

Church-state relations in South Africa, Zambia and Malawi in light of the fall of the Berlin Wall (October 1989)

**Author:**Paul Gundani¹**Affiliation:**¹Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, University of South Africa, South Africa**Corresponding author:**Paul Gundani,
gundaph@unisa.ac.za**Dates:**

Received: 17 Oct. 2017

Accepted: 20 Jan. 2018

Published: 19 Apr. 2018

How to cite this article:Gundani, P., 2018, 'Church-state relations in South Africa, Zambia and Malawi in light of the fall of the Berlin Wall (October 1989)', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74(1), 4852. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4852>**Copyright:**© 2018. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in October 1989 bears a striking resonance with the biblical fracturing of the curtain in the Jerusalem temple. It presaged the death of the post-war dispensation of Church-state relations characterised by a Church that was, in the main, subservient, acquiescent and complicit to the apartheid regime in South Africa, as well as the oppressive one-party state regimes north of the Limpopo. As the Berlin Wall collapsed, the dispensation characterised by either neutrality or docility and co-option of the Church to the Apartheid and Independent states gave way to the birth of a 'prophetic' Church, which would not only gain a new lease on life, but would become a robust interlocutor of the post-Cold War state. The latter is exemplified by historical signposts such as the Rustenburg Declaration (1990), the Pastoral letter of the Zambia Catholic Bishops Conference (1990) and the Pastoral letter by the Catholic Bishops of Malawi (1992), among others. This paper is an analytical desktop study, which will be based on the published literature.

Introduction

In his book entitled, *The World's Christians*, Douglas Jacobsen (2011:151) refers to the dilemma that newly independent states of Africa faced as soon as they got their independence. 'The new rulers were offered gifts, loans, and military assistance in exchange for ... their allegiance to either the United States or the Soviet Union. He also notes that the only condition that these African countries were given was "ideological agreement with either Western capitalism or Soviet Communism, and concerns like justice or nation building were often treated as inconsequential"' (Jacobsen 2011:151). Furthermore, Jacobson makes an interesting observation regarding the spin-offs and changes that took place in Africa since the end of the Cold War in the late eighties. He notes that 'some improvement in the political realm' has been experienced by many African countries because of the loss of the readily assured foreign support. Because of this change, African leaders have for the past 25 years become more accountable to their own people, and multiparty politics and democratic rule have become stronger (Jacobsen 2011:151).

In this article, we focus on developments in South Africa, Zambia and Malawi, respectively. Our main contention, in the article, is that the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, had a huge influence on the change and transformation that engulfed Southern Africa in the early nineties. This change had positive spin-offs for countries that had hitherto been characterised by conflict. In the three case studies that we discuss, it is important to understand their particular forms of conflict in terms of the Cold War. In spite of the denominational diversity of the churches in Southern Africa, in this article, we use the term Church in a generic sense to refer to the whole mystical body of Christ, but without any intention to veneer over the differences in theology, ecclesiology or polity.

South Africa

From Cottesloe to Rustenburg: Church and state relations in South Africa (1960–1990)

The Sharpeville massacre in 1960 stirred the conscience of the ecumenical church and resulted in the convening of the Cottesloe Consultation in December 1960 under the aegis of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The main purpose of the consultation was to assist the churches in South Africa to come up with a clear theological position on the apartheid policy. According to Gous (1993:254), the official representatives of the churches 'reached an incredible level of unanimity and took far-reaching decisions'. The Consultation's conclusion was that 'apartheid

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

could not be reconciled with the teachings of Scripture' (Gous 1993:254). Hence, there was no biblical foundation for the prohibition of mixed marriages, and excluding anyone from church on the basis of race and colour, as practices flowing from the apartheid ideology. Similarly, the Consultation was critical of the National Party government's policy on migrant labour and wage disparities between whites and blacks, among other issues (Walshe 1977).

It is evident that Afrikaner nationalism was conveniently used by Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd to influence the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk (NHK)¹ to retract their support from the Cottesloe Statement. Pressure from Afrikaner members resulted in the resignation of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) and the NHK from the WCC in 1960. Henceforth, by virtue of a common cultural and ideological heritage, both churches offered official support to the National Party government and arrogated upon themselves the duty and responsibility to legitimise the apartheid policy. No doubt, Afrikaans-speaking churches wielded undue influence over the National Party government for the next 30 years.

