The University of Western Cape Project on Ecclesiology and Ethics

Ernst M. Conradie

Introduction: Becoming UWC

In its simplest terms, the tension between ecclesiology and ethics is between what the church is and what it does, between what it is supposed to be and what it is supposed to do, between what it believes about itself and how it acts. Allowing for a degree of abstraction, this tension is not unique to the church although it gains a certain theological depth given the tension between the theological and the sociological dimensions of the church. In a secularized form, this is the tension between movement and institutionalization, between the vision of an institution and what it actually accomplishes. This is true of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in a quite remarkable way.

One may say that the "UWC project on ecclesiology and ethics" commenced with the charter that established the university in the first place. This charter was based on the system of race classification that prevailed at that time. According to the Verwoerdian vision, every population group in South Africa had to have its own university so that each could develop its own potential. The university was at first under the firm control of academics who were notoriously regarded as "Kleurlingkenners" (those who know "coloureds") but eventually rejected the basis upon which it was founded. It finally opened its door to people irrespective of race classification. The rest, as they say, is history. There is no need to tell that history, but it may be captured in dramatic shifts from a "university for Coloureds" to an institution deeply embedded in the struggle against apartheid, to "the intellectual home of the left" (1980s), to a maieutic role in the transition to democracy (1990–1994), to a struggling university (1995–2000), to a "place of quality, a place to grow" (2001–) and to being one of the leading universities on the African continent.

Two comments on this history are important here:

Firstly, the identity of the university cannot be restricted to any one of these phases. It certainly cannot be found in its early origins. No one would wish to actually return to the heroic days of the struggle in 1976. Being the intellectual home of the left may have been appropriate for the 1980s but constant repositioning is necessary given ideological shifts that are taking place. The most apt description of the identity of UWC is captured in the phrase "becoming UWC," which is also the title chosen for a book on UWC's story. As Lalu and Murray observe, "Becoming UWC is not merely a project of recall or nostalgia.

It is a process of making sense while also sensing the possibilities of a future in a space where opposing apartheid was a matter of course."[1] The motto on the university's emblem symbolizes this equally well: *Respice et prospice*. It is only by looking forward that one can assess the legacy of the past. The message is clear. The identity of the university lies in the future, not in the past. Its history has been one of becoming what it hopes to be, albeit that this vision has shifted over the years. This vision cannot be merely one of climbing the pecking order of university ratings. Becoming UWC can- not be a triumphalist narrative of the corporate university with its own distinct brand, but has to rethink the very notions of knowledge and what being a university entails. Lalu and Murray explain:

> UWC was caught up in the conundrum of seeking to tally the universality of reason, that founds the modern university since the nineteenth century, with the nationalist claim of seeking to produce an argument that would set it apart from the colonial sources of a racial discourse in which the universality of reason is deeply implicated.[2]

Secondly, it is immediately clear that an emphasis on the difficult task of building the institution (read "ecclesiology") was inseparable from understanding the social challenges (read "ethics") throughout this period. The ongoing transformation of the institution was always in response to an emerging vision of what it wished to be. However, even in the most trying circumstances the emphasis was never on societal challenges only. The need to attend to the daily task of establishing appropriate institutional patterns and academic cultures prevailed even in the midst of police blockades, class boycotts, draconian funding formulas, rising student debt, threatening financial bankruptcy, educational dis- advantages, and so forth. In terms of ethical theory one may say that institutionalization is necessary to cultivate the academic and other virtues that are so necessary to address social challenges. Indeed, graduate attributes may be formulated more accurately in terms of academic virtues than in terms of academic skills or knowledge.

From Belhar to URCSA (1978–1994)

In less secular terms, the UWC project on the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics was dominated, after 1978, by reformed and ecumenical discourse on a *status confessionis*. Since this story has been well documented elsewhere,[3] one only needs to highlight the UWC contribution to this debate here.

In 1972 a Faculty of Theology was established at the University of the Western Cape when the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church shifted its theological education from a seminary in Wellington to UWC. At first, the Faculty of Theology focused only on the training of ministers in the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church. It soon became an

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[1] Premesh Lalu and Noëleen Murray, eds., *Becoming UWC: Reflections, Pathways and Unmaking Apartheid's Legacy* (Bellville, South Africa: Centre for Humanities Research, 2012), 20.

[2] Ibid.

