>77</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B4, Minutes of the Council Meetings. The writer has not so far succeeded in identifying the service in question. Bishop Philip le Feuvre, a former lecturer, seems to have forgotten about the service.

<sup>78</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B4, Minutes of the Council Meetings.

<sup>79</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B4, Minutes of the Council Meetings.

<sup>80</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B4, Minutes of the Council Meetings.

<sup>81</sup> See *The Road To Democracy in South Africa (1980-1990)*, vol. 4, Part 2, Pretoria: UNISA, 2010, 1584.

<sup>82</sup> The issue of the attire on this occasion is contested. For instance Weeder recalls that they were wearing St Paul’s College blazers, (interview with Michael Weeder, Deanery, Cape Town, 08/12/12). If, as Govender and Jackson asserted, they were wearing cassocks, a liturgical garment, then their act symbolically constituted “claiming” the space in the hall for the church. If, on the other hand, as Weeder says, they wore college blazers, their action carried less symbolic significance since these blazers carried less official authority than cassocks.

he wanted to dispute what Mr Hendrickse was saying about the ANC, he was denied a chance to raise a question. Commotion then followed, people throwing chairs, and that marked the end of the meeting.<sup>83</sup>

The students' engagement with Mr Hendrickse implied the College's resistance to the politics of marginalisation and exclusion, in other words, the politics which Mr Hendrickse and his party represented. That an apartheid operative, Olivia Forsyth, sat with the students and even prompted Weeder to raise a question suggests the extent to which the apartheid security agents monitored the activities of students from St Paul's College. The clerical attire that students wore on that particular occasion had a certain amount of symbolic significance. Identifying with St Paul's College was symbolically important: a place that had, traditionally, been a centre of white power, was now openly critical of the apartheid policies of racial division.

#### **Offering "political prayers"**

Occasionally the fight against apartheid surreptitiously occurred in the context of worship in the chapel where, sometimes, students prayed "against" each other's intentions. For instance, Weeder recalls that, in 1983, during prayer time in the chapel a white student prayed for the South African Defence Force soldiers fighting on the borders and Weeder responded by praying for soldiers on the opposite side, the MK (ANC).<sup>84</sup> These prayers signified an ideological struggle, one seeking to preserve apartheid, and the other trying to dismantle it. Yet to both sides a prayer became also a "symbol" or what we might call a tool of emotional healing because both parties believed that "their God" would hear their prayers. The writer witnessed these 'political prayers' in St Paul's Theological College chapel in the years between 1984 and 1986.

It was the invitation to Terror Lekota, the chairman of UDF in the Eastern Cape in 1984, to address the College that symbolised another significant radical shift in college politics. Lekota addressed the College on the phenomenon of the mass democratic movement. Govender recalls that he chaired the meeting, a meeting which about only 25 students out of (about) 50 attended.<sup>85</sup> The fact that only about half the number of the College student body attended the meeting seems to illustrate the divisive nature of the issue (i.e. the College's affiliation with the UDF). More significantly, by inviting

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Rogers Govender and Rev Fr Austen Jackson, Parow, Cape Town, 11/10/12.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Michael Weeder, Deanery, Cape Town, 08/12/12.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Rogers Govender, Rev Fr Austen Jackson, Parow, Cape Town, 11/10/12; Interview with Rev Fr Michael Weeder, Deanery, Cape Town, 08/12/12.

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Lekota to address the College, the politically radical students enrolled at the College symbolically claimed a “traditionally” white space for the black struggle against apartheid.

In 1984, as a sign of protest against the Tricameral Parliament, the story is told that twelve students clad in their cassocks stood at the rear end of St George's Cathedral, whereupon an Afrikaner came advancing towards them, and then said, “You hypocrites ..., pis ...”<sup>86</sup> The episode symbolised the tension between two political positions, the attitude of an Afrikaner representing the preservation of the status quo and the Anglican ordinands' resistance to this status quo. Weeder remembers that, sometime during August and September 1984, St Paul's hosted young men from COSAS who were on the run from the security police; these men found refuge in St Paul's, and they slept in the Common Room.<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, Govender and Jackson also remember black students' resentment against some whites attending cultural festivals at the 1820 Settler's monument in Grahamstown. These black students claimed that the monument stood for blacks being dispossessed of the land by whites.<sup>88</sup> Even though Siphosini W Zulu was a student in the years between 1986 and 1988, nevertheless his experience reflects the situation as it existed in the period under study. He recalls his experiences thus:

St. Paul's College in my view was South Africa sample in terms of race, lifestyle, and behaviour. Group Areas Act was still in force for that reason Blacks as defined by the laws of S.A. then could not be given accommodation anywhere. So they could only be given flats within the limits of the college boundaries. ... The worst time was a month of March which was characterised by memories of Sharpeville. Blacks saw this month as a month that should have speakers [in the Common Room] that would make the spirit of 21 March prevail and passed on to those that were not conversant with the story. The point was to workshop the whites on the suffering of blacks. The other political highlight would be June 16. For this was not talk show but everybody were made to take part in the march to Joza township to form solidarity with the less fortunate people there ...<sup>89</sup>

Zulu's perceptions of life at St Paul's, and his description of its activities reflect the tensions, paradoxes, and contradictions of wider South African

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Michael Weeder, Deanery, Cape Town, 08/12/12.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Michael Weeder, Deanery, Cape Town, 08/12/12.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Rev Fr Govender and Rev Fr Austen Jackson, Parow, Cape Town, 11/10/12.

<sup>89</sup> Response to a questionnaire, 28/02/13.

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society. During the period under discussion, St Paul's had become both a symbol of resistance and acquiescence to apartheid. It is precisely because of the existence of these opposing forces that racial tensions were inevitable.

### **The State of Emergency, and the *Kairos* Document: 1985**

*A mirror of wider society*

During 1985, South Africa became characterised by widespread and escalating political violence. Given this situation, the then Prime Minister, PW Botha, declared the State of Emergency in July of that year. Blacks' and whites' attitudes to the increasing violence and the State of Emergency were in sharp contrast. This sharp difference in attitudes between the two groups became more apparent at St Paul's College. Writing in the report to the College Council, Buchanan captured the mood of the College thus:

We reflect very much the opinions and the differences of the country as a whole. We agonise through many things to try and find the will of God for us. We do not always find it easy to express His will and we do not always arrive at the right answers.<sup>90</sup>

In the same letter, more tellingly, Buchanan asserted, "On the whole we are a happy College, though the word 'happiness' involves quite a wide range of meaning! Seeking God's will *is* a happy experience but rarely comfortable." The qualified use of the word "happiness" here suggests the difficult times that the College was going through.

Thus in response to the intensification of the ANC struggle waged in the country, in 1985, the State President, PW Botha imposed the State of Emergency. Responding to the imposition of the State of Emergency, Buchanan wrote,

As I sit to write this letter, the State of Emergency has been in effect for less than twenty four hours ... It is clear that many people are going to be caught in the midst of suspicion of it ... while the external unrest will die ... the Church must stand as a bridge, and that can mean facing the torrent and the forces would sweep everything away ... For most of this term the

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<sup>90</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 A 4, Wardens Letters, 1983-1991.

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College has been doing a very slow in depth study (hopefully) of violence.<sup>91</sup>

With possibilities of racial tension flaring up, the issues of communication and dealing with violence became of critical importance. That there had been some instances of communication breakdown between black and white students threatening the stability of the College is evident from the fact that Buchanan wrote as he did: "For most of this term the College has been doing a very slow in depth study (hopefully) of violence" (a study which was organised by the Political Studies department of Rhodes University). Issues surrounding communication and violence became critical in the College as many parts of the country became engulfed in relentless violence. Thus Buchanan further asserted that,

... so for me, the answer lies in the desire, expressed at the Provincial Synod, for the genuine leaders of this country to sit together in order to listen and *hear*. The Biblical principle of seeking to talk to those with whom we disagree is essential. No one has, or is, the repository of all truth. Yet all too often we act as though we believe we have all truth ... So whites simply cannot hear the anger and frustrations of the blacks; and the blacks are oblivious to the terrified fear of the whites – and we all suffer ... the Provincial Synod was trying to address itself to the matters in the land which make for an escalation of violence. Sin does not stop in the political arena! The constant misuse of Romans 13 or the inability to exegete the "render to Caesar passage" correctly is all part of a blindness which the Church in the form of the Provincial Synod tried to point out was almost hysterical to say the least.<sup>92</sup>

The issue whether the use of violence was justifiable as a way of ending apartheid split white and black Anglican members in the Provincial Synod of 1985. And this division manifested itself in the black and white students who were enrolled at St Paul's College. The ANC threatened to make the townships ungovernable and, in return, came Botha's "total strategy" which, among other things, resulted in an increase in brutality on the part of the security police. Botha's "total strategy" caused havoc in the townships, and led to detentions without trial. The Provincial Synod of that year, meeting

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<sup>91</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 A 4, Wardens Letters, 1983-1991.

<sup>92</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 A 4, Wardens Letters, 1983-1991.



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under the presidency of Archbishop Russell, called for the renunciation of violence from both sides.<sup>93</sup>

Alan W Smedly was a senior student from January 1983 to November 1985. He recalls his experience at the time as follows:

I think all of us were on a steep learning curve. For many it was the first time we had lived with, and amongst, other racial groups. Consequently it was the first time that we discovered the real humanity of one another. I think many black students discovered that there were actually some humane and decent white people out there. Likewise, many white students discovered what apartheid really meant to black people. The horrors and injustice of apartheid were exposed in a way that most white students had never experienced before.<sup>94</sup>

For Smedly, the closer interaction with black students changed the perceptions of some white students in terms of their realisation about what apartheid actually did to black people and the suffering it entailed. Other white students were simply exposed to the sheer injustice of the system.