Contrary to the position taken by the DRCs regarding apartheid, English-speaking churches were officially opposed to the apartheid policy and remained committed to the decisions made at Cottesloe. The South African state, however, often used a range of bullying tactics and intimidation to 'whip the church back into line' (Storey 1998:188). A few examples will suffice. Firstly, the state accused the church of collusion with external forces that were intent on destabilising the South African state. Soon after the announcement of the Cottesloe Statement, Hendrik Verwoerd called the Consultation 'an attempt by foreigners to meddle in the country's internal affairs' (Storey 1988:188). Although such an accusation was not factual and did not have merit, it put psychological pressure on the leader who represented the general membership of the church. The isolation of Beyers Naude, who refused to retract his support for the decisions taken at Cottesloe, was one example of such bullying (Van der Borgh 2011). Another example of state bullying was the setting up of a judicial commission, in 1980, against the South African Council of Churches (SACC), which the state regarded as a thorn in its flesh. After 2 years of intensive investigation of the SACC offices, Bishop Peter Storey (President) and Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Secretary General) were finally hauled before the Eloff Commission of Inquiry. The following words from Bishop Storey (1998:187) summarise the residual effects of state bullying; 'I was cross-examined for more than 20 hours, and no matter how just our cause, it was impossible not to feel somewhat intimidated'. The bombing of Khotso House, which was the Headquarters of the SACC, in 1988 was another foul act of intimidation orchestrated by the apartheid state. Later, in 1996, Adrian Vlok, former Minister of Law and Order under

the watch of P. W. Botha, applied for amnesty for his involvement in the bombing of Khotso House. In his testimony, Vlok argued that the intention was not to endanger people but to render the House unusable (Boswell 2012:34). Apart from these examples, the state under Botha carried out many and varied egregious attacks against religious leaders as part of the 'total strategy' or the 'total onslaught' policy against communism. The poisoning of Rev. Frank Chikane in the late 1980s on his trip to the United States, the letter bombing of Fr Michael Lapsley in Harare and the deportation of African religious leaders from 'South Africa' to the 'Homelands', among others, provide ample testimony to the desperation of the apartheid state in bullying, intimidating and proscribing progressive voices in the Church.

In spite of state bullying and intimidation, the 'prophetic movement'² became more resolute from 1981 through 1989. This movement included the SACC, the Christian Institute (CI) and Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) and Black Theology movement, among others. It is within this movement that the Kairos document was incubated and hatched. For this movement, apartheid was a 'sin' and a heresy. The same stance was adopted by the World Council of Reformed Churches in 1982 (Goranzon 2010:2).

Mounting pressure from progressive Christian organisations and the Ecumenical movement, coupled with international sanctions, unrelenting resistance from the Mass Democratic movement, determined military campaigns from the African National Congress's (ANC's) Umkonto we Sizwe, general civil disobedience and the failure of the state of emergence, among others, forced P. W. Botha to resign in August 1989. F. W. de Klerk, who succeeded him, set about to dismantle apartheid. He lifted the ban on the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and affiliated political organisations, suspended executions, and on 11 February 1990, released Nelson Mandela, De Klerk and other political leaders went into negotiations under the banner of the Convention for Democratic South Africa (CODESA).

In an interview with the Guardian on 31 January 2010, De Klerk demonstrates the dire consequences for South Africa had the National Party continued to follow the apartheid policy. He argues that, 'If we had not changed in the manner we did, South Africa would be completely isolated. A majority of people in the world would be intent on overthrowing the Government. Our economy would be non-existing; we would not be exporting a single case of wine, and South African planes would not be allowed to land anywhere. Internally, we would have the equivalent of civil war' (Duval 2010). De Klerk further claims that the National Party had abandoned the concept of separate development as far back as 1986:

We embraced the idea of a united South Africa with equal political rights for all, but with effective protection of minorities. Then my predecessor lost his enthusiasm. When I took over, my task was to flesh out what was already a fairly clear vision, but we needed broader support. We needed negotiation. (Duval 2010:online)

² Anders Goranzon defines the 'prophetic movement' as a movement that was prepared to take a critical stance against the apartheid state; see Goranzon (2010:2).