[3] See especially G. Daniel Cloete and Dirk J. Smit, eds., *A Moment of Truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mis- sion Church* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 1984); and Piet J. Naude, *Neither Calendar nor Clock: Perspectives on the Belhar Confession* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 2010).

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intellectual home of the church struggle against apartheid, with students and staff deeply involved.

In a famous class discussion in 1978, Jaap Durand, the then professor of Systematic Theology, asked students what exactly is wrong with apartheid. The students (who included Leonardo Appies, Russel Botman, and David Carelse) were at first taken aback by the question and commented on injustice, repression, and police brutality. Durand insisted that they focus on a *theological* critique of apartheid. The class gradually came to a core insight, namely that the policy of segregation assumed the fundamental irreconcilability of people.[4] It was assumed that racial differences are so significant that people should best be kept apart – for the sake of order and peace and with the force of law if necessary! By contrast, the gospel of reconciliation in Jesus Christ, based on the radically inclusive ministry of Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee, proclaims that, at least in the church, such differences do not have the final word.[5] On this basis, three core insights emerged, namely (1) a theological understanding of the unity of the church and the need to make that visible, also for the sake of society; (2) an understanding of the significance of reconciliation in Christ and the need for a ministry of reconciliation; and (3) an understanding of God as one who is "in a special way" the God of the poor, oppressed, weak, vulnerable and marginalized and the need to work towards justice in church and society. The fruitful tension between ecclesiology and ethics, the indicative and the imperative, is obvious in each of these core insights.

A deputation from the class then submitted a resolution to the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church that was about to meet at that time. This resolution was accepted by the synod and this prepared the way to the declaration of a *status confessionis* and the acceptance of a concept confession at the Belhar synod in 1982 and the final acceptance of the Confession of Belhar in 1986. There is no need to document that history here, but it is important to comment on the declaration of a *status confessionis* since the inseparability of ecclesiology and ethics is nowhere more obvious than here. Ethical concerns prompt not only theological reflection but nothing less than confession, while the confession is situated in a context where its ethical implications are immediately grasped. At the same time ecclesiology and ethics are not confl ted with each other, so that the tension between the indicative and the imperative, grace and gratitude, is retained.

In an authoritative essay in *A Moment of Truth*, Dirkie Smit investigated the background and meaning of the term in Protestant circles.[6] He noted that there were especially three contexts within which a *status confessionis* was declared in the 20th century, namely the church struggle in Germany with regard to loyalty to Hitler and the exclusion of Jews from offices in government and in the church (1934), the ecumenical rejection of the ideology of racism (1977), and the ecumenical rejection of the possession of nuclear weapons (1982). The struggle against apartheid in church and society in South Africa

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[4] See H. Russel Botman, "Narrative Challenges in a Situation of Transition," in *To Remember and to Heal: Theological and Psychological Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation*, ed. H. Russel Botman and Robin M. Peterson, 37–43 (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1996), at 39–40.

[5] See J. J. F (Jaap) Durand, Durand, J. J. F. (Jaap), "A Confession – Was it Really Necessary?", in Cloete and Smit, *A Moment of Truth*, 33–41.

[6] Dirk J. Smit, "What Does Status Confessionis Mean?", in Cloete and Smit, *A Moment of Truth*, 7–32.

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thus constituted a fourth such context, while subsequent debates on global economic injustices also evoked proposals for declaring a *status confessionis*.

Smit argues that a *status confessionis* is best understood in a context where Christians or churches have arrived at the judgment that a situation has developed where a moment of truth has arrived within which nothing less than the gospel itself and their most basic Christian confession were at stake so that they feel obliged to witness against that in word and in deed. On this basis he identified three core aspects of the declaration of a *status confessionis*[7]: Firstly, the so-called *casus confessionis*, the abnormal situation in which a state of confession is declared, is crucial. A *moment of truth* has arrived where the gospel itself is at stake. In the case of Belhar, the situation was not merely the oppression and injustices associated with the political system of apartheid. The primary problem addressed in the Belhar confession, as indicated in the accompanying letter, had to do with the relationship between the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) at that time. Although apartheid is not mentioned as such, the issue was the way in which apartheid was propagated by the DRC and legitimized theologically, whether explicitly or tacitly. Moreover, despite numerous exhortations and outcries by the DRMC, the DRC failed to respond appropriately. They apparently did not get the message. In this context the DRMC reached a point where it declared that the integrity of Christian witness in this context was at stake. The only option was to confess the Christian faith as clearly as possible, for the sake of the gospel and in the hope that the DRC would recognize what was at stake.