Gail Chester, a student in the years between 1983 and 1985, describing herself as the “only sole [Whites] woman surrounded by sixty men” recollected her experience thus, “with all the upheavals going on around us, I was deeply aware of the pain and conflict that was part of so many fellow students’ lives and I became much more conscientised to the wrongs of apartheid”.<sup>95</sup> Undoubtedly the experience of living with black people and interacting with them on a regular basis to an extent transformed Chester and other whites. This change was also the result of whites experiencing, at first hand, the pain of black people, their bitterness, and their alienation from apartheid policies. Indeed, white students’ experiences in the College tended to undermine the way in which they had been socialised to accept apartheid.

Ironically, in his warden’s report to the Council in 1985, Buchanan considered racial tensions in the College as having had a positive impact on building racial relationships in the College. He noted: “One of the things that worried me most about 1985 was that we had no explosions or clashes in the College. I say “worried” because not only in the past have these seemed to be almost inevitable but also because there have been few other ways, eventually, for people to hear and see each other clearly.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Clarke, *Anglicans against Apartheid, 1936-1996*, 4100.

<sup>94</sup> Alan W Smedly, questionnaire, 20/08/12.

<sup>95</sup> Gail Chester (presently Rev Mrs Gail Blanden), questionnaire, 15/10/12.

<sup>96</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B 1- B5, Report to the College Council.

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Given that Buchanan had been warden of the College since 1976, the fact that he wrote thus in 1985 implies that racial explosions had become part of college life for the past nine years. This, in turn, suggests the existence of ongoing racial polarisation in the College. Early in 1985, Buchanan made an important announcement that the College had to cut its ties with the UDF. He asserted:

Early in the year I informed the College that the Bishops had requested (we understood that to mean “required”!) us to drop our formal links with the U.D.F. ... while we all did as the Bishops requested I cannot say that many of us considered it was the right move. It was a good example though, of having to learn to live under authority.<sup>97</sup>

Cutting ties with the UDF was a momentous decision. Symbolically, the action implied that the College dissociated itself with struggle politics. However, it did not imply that the College now supported the apartheid government. Instead, the issue was one of subservience to church authority. Perhaps the decision reflects a change in the attitude of the church's leadership towards students' 'politics'. From 1985, Desmond Tutu became the archbishop of Cape Town. Bishop Lawrence Bekisisa Zulu<sup>98</sup> and Philip le Feuvre<sup>99</sup> insisted that Bishop Tutu discourage clergy from being card-carrying members of particular political parties.

### **The *Kairos* Document**

The College debate on these issues took place against the background of the impact of the *Kairos* Document.<sup>100</sup> The document was associated with certain theologians who sat on the South African Council of Churches and the Institute of Contextual Studies. “The Document identified ‘non-political’ theology that supported the status quo, state theology that legitimised the status quo and prophetic theology that was highly critical of the status quo.”<sup>101</sup> Through various avenues such as the Albany District Council of Churches, or the Anglican Students Federation, St Paul's students ex-

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<sup>97</sup> William Cullen Library, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg: ACSA Archives, AB 2568 B 1-B5, Report to the College Council.

<sup>98</sup> See Henry Mbaya, *Ungusobaba* [you are our father]: the life of an Anglican bishop, Lawrence Bekisisa Zulu, 1937-2013+, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, Pretoria: UNISA, Dec. 2012, vol. xxxviii, no. 2., 265.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Bishop Philip le Feuvre, Somerset West, Cape Town, 19/11/12.

<sup>100</sup> *The Kairos Document, The Challenge to the Church*, Skotaville: Braamfontein, 1986.

<sup>101</sup> Theological Education in South Africa: The Current Situation. <http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues>: accessed 18/09/11.

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perienced the revitalising power of the *Kairos* Document in the form of liberation theology.<sup>102</sup>

### Conclusion

In this article, I traced the history of St Paul's Theological College in terms of its resistance and acquiescence to apartheid from 1973 to 1985, and I highlighted certain historical episodes. I illustrated, in particular, how the actions of some students and, sometimes, members of staff in the College either covertly or overtly tried to undermine or tacitly support certain aspects of apartheid legislation or its manifestations. I also highlighted the fact that resistance took place at various levels and to varying degrees during the different phases of the College's existence. More significantly, I have also shown that the responses of black and white students to political developments in the country were sometimes in stark contrast to each other, which consequently added to the conflict that occurred in the College in 1982.

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