¹ In this article we use the name 'Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)' to refer to the largest and original Reformed Church that was planted the Cape of Good Hope in 1562, sometimes referred to as the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK). Moreover, when we refer to the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk (NHK), we mean the more conservative 'daughter church' that was established in 1853 (see Du Toit 1984:617-632).

De Klerk's claim confirms Fukuyama's observation that the apartheid system lost legitimacy among whites in the mid-eighties because of its ineffectiveness. This 'acceptance on the part of a majority of Afrikaners of a new system of power-sharing with blacks' (Fukuyama 1992:21) was to be confirmed in the 1991 all-white referendum.

It is not possible to understand the change in South Africa during the 1980s outside of the context of the Cold War. In this context, the losses by the South African National Defence Forces and their final defeat at Cuito Cuanavale in Angola (September 1987–June 1988) at the hands of Angolan and Cuban troops, resulted in diplomatic and political gains for the whole region of Southern Africa. According to Campbell, 'The battles of Cuito Cuanavele were the fiercest since World War II. After the failure of the March [1988] offensive the South Africans were forced to the negotiating table' (Campbell 1990:26) which resulted in the independence of Namibia in 1990. This viewpoint is corroborated by Velthuisen who sees the battle as having created an opportunity 'for major peace dividends for South Africa ...' (Velthuisen 2009:118). The latter argues that the battle of Cuito Cuanavale:

was one of the final and most significant battles of the Cold war. The battle permanently changed the political and strategic landscape of the Southern African region. The peace negotiations that followed in the wake of this battle led to the withdrawal of the South African military from Angola and Namibia, resulting in the independence of Namibia and the negotiated settlement in South Africa. (p. 120)

Of course, associated with military forays in and out of South Africa was a growing defence budget that was becoming unsustainable. For instance, between 1986 and 1989 the Defence spending had increased from R4.3 billion to R10.3 billion (Campbell 1990:28). Clearly, something was bound to give.

The fall of the Berlin Wall (09 November 1989) and the demise of Apartheid

But why did change happen so fast soon after De Klerk became President? Was he under pressure? De Klerk's answer to these questions is that, indeed, time was against him. The National Party had realised that military action was not going to yield victory. 'We were involved in an armed struggle where there would be no winners'. Moreover, the fall of the Berlin Wall at the end of 1989 was a critical factor. 'That took the sting out of the tail of the Communist Party'. In his view, the fall of the Berlin Wall had the same effect on the leaders of the ANC, considering that many had trained in the Soviet Union. Hence, De Klerk says, his political instincts were, 'to go for the whole package as one of my colleagues had advised, when you cut the tail off the dog, better do it in one stroke' (Usborne 2010:independent online). Writing about De Klerk's announcement to Parliament on 02 February 1990, Usborne writes: 'In short, in half an hour, De Klerk had announced a commitment to a full democracy, with majority rule in a unitary state which would include the homelands, an independent judiciary, a commitment to equal justice for

all under a human rights manifesto, no discrimination and a free economy. The entire edifice of apartheid, so hated around the world, had been dismantled in a single speech' (Usborne 2010:online). Even Nelson Mandela was awe-struck. Small wonder then that Usborne confessed, 'It was a breath-taking moment, for in one sweeping action he had virtually normalised the situation in South Africa. Our world had changed, overnight'.

Similarly, Tony Leon, former President of the Democratic Alliance and former South African Ambassador to Argentina, shows the poignant link between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of Apartheid. Leon (2014) writes:

There can be few modern events – perhaps other than Nelson Mandela's walk into freedom some three months later, and there is a direct link between both of them – which so symbolically, and on prime time television, defined the turning page of history ... The fall off the wall ... also led to changes here when F. W. de Klerk, who read the writing on his own wall of apartheid reckoned the fall of communism removed the immense obstacle in the path forward for South Africa. (p. 13)

Similarly, Max du Preez (2015) argues that De Klerk had a trump card to play in November 1989; 'the breaking down of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 removed all fear of a "communist onslaught" on South Africa, the last argument in favour of white rule'.