Secondly, it should be noted that the gospel itself was *at stake* in this situation and that neutrality was therefore no longer tenable. This was no mere matter of theological conversation. This is a crucial aspect of Smit's argument. The problem was there- fore not merely one of the injustices perpetrated under apartheid – which would require prophetic witness in church and society. There was also more at stake than idolatry – which would require a call to conversion within the church itself. The primary problem was one of heresy, of false teaching, of thought patterns that became deeply embedded in the church itself, of the failure to recognize and unmask such thought patterns. Such heresy could refer to the explicit theological legitimation of apartheid, but the Belhar confession went much further than that. In the paragraphs on the various distortions of the gospel that were rejected it becomes clear that this had to do with the failure to embody the visible unity of the church, the various ways in which the ministry of reconciliation in Jesus Christ was obstructed through the legitimation of enforced racial divisions and the legitimation of various forms of injustice by Christians.

Thirdly, Smit argued that it was indeed the good news of the *gospel* that was at stake. He emphasized that the acceptance of a confession was not aimed to divide the church even further but to plead for reunification. The problem, of course, is that any confessional stance where heresies are denounced would tend to create division even though there is a

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[7] For this discussion, see also Ernst M. Conradie, "Globalisation, Consumerism and the Call for a *Status Confessionis*," in *Globalisation Volume II: Global Crisis, Global Challenge, Global Faith – An Ongoing Response to the Accra Confession*, ed. Allan A. Boesak and Len Hansen, 53–76 (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2010).

call to unity on the basis of truth. In Jaap Durand's contribution to the same volume, the deepest rationale behind the Belhar Confession was clearly articulated.

Apartheid was more than an oppressive political system. It became a form of pseudo-gospel and indeed a quasi-soteriology.[8] Many ordinary Christians believed, implicitly but deeply, that separation on the basis of race would help to rescue them from various perceived threats. The way in which they could maintain political power, economic dominance, and a particular socio-cultural understanding of civilization and safety and security was on the basis of a system of race classification. To put it crudely, the only way to maintain the "candle" of Western civilization amidst the "sea of barbarism" in "dark Africa" was to draw clear racial distinctions. Apartheid was believed to be the only means of survival and therefore of salvation. The argument of the Belhar confession is that the gospel of reconciliation in Jesus Christ is thwarted on such a basis. It loses credibility. Thus there emerged a need to understand the liberating power of the gospel of reconciliation in Jesus Christ across racial and other barriers.

It should be noted that a *status confessionis* only becomes appropriate after many years of Christian witness and attempts to help those propagating heresy to see the demands of the gospel more clearly. A *status confessionis* could only be declared when other avenues have proved fruitless, when the urgency of the situation demands it, and when confessing one's faith as clearly as possible proves to the only way forward. This requires a sense of prophetic discernment to know when that moment of truth has arrived – not too early and not too late.

One further aspect of such discourse on a *status confessionis* is important for reflection on ecclesiology and ethics. The confession has implications for the community within which the confession is expressed. One of these implications was the need for church unity. This led to the formation of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) in 1994. A crucial aspect of "ecclesiology" in such reunification was the adoption of a new church order that would spell out the way in which a confession community is to be structured. As Smit comments,

> The identity and integrity of the community is expressed in the confession, and therefore it should inform and guide the order and the ethics of the church. It is for this reason that the writing of a new Church Order for the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa based on the Belhar Confession was such a significant moment in the history of the struggle. This Church Order represents the attempt to embody the truth of the gospel, as understood in the historical moment, in the life of the church that belongs to Jesus Christ.[9]

The Faculty of Theology at UWC had an obvious hand in drafting this new church order. In terms of the study of ecclesiology and ethics this is quite remarkable. One may say that the church struggle against apartheid elicited debates not only on Life and Work or

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[8] See J. J. F. (Jaap) Durand, "The Confession of Belhar: A Crisis for the Dutch Reformed Churches?", in Cloete and Smit, *A Moment of Truth,* 116–26; also Murray H. Coetzee and Ernst M. Conradie, "Apartheid as Quasi-soteriology: The Remaining Lure and Threat," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 138 (2010), 112–23.

[9] Dirk J. Smit, *Essays in Public Theology: Study Guides in Religion and Theology* 12 (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2007),

Church and Society but also on Faith and Order, as exemplified by the Belhar Confession and the church order of URCSA.

The term "uniting" in the name of URCSA indicates that church unity has not been accomplished given the desire for reunification with the Dutch Reformed Church – but then on the basis of the Belhar Confession. One aspect of such reunification is the need for an integration of theological education. This occurred in 2000, when URCSA terminated its contract with UWC and shifted its theological seminary to be located at Stellenbosch University. What was a sad eventuality for UWC in a period of rapid decline (It lost its Music Department soon afterward.), became a source of redemption for the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University. Nevertheless, unity within the estranged family of DRC churches on the basis of Belhar remains elusive 37 years after the UWC students saw some light.

From Faculty to Department (1995–2005)

The year 1994 of course signals the transition to a fully democratic dispensation in South Africa. For UWC this meant that a number of its senior staff members, including the then Vice-Chancellor Professor Jakes Gerwel, made a transition from the academy into politics. Some UWC staff members were attracted to other universities eager to change their staff profile, while others accepted positions in business and industry.

In an attempt at restructuring the size and shape of faculties, the former Faculty of Theology (now with students from a variety of denominations) was integrated with the departments of Semitic Languages, Hellenistic Greek, and Biblical and Religious Studies to form a Faculty of Religion and Theology in 1995. The Department of Biblical Studies (later renamed as Biblical and Religious Studies) was established in the Faculty of Arts in 1971 to provide training, especially for prospective teachers. The new Faculty of Religion and Theology had four departments, namely Biblical Studies and Languages, Christian Studies, Christianity, and Society and Religious Studies. This was quite a strong faculty, with 19 full-time academic members of staff, including well-known public figures such as Denise Ackermann, Russel Botman, Daan Cloete, Farid Esack, and Dirkie Smit.

However, between 1994 and 1999, UWC's student numbers plummeted from around 15,000 to around 9000 students. This is hard to explain, but one factor was the availability of scholarships for prospective teachers – which were phased out given that teacher-student ratios in the Western Cape were out of synch with the rest of the country. Student numbers in the new faculty dropped even more dramatically in the same period. In 1998 a large number of academic and administrative staff members at UWC were retrenched in a process that lacked transparency (to put it mildly). These included six of the 15 academic staff members in the Faculty of Religion and Theology that remained by that time (Four posts that became vacant between 1995 and 1998 were not filled.). The Uniting Reformed Church subsequently cancelled its contract with the university, with two senior academics (Russel Botman and Dirkie Smit) moving to Stellenbosch University, together with Hannes Adonis (who was one of those retrenched). When Denise Ackermann retired by the end of 2000 only six members of staff remained.

In 2000 the Department of Religion and Theology was established in the Faculty of Arts. At the undergraduate level it offers a three-year Bachelor of Theology, the subject Ethics as a major, and a first-year service course in Hermeneutics. Semitic Languages and Hellenistic Greek were no longer offered. The subject Ethics started off as a course offered at first-year level only with around 80 students in 2000. It steadily grew in numbers and stature. More than 650 first-year students and around 200 third-year students registered for Ethics in 2015. This astonishing growth may be explained in terms of its distinct focus, namely on the moral and religious foundations of society and the formation of a human rights culture. Students from the faculties of Arts, Law, Community and Health Sciences, and Economic and Management Sciences take Ethics as a service course while some also take it as a major towards B.A., B.Psych., or B.Th. degrees.

This constitutes another chapter in the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics at UWC, given the slow task of institution building amidst societal challenges, between the study of theology and the study of the moral and religious foundations of society. One may say that the study of (Christian) theology provided the source of inspiration for the introduction of ethics, but that, in terms of student numbers, the study of ethics sustains the feasibility of studying Christian theology and now also Islamic Studies. As anyone in the field would know, there is often a tension between studying theology and studying religion, especially at public universities, so that the "and" in the name of the department can scarcely hide inner tensions. However, at least in this department the two disciplines, each with sub-disciplines, exist peacefully alongside each other. One may say that it is studying ethics that keeps the peace.