De Klerk, Bloemfontein and Rustenburg

In our view, there was a seamless orchestration and nexus between, on the one hand, decisions made at the General Synod of the DRC held at Bloemfontein (06–25 October 1990), and at the Rustenburg Consultation (05–09 November 1990), as well as the fast-paced political changes unleashed by De Klerk on 02 February 1990, on the other hand.

It is interesting to note that in his 1989 Christmas message, F. W. de Klerk let the cat out of the bag regarding his future vision for South Africa. According to Van der Merwe (2010:285), President De Klerk made an appeal to the churches in South Africa, to formulate a strategy 'conducive to negotiation, reconciliation and the change for the situation in South Africa'. It is clear that President De Klerk had set the terms and agenda for change, not only for the state but for the church as well. Almost a year later, at Bloemfontein, the DRC Synod renounced apartheid, unconditionally. The Synod further condemned:

all forms of discrimination and the suppression of peoples and wholeheartedly desires that all will be free to share in the privileges of the fatherland and will receive reasonable and equal opportunities to acquire prosperity and riches. (Van der Merwe 2010:286)

Van der Merwe (2013) also notes that:

With the *Church and Society*³ the DRC took the first small step on a new road, a road which led to the Church conference in Rustenburg where the DRC publicly confessed that the apartheid policy was a sin. (online)

3.The document 'Church and Society' was tabled at the 1986 DRC General Synod for discussion and adoption on the matter of Race relations in South Africa. In this document, the DRC explicitly rejected the apartheid ideology (see Kritzing 1994:182).

Although both local and global factors influenced the South African state to change its ideological position regarding apartheid, it is important to note that the state did not fundamentally change its *modus operandus* in respect of its relationship with the Church. To attain a non-racial society in the post-cold war era, the state pulled its weight in its appeals to the Church to emphasise reconciliation over justice. Once again, the Church was reduced to the role of handmaiden of the state. However, a fundamental difference with the past is that the DRC, together with other churches, played an 'unmistakeable role' in the process of establishing democracy during the 1990s (De Wet 2014).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of 1996, which was a government initiative towards the promotion of reconciliation, must therefore be understood within a growing context of partnership between Church and State. In the post-Cold War era the church was faced with a new *Kairos*,⁴ that is, to build a new society based on values of reconciliation, forgiveness and inclusion. In this new role, the church was united, unlike during the dark days of apartheid when she was divided or separated along theological and ideological lines. Once again, SACC, an ecumenical body that had vociferously resisted the apartheid state, took the lead in carving out a vision just for a society in the post-apartheid dispensation. This vision had already been articulated in 1994. In the Secretary General's report, Brigalia Bam argued that the ending of apartheid:

coupled with the new order free of the East-West Cold war; and the stature of President Mandela among leaders in the world, opens for us ... an opportunity, space or possibilities... to establish the 'ideal' society which we struggled for and died for ... the ideals of a just political, economic and social order. (Goramzon 2010)

Zambia

One Zambia, One Nation

In his article, Phiri (1999) argues that, from 1964, when Zambia gained independence, up to 1972, Church-state relations were generally harmonious and characterised by mutual respect. 'The government was in many ways accountable to the people. By all accounts, Zambia was a promising democracy' (Phiri 1999:332). Throughout this period, the government subsidised services such as education, health care and other social services. Ideologically, Zambia adopted a mild socialism that Kenneth Kaunda called 'Humanism'. This period was also characterised by political pluralism and an active civil society. In such an environment, Phiri argues the churches left political functions to political parties and the civil society.

Change in Church-state relations, however, came in 1972, when the government of Kenneth Kaunda introduced a one-party state under the United Independence Party (UNIP). Under one-party rule, the state viewed the mandate of the Church as 'spiritual' and therefore 'questioned and challenged' its competence to comment on political issues. In the view of

4. In this case *Kairos* was no longer understood as a crisis, but as an opportunity (see Goramzon 2010:10).

the Government, the Church's duty was to pray for political leaders (Zvanyika 2013:6). On its part, however, the Church opted for a policy of neutrality in all matters political.