Unlike many other public universities where the study of theology is eventually undermined when downgraded into a department and integrated with Religious Studies as a discipline, this has not happened at UWC over the past 15 years. Becoming integrated within a Faculty of Arts has liberated the study of theology from its self-isolation. My sense is that the study of theology is welcomed by many colleagues in other departments who understand the need for that in terms of their roles as lay leaders in various Christian churches but also due to the presence of strong cohorts of committed Buddhists, Jews, and Muslims amongst the staff.

The More Recent Project on Ecclesiology and Ethics (2006–2015)
In 2006 the Department of Religion and Theology registered three major collaborative research frameworks that describe the parameters within which the research activities of staff, extraordinary staff, and postgraduate students are situated. These research frameworks are entitled "Moral Education: Towards a Human Rights Culture," "Ecumenical Theology and Social Transformation in Africa," and "Christian Ecological Theology." A fourth research framework on "Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics and Rhetoric" is also recognized.[10]

On the basis of the second of these research frameworks an initiative was launched in 2006 to establish a Desmond Tutu Chair of Ecumenical Theology and Social

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[10] See the departmental website at http://www.uwc.ac.za/Faculties/ART/RandT/Pages/Research-Frameworks. for annual reports in this regard.

Transformation in Africa. After a period of initial fundraising the chair was eventually established in 2012 as a rotating chair. As from July 2013, Professor Christo Lombard was appointed as the first full-time incumbent while a fully endowed chair will be established as from January 2016.

In 2012 a three-year project on Ecumenical Studies and Social Ethics was launched with financial support from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The tension between ecclesiology and ethics was understood to be at the heart of this project. The underlying question is how ecclesiology and ethics, spirituality and society, an ecumenical vision and social transformation, Christianity and culture, faith and science are connected. The interest is elicited by the elusive "and" in these paired concepts. In all ecumenical reflections on "ecclesiology and ethics" it is recognized that a particular moral vision provides the source of inspiration that is necessary to sustain processes of social transformation amidst the many obstacles thwarting such work. Inversely, a theological vision of the place and role of the church in God's coming reign is only authentic and credible if it inspires and leads to social transformation. However, the tension between ecclesiology and ethics in the ecumenical movement is also undeniable. Often, either matters of "Faith and Order" or of "Church and Society" dominate ecumenical agendas.[11]

This question was specifically addressed through a project on "Ecclesiology [read Faith and Order] and Ethics [read Life and Work]" initiated by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the early 1990s. This project made many connections but the literature suggests that there remain undeniable tensions between these streams of the ecumenical movement. The aim of the project in the Department of Religion and Theology at UWC is to explore this question further from within the current (South) African context. The strategy that was followed was to identify key areas where this relationship between ecclesiology and ethics requires further reflection in the South African and wider African contexts, to stimulate reflection on these areas, and to provide academic leadership in the debate through a series of carefully planned publications in order to take the debate on ecclesiology and ethics forward. This is done in the hope that it will contribute both to ecumenical studies worldwide and toward other initiatives on social transformation at UWC.

The intuition behind the project is that the life and work of Archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu can provide some clues in this regard as he seems to move so effortless from the one to the other. We have often joked that when the Arch engages in church affairs he tends to start talking politics, while when he is engaged in politics he starts praying. How, then, should the dynamics of the interplay between ecclesiology and ethics be understood on the basis of his inspiring example?

Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation
This project was structured in the form of a series of think tanks and one-day conferences culminating in a conference on "Ecclesiology and Ethics: The State of Ecumenical

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[11] See Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra, eds., *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formationand the nature of the Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), vii.

Theology in Africa" (3–5 June 2015). The themes that were identified alternated between a focus on social transformation (ethics) and ecumenical studies (ecclesiology). We used the metaphor of walking (or skating) on two legs, suggesting that the weight needs to be shifted from one leg to the other in order to keep the movement and the momentum going. It may be helpful to offer a brief description of each of the prior think tanks and conferences.

Guiding visions for the transition to a post-apartheid society (9 November 2012)
The purpose of this think tank was to juxtapose a number of concepts that have been employed to capture an appropriate vision for society. This is based on the observation that practitioners involved in the fields of politics, the economy, jurisprudence, education, social services, and civil society typically operate within the parameters of one such guiding concept and gradually take its assumptions for granted, while the same concept would be highly contested in other discourses. As a result, a variety of conflicting proposals is now available, each with a body of literature. A list of these would include "revolution," "economic liberation," "reconciliation," "nation building," "social development," "reconstruction and development," "sustainable development," "black/women's empowerment," "community building," "sustainable livelihoods," "social cohesion," and "social transformation" itself. While no one concept would do, a mere conflation and confusion of such guiding concepts would inhibit the change required. To juxtapose these concepts is therefore to invite critical reflection in this regard, admittedly at a high level of abstraction. This think tank engaged critically with the vision embedded in the National Development Plan, which is one of "development" premised on sustained economic growth.

A critical assessment of "reconciliation" as one of the guiding visions during and beyond the transition period in South Africa (26 October 2012)[12]
The purpose of this think tank was to capture the state of current discourse on the symbol of reconciliation in the context of public theology in South Africa. This requires some clarification on the different ways in which the rather elusive term "reconciliation" is used with reference to human relationships with God, inside the church as the "body of Christ," for the ministry of the church in society and in secular discourse. This was explored on the basis of a detailed position paper that I presented in which I offered a conceptual analysis of the notion of reconciliation.

Notions and forms of "ecumenicity" in (South) Africa (22 February 2013)[13]
This think tank explored various meanings of being "ecumenical in the highly politicized South African context, given the crisis within the South African Council of Churches (SACC) at that time and tensions between the SACC and the Zuma government. The budget constraints experienced by the SACC, the All Africa Conference of Churches, and indeed the WCC seem to suggest a dampening enthusiasm for the ecumenical movement. Moreover, mainline churches constitute an increasingly smaller portion of Christianity

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[12] See Ernst M. Conradie, ed., *Reconciliation as a Guiding Vision for South Africa?* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2013).
[13] See Ernst M. Conradie, ed., *South African Perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2013).

worldwide. The WCC has 345 member churches while there are currently an estimated 43,240 denominations worldwide. The SACC, with its 26 member churches, hardly represents Pentecostal churches or AICs in South Africa.

In this context, the purpose of this think tank was to explore an underlying ecumenical vision. It took a step back by raising the more fundamental if also more abstract question: What does the word "ecumenical' actually mean?

In the South African context it seems clear that there is a tension between grassroots ecumenical fellowship and appropriate ecumenical structures at a national level. One may say that ecumenism is alive and well in local communities throughout South Africa. Although distinct denominational identities are typically maintained and reinforced, lay Christians seem to have no problem in joining hands in prayer groups, marches, funerals, Bible study groups, community structures, governing bodies, soup kitchens, trade union meetings, and so forth. Secular forms of cooperation often have a religious, if not overtly Christian, dimension. By contrast, larger ecumenical structures are, to put it simply, "under review."

During the discussion, the fault-lines and underlying tensions in the ecumenical movement were explored at some length, with specific reference to the tension between "Ecclesiology" and "Ethics." The observation was made that local churches in South Africa are often predominantly interested in issues of Faith and Order, while ecumenical gatherings at a regional, national, and continental level are predominantly focused on issues of Church and Society. Whether this is appropriate, either way is open to further deliberation.

The quest for identity within so-called mainline churches in South Africa (24 May 2013)
This one-day conference explored the dialectic between the establishment of various denominations in South Africa based largely on European divides; the subsequent widely recognized need for ecumenical fellowship in the (South) African context; the emergence of Pentecostal and independent churches (AICs) breaking away from such mainline churches over issues of identity, leadership, or ecclesial reform and often resisting inclusion in such ecumenical structures; and the quest for identity where such denominational differences are nevertheless maintained. The reality is that such denominational differences have been internalized, embodied, and practised in South Africa over many generations so that members have come to regard such differences as significant for their own identity. However, upon reflection they may well find it difficult to explain to themselves what is at stake. What, then, is the difference between these churches at an experiential level? Moreover, one has to relate such a quest for identity to cultural identities, hybrid identities, and relationships with other religious traditions.

The invited speakers – namely John de Gruchy (Reformed tradition), Stephen Brislin (Roman Catholic tradition), Thabo Makgoba (Anglican tradition), Musawenkosi Biyela (Lutheran tradition), Jerry Pillay (Reformed tradition), Peter Storey (Methodist tradition), and Lindsay Rinquest (Baptist) – each addressed the question why maintaining

a distinct sense of identity seems to matter in each of these traditions.[14] What continues to attract people to the church and what are the issues that they struggle with in terms of distinguishing such identity in relation to other so-called mainline denominations, Pentecostal and independent/indigenous churches, other religious traditions, and secular ways of life? Why should such denominational identities be maintained? Why does it seem that ecumenical relationships are waning while there is a stronger sense of denominational identity?