By the mid-eighties, Zambia was showing clear signs of economic and political decline. One key economic challenge for Zambia was its dependence on one single primary export product, in the form of copper (Babalota 1999). That was compounded by failed economic policies and an escalating external debt. These factors forced the government to return to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) sponsored programme in 1989. As Simatela (2006) argues, 'The programme was now re-implemented with increased intensity'.⁵ As part of the IMF and WB Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the government of Zambia was forced not only to devalue the Kwacha but also to increase maize meal prices. Furthermore, state subsidies on education and health care were removed. These measures triggered food riots in the towns and cities. The mid-eighties were also characterised by the erosion of civil liberties. 'Civil society groups had been silenced effectively by the party structure and individuals intimidated by state security agents' (Phiri 1999:335). Hence, the change in Church-state relations from 1990 should be understood within an environment where the Church was the only independent 'civil society' movement left standing.

From 1990, the Catholic Church reviewed its position in the face of worsening human suffering, and of 'dishonesty... injustice ... [and] oppression of the poor' (Phiri 1999; 335). In our view, the Church's radical review of its relations with the state may be explained in terms of the global changes unleashed by the fall of the Berlin Wall in October 1989. As the Soviet Union began to implode the Government of Zambia was quick to read the signs of the times. It approached the IMF and the WB, again, for loans in order to shore up the floundering economy. The two Bretton Woods institutions (viz. IMF and WB) obliged, but the loans were granted with conditions which included the removal of state subsidies for services such as education and health care, among others. The Economic SAP adopted by the government left the country at a crossroads. The policy shift from a socialist 'Humanism', to capitalism hurt the masses more severely as most of the state cushions, which were in place since independence, were removed. The SAP brought about severe adverse consequences on the poor and triggered food riots in major towns across the country (Phiri 1999:335).

The sociopolitical turmoil wreaked by the SAP in Zambia, since 1990, thus provided a context for a shift in Church-state relations. Although Henriot (SJ) (2006:6) does not necessarily mention the fall of the Berlin Wall as the one factor behind the change of the church's relations *vis-à-vis* state, he is not oblivious of the impact of wider international policies on developments in Zambia. In a more direct way, though, he shows why the neo-liberal policies of the IMF and the WB

5. President Kaunda had accepted the IMF/World Bank reforms a couple of years earlier, but abandoned them mid-stream.

adopted by the Zambian state provided the context for the church's shift in relation to the state. Henriot (2006) contention is:

[A]s the consequences of IMF and World Bank neo-liberal policies became clear in the lives of the ordinary Zambian, the church raised a clarion call to set as the evaluation criteria of the imposed economic reforms one clear norm: 'they must serve all the people'. The development model of liberalization, privatization, curtailment of social services and overall retreat of the state has not met that criteria in the Zambian experience. (p. 6)

The Catholic Church made a timely intervention on behalf of the poor through a pastoral letter (Zambia Episcopal Conference, Economics, Politics and Justice 1990) addressed to its Catholic members, the government and the general populace. In the letter, the bishops questioned the self-proclaimed 'supremacy' of the ruling party in the national discourse. In the bishops' view, the ruling party was supposed to subject its vision and agenda to the supremacy of the citizens. Furthermore, the bishops lamented the systematic erosion of political and economic justice in the country, manifest through the growing gap between the rich and the poor. Their appeal for a more just political and economic order shocked President Kenneth Kaunda, who retorted by claiming that the bishops were abusing the pulpit and preaching hatred. In a rather lame attempt to parry the adverse impact the bishops' statement had caused on his government, Kaunda claimed that the Christian spirit in Zambia was collapsing and with it the good Church-state relations (Zvanyika 2013:29). Ultimately, Kaunda's protestations against the bishops' Pastoral letter did little to alienate the church from the suffering masses. Instead, the UNIP government alienated itself from the citizens.

Vox ecclesia vox Dei

The bishops' statement ignited a fire within the urban populace and more particularly the trade union movement in Zambia. In the struggle for survival that ensued, the role of labour unions was strengthened. This situation created an opportunity for political dissent, which eventually gave birth to multi-party-ism. In this new sociopolitical context, it is important to note that, while the churches were officially non-partisan, their newly acquired 'prophetic mantle' favoured the emergence of multiparty democracy in Zambia. Across the country, the excitement was getting more and more palpable. As Zvanyika (2013:29) correctly observes, in the fast-changing political situation, the temptation to make 'political sermons' was becoming more frequent. Phiri (1999:340) also notes that, 'the churches helped to raise political awareness by calling for national days of prayer for Zambia and by organizing political seminars'. In this new context, Frederick Chiluba, a fiery Christian and a trade union leader who had met his Damascus conversion in jail, mobilised Christian members to support his newly formed Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) party by opening his campaign rallies with a prayer and Bible reading. In this highly politically charged environment, popular support started to shift from Kaunda to Chiluba.

The amendment of the Constitution from a one-party state to a Multi-Party state to which Kaunda gave assent on 17 December 1990 became a turning point in the political history of Zambia since 1972. In spite of this auspicious turn of events for the country, there were outstanding constitutional issues that were yet to be ironed out by the UNIP and the MMD, two leading parties that were now running toe-to-toe. In July 1991, Church leaders, once again, saved the country from the precipice of violence when they persuaded and facilitated constitutional talks between Kaunda and Chiluba. An agreement between the two cleared the way for the national elections on 31 October 1992 (Zvanyika 2013:30). On 23 September 1991, leaders of mainline churches made it unequivocally clear to all Christians in Zambia that the role of the Church was 'to foster peace, reconciliation and justice' and to show concern for the poor. Furthermore, they took occasion to affirm the will of the people, expressed through periodic free and fair elections, as the basis of the authority of government (Zvanyika 2013:30).

In a foreword to D. Johnston and C. Sampson's edited book entitled, *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (1994:viii) Jimmy Carter, former President of the US, has cited Zambia as a good case in which 'the churches carried the trust of the people and made a decisive contribution to the re-establishment of democracy'. In our view, the global ideological shift that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall had a direct bearing on economic and social developments in Zambia. Consequently, Church-state relations were also affected. The shift that happened is poignantly expressed by Fr Pete Henriot (SJ) who saw the role of the Church in the new situation in terms of a 'prophetic mandate'. According to Henriot (SJ), the Church must 'speak on behalf of and for the people it serves because justice is the aim and intrinsic criterion of all politics' (Zvanyika 2013:6). Henriot goes further to argue that 'the Christian community cannot be neutral in the face of human suffering, of dishonesty, of injustice or oppression of the poor' (Zvanyika 2013). Hence, the change in Church-state relations. In Henriot's view, what is particularly important is that from 1990 right up to the national elections in October 1991, the church's presence was never in doubt. For him, this constituted a key moment in the history of Zambia. This presence was expressed in the role the Church played in education, election monitoring and in her prayers. It is no wonder then that the church was hailed as, 'the mid-wife for the birth of multiparty democracy in the 1991 elections' (Henriot 2006:5).

Malawi

The politics of Malawi (1964–1989)

Malawi attained independence from Britain in 1964. For the next 30 years, Malawi knew only one leader, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda and one ruling party, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). Dr Banda had left his medical practice in Scotland to join national politics aimed at freeing Malawians from British colonialism. He took the helm of the MCP in 1958 and remained its leader up to the time of his death in 1997. A reclusive leader who never married, and did not lead

a family life, Dr Banda attained the status of a Messianic hero to the majority of his people across the faith divide. With time he became an absolute ruler and a dictator. Throughout his tenure as President of Malawi, Banda's authoritarian rule resulted in unparalleled political purging of his foes. All forms of dissent and opposition to his rule were ruthlessly crushed, and this resulted in the externalisation of political opposition in neighbouring countries.

Although Malawi was one of the most isolated countries in Africa, it was not only recognised but also rewarded by Britain and the United States for its anti-communist policy. As Meinhardt (2001:223) correctly observes, the West viewed Malawi as 'a bulwark of peace and political stability' in Southern Africa. The reality, however, was that Malawi was ruled by 'one of the most repressive regimes in Africa'. In spite of its lack of mineral wealth, whose income could complement the small revenue from tea export, Malawi's lifeline came from Western and South African donors (Meinhardt 2001:225). It is critical to see the change in Malawi in the 1990s in terms of a shift of priorities by the latter.