This quest for identity is radicalized in the light of what may be called a "branded Christianity," where churches compete with each other in the market of providing religious services and attracting adherents. Understandably, many mainline churches fear losing their members to other churches or to secularism, with serious financial implications. One may wish to resist such a "branded Christianity" by insisting on the need for ecumenical fellowship and thus underplay the differences, but this only underlines the need to clarify denominational identity. Why exactly is that still important?

Ecumenical engagement in the form of NGOs and FBOs as dynamos for social transformation in the Western Cape (2 August 2013)

This think tank commenced with an introductory paper by Charles Amjad-Ali in which he commented on the role of civil society and the distinctions between non-government organizations, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and non-profit organizations in general. It was attended by a large number of representatives of FBOs in the Western Cape. The consensus was that FBOs indeed function as dynamos of social transformation in the sense that they elicit some energy from a faith-based perspective and channel such energies to address grassroots needs. They develop considerable expertise in this regard but this poses a problem of reception, that is, how to re-engage with the faith communities from which they emerged. They struggle to command the interest of others working in different fields of specialization given the many challenges competing for the attention, time, and financial commitments of faith communities. They therefore seek ways of ensuring the proper reception of their work in order to influence such faith communities and through that to shape social transformation. In ecumenical discourse this is known as the problem of "reception," namely the way in which important documents produced through the interaction between member churches are received within such member churches. This focus on faith-based organizations subsequently prompted the establishment of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society with the expressed aim to provide a forum for the interaction between the four research frameworks of the Department of Religion and Theology and the agendas of a large number of such faith-based organizations in the Western Cape.

Religion and moral formation toward responsible citizenship (30 August 2013)

This think tank was structured in the form of a position paper by Charles Amjad-Ali and prepared responses by invited participants. This matter has been contested ever since

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[14] See Ernst M. Conradie and John Klaasen, eds., *The Quest for Identity in So-called Mainline Churches in South Africa* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2014).

Kant assigned and restricted the role of religion as one of providing a source of inspiration for doing one's civil duty. As a result, especially in the Western world, the role of religion has often been privatized. This privatization of religion continues to evoke responses (especially but not only from the Abrahamic faiths) in which the public role of religion is emphasized. Nevertheless, a purely functional understanding of the role of religion remains the dominant approach in the South African context. If it has any use, it is assumed that religion could play a role toward the common good through fostering the moral fabric of society, building social cohesion and engagement in a range of areas including education, poverty relief, development projects, HIV-awareness, and environmental awareness. In secular, pluralistic, and highly industrialized societies there has emerged a widespread perception that this role of religion is no longer really necessary. Nevertheless, as the so-called Bökenförd principle maintains modern societies rely on moral presuppositions/social capital that they cannot themselves guarantee or sustain. In the African context, by contrast, the potential role of religion in the dynamics of building a better society is seldom questioned.

Yet, the role assigned to religion in the public sphere remains contested. On the one hand, the temptation to seek religious legitimation for political policies and alliances is always present – as South African history from the early days of imperialism to the present amply illustrates. On the other hand, the need for a fiercely independent civil society for the sake of participatory decision making cannot be underestimated. How, then, is the place of religious groups in civil society to be understood? Can religious affiliation, in terms of the particular self-understanding of religious traditions, be safely located in the sphere of civil society?

These broad questions were explored more narrowly with respect to the theme of citizenship. This raises many further questions:

1. Of what are you a citizen (a nation state, a polis, an empire, a province, a municipal district, etc.), how is that constituted, and with what assumptions?

2. On what basis does one become a citizen (by birth, by living and working in its sphere of jurisdiction, by voluntary association, by adoption) and what mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion are operating in this regard? This has been a crucial issue in South Africa for obvious reasons given the influx of various waves of immigrants.

3. What status is assigned to such recognized citizens, either overtly (through policies and legislation) or covertly (through the selective implementation of such policies or through social perceptions, stigmatization, group conflict, xenophobia, etc.)? This is the crucial debate on "Citizens or Subjects."

4. What minimum rights may be attributed to all citizens? This is not merely a question of universal human rights (e.g., in the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution); it is also a matter of minimum rights associated with restorative justice (e.g., affirmative action and black empowerment) and to distributive justice (given current economic inequalities). This is also contested since such rights differ from one country to another.