The Messiah's rules with justice and righteousness: Church-state relations in Malawi

Because of Banda's dictatorial rule, churches, like all other civic and religious organisations, were cowed into acquiescence and subservience. Thus, self-preservation became a major pre-occupation for Church leaders and ordinary members of the Church. Co-option of the Church by the state became the order of the day. The extent of co-option and collusion was so serious that church leaders propagated Hastings Kamuzu Banda's ideology that there was no poverty in Malawi, and that Malawians were some of the happiest people in Africa.⁶ Church leaders, just like government leaders, fawned at Banda and made him a kind of Messiah for the hapless Malawians. 'Following his rapid rise to power in Malawi, Banda often cited his position as an Elder of the Church of Scotland as one of his pillars of his spiritual authority' (Mitchell 2002:6). Hence, an atmosphere characterised by a mixture of reverence and 'fearful, silent acquiescence' limited Malawi's political discourse for more than a generation.

Fear of Banda's rule must be understood in context. In 1967, the government of Malawi unleashed a wave of persecution against members of the Jehovah's Witness for refusing to buy the ruling MCP membership cards. This followed a party resolution to ban the religious movement on the grounds that:

the attitude of its adherents is not only inimical to the progress of this country, but also so negative in every way that it endangers the stability and peace and calm which is essential for the smooth running of the state. (Nsereko 1986:275)

In the persecution that ensued, witnesses were arrested, assaulted and killed by mobs. Their homes were set alight, and property destroyed or looted. This reign of terror continued

6. In December 1984, the writer attended an all-Africa conference of the Young Christian Students (YCS) at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya. The representative of the Malawi YCS, an Irish nun, argued in her report that there was no poverty in Malawi.

into the early 1970s and received personal support from President Banda who called the Jehovah's Witness members 'the Devil's witnesses' (Nsereko 1986:276).

In spite of the government's persecution of the members of the Jehovah's Witness church, other churches developed a relationship with the state typified by acquiescence. For instance, the Presbyterian Church, which Banda claimed to be an elder of, cultivated a very close relationship with the President, his government and the MCP. The Episcopal and Protestant churches, including those from the reformed tradition, followed suit. Meanwhile, Catholics took a low profile because they had formerly supported the Christian Democratic Party (CDP), then a Roman Catholic-based party, in elections leading to the independence of Malawi (Zeze 2013:4). In an environment characterised by acquiescence and co-option, it was not surprising that the Nkhoma Synod, previously known as the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM),⁷ reduced itself into, what Zeze (2013:7) calls 'a state-sponsored religion'. Seemingly, Dr Banda's relationship with the Nkhoma Synod and South Africa were tied with an enduring bond. Up to 1993, Dr Banda ruled Malawi 'by a singular mixture of terror and ritualized paternalism, relying on religious institutions to bolster his own moral authority' (Mitchell 2002:5).

The winds of change reach Malawi

Like Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, another African leader who was viewed by the West as an anti-communist bulwark, Banda's grip on power became threatened by winds of change blowing from East Germany that triggered the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. From 1990, Banda gradually began to lose the 'unquestioning support' of his Western allies, particularly, the United Kingdom and the United States (Mitchell 2002:5). At the same time, South Africa, a strong ally of Banda, was in throes of political changes introduced by F.W. de Klerk, the last leader of apartheid South Africa. After all, political developments from Zambia, Banda's next-door neighbour, were portentous. 'Malawians watched with great interest as the paramount ruler of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, responded to calls for multiparty democracy by stepping down from power in acquiescence to popular will' (Mitchell 2002:5). The winds of change were slowly but surely blowing towards Malawi. There is no doubt, however, that academics and students in Malawi, and individuals who were fighting for human rights and democratic reforms from exile, beckoned the signs of the times. Their influence on the change that finally happened was, however, limited (Meinhardt 2001:220).

It is within this context of global changes triggered in Eastern Europe that one can situate the role and place of the Catholic Church in facilitating political change from Banda's authoritarian dictatorship to multiparty democracy. Much has been written about 'Living Our Faith', a Pastoral letter by

7. The DRCM was founded in Nyasaland (now Malawi) in November 1889. It was established through the missionary enterprise of the Cape Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. It later partnered with the Livingstonia Synod and the Blantyre Synod to form the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) (see Pauw 1980).

the Malawian Catholic bishops published in 1992, a few months after the dawn of democracy in Zambia. For our purposes, however, we will only focus on its main points and the extent to which it influenced changes in Church-state relations in Malawi.