5. Since such discourse on the rights of citizens, if viewed on its own, may yield a culture of entitlement, what are the common but differentiated responsibilities of citizens?

The role of religion may be related to each of these five questions. This role cannot be restricted to that of moral formation but certainly includes that as well. What, then, is the role of religion in shaping responsible citizenship?

Recognizing current ecclesial reform/deform movements in South Africa (28 March 2014)

This think tank recognized the role of reform movements that provide the impulse for social transformation but also the danger that such movements may degenerate into deform movements. Ecclesial reform movements are all driven by a particular vision. They capture the imagination and elicit considerable public interest. They are movements because they are able to move people. The focus is here on ecclesial movements, albeit these are influenced by movements elsewhere in society and sometimes focus on societal change. Not all such movements focus on ecclesial reform. Such movements are not necessarily positive. They may be described by some as reform and by others as deform movements. In some cases both may well be true. In all cases one may find some form of institutionalization and bureaucracy, but the emphasis is on the movement and vision that extend well beyond such institutions. In all cases such reform movements call for reflection and explanation because they introduce some novelty but also because they are typically deeply polemical. Such theological reflection thus becomes part of the movement and seeks to sustain the movement, but does not exist on its own and will be counter-productive when it becomes an aim in itself.

The think tank was structured in the form of short papers that attempted to identify, describe, and assess the following ecclesial reform and/or deform movements at the forefront of current changes in church and society in the South African context (in no particular order):

6.   A movement offering prophetic resistance against various forms of political oppression or hegemony;
7.   A movement toward gender-inclusive ministries within the church;
8.   A movement seeking to retrieve classic spiritual disciplines;
9.   A movement promoting the greening of Christian institutions and practices;
10.   A movement to retrieve the values embedded in a traditional family-based sense of community;
11.   A movement to emphasize the need for an intellectually plausible understanding of the Christian faith;
12.   A movement seeking to embody resistance against patriarchal structures and patterns in church and society;
13.   A movement seeking appropriate forms of Christian gathering and worship other than through congregational structures;
14.   A movement seeking to mediate and unlock the richness of God's manifold blessings, especially but not only amongst the urban poor, and Christian participation in

a movement to resist strategies of exclusion and stigmatization and to ensure equal access to medical and other services to any marginalized group.[15]

The Pentecostal movement and the ecumenical movement in Africa (30 May 2014)

This one-day conference recognized that Pentecostal and independent churches together constitute roughly one half of Christianity in South Africa, with so-called mainline churches (see above) constituting the other half. There seems to be some resistance in Pentecostal churches (with some notable exceptions) to be co-opted in any form of ecumenical fellowship given the historic reasons why they broke away from such mainline churches in the first place. How, then, is the relationship between the ecumenical movement and the Pentecostal movement to be understood? This question was explored with reference to six core ecumenical themes, namely unity, Faith and Order, social responsibility, education, worship, and mission.

African notions of ethical leadership (2 December 2014)

This event was structured in the form of a public lecture by Christo Lombard under the auspices of the launching of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society. The paper on "Desmond Tutu's Style of Ethical Leadership" explored notions of moral formation and ethical leadership with specific reference to Tutu's inimitable style of leadership.[16]

Ongoing Projects

As indicated above, the conference on the state of ecumenical theology in Africa is to provide the culmination of the UWC project on ecclesiology and ethics. However, this is necessarily an ongoing project given the current research projects of its postgraduate students. These include a current project by Demaine Solomons on South African discourses on reconciliation, by Lerato Kobe on Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu's notions of reconciliation, by Rochelle Davids on the aims of South Africa's *National Development Plan,* by Mbhekeni Nkosi on Economic Inequalities and Restitution, by Rethabilie Leanya on the concept of "Dead aid," and by Teddy Sakupapa on Ecclesiology and Ethics in the context of the All Africa Conference of Churches 1963–2013. These are merely samples of what is indeed an ongoing UWC project on ecclesiology and ethics.

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[15] See Ernst M. Conradie and Miranda N. Pillay, eds., *Ecclesial Reform and Deform Movements in the South African Context* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2015).

[16] See Christo Lombard, "Desmond Tutu's Style of Ethical Leadership," paper presented at the launch of the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society, University of the Western Cape, 2 December 2014.