‘Living Our Faith’: Pastoral letter from the Catholic Bishops of Malawi (March 1992)

During Lent of 1992, the Catholic Bishops of Malawi issued a Pastoral letter to Catholics, and the society at large, as part of their spiritual reflection for Easter. Parish priests read the statement from the pulpits of Catholic churches throughout Malawi, and 16000 copies were circulated for further examination and discussion. In the letter, the Catholic bishops made it clear that they were not willing to restrict the Church’s action to the religious field, as to do so would give the wrong impression that the Church has nothing to do with the temporal problems that Malawian citizens were facing daily. In the letter, the bishops were critical of the state for promoting a situation where only ‘a minority enjoys the fruits of development and affords luxury and wealth’ while the majority lived a life that is ‘hardly compatible with their dignity as sons and daughters of God ...’ (Mitchell 2002:6). The bishops were also critical of the falling standards in education, and health. They argued that there were serious shortcomings in the education systems which included overcrowded classes, shortage of teachers and teaching material, as well as unequal access to education and lack of discipline. Furthermore, the bishops noted that the health system was characterised by the shortage of health facilities, overcrowding, lack of health personnel, and poor quality of medical care. Moreover, the bishops castigated the state for its failure to deal with bribery and nepotism in public spaces. In the social and economic life of the nation, bribery and nepotism were identified as endemic and as worrying causes of violence and harm to the citizens. Lastly, the bishops made a ‘polite but direct appeal for greater governmental accountability for the Malawian people’ (Mitchell 2002:6).

The government of Malawi came out guns blazing against the Catholic bishops. All of them were called by the Chief of Police, in Blantyre, for questioning. Soon after, the government declared the letter seditious. Henceforth, any person in possession of the letter was required by law to surrender it to the nearest police station. Failure to do so would result in criminal prosecution. Threats from the MCP and top aides of Dr Banda came to naught. Even the deportation of Monsignor John Roche, Apostolic Administrator of Mzuzu Diocese back to Ireland, his home country, did not weaken the resolve of the bishops.

The Pastoral letter received international publicity. International support and solidarity statements endorsing the letter came from the Bishops Conferences in the United States, England, Wales, and Canada, among others. Apart from the solidarity support, Dr George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to President Banda seeking guarantees for the safety of the bishops. Other international organisations such as Amnesty International (AI) and the WB weighed in,

appealing to Banda’s regime to ‘modify its human rights practices’ (Mitchell 2002:13). The suspension of development aid by Western donors in May 1992 triggered strikes and mass protests across Malawi. Without Western donor support, Banda had no other option for financial aid. His close relations with the apartheid government in South Africa, ‘which had granted him considerable financial aid in the past had lost its value due to the political changes in Pretoria’ (Meinhardt 2001:225).

Emboldened by international diplomatic support, as well as international interest in the political affairs of their country, Malawian University and Polytechnic students, as well as members of the civil society, took up the fight for human rights and multiparty democracy in Malawi. Leaders of major churches, including the three Presbyterian Church Synods and the Anglican Church, welcomed the letter by the Catholic bishops. They called for a national referendum on multiparty democracy in Malawi. In a referendum held in June 1993, Malawians gave popular support in favour of the multiparty democracy, and subsequently, President Banda and his MCP lost in the national elections held in 1994 (Ross 2006).

According to Zeze (2013:8): ‘the Pastoral letter by the Catholic Bishops of Malawi played a great role in the political transition [of Malawi] from one-party system to multiparty democracy’. It triggered a countrywide call for change from the one-party dictatorship to multiparty democracy. A new constitution was crafted which recognised free political activity, multipartyism, freedom of association and freedom of conscience. The new constitution provided for justiciable human rights based on the Bill of Human Rights. In a further attempt to hold the Government to account, churches, business and civil society organisations formed the Public Affairs Committee (PAC), an advisory authority, whose mandate was to continue regular dialogue with the government on key national issues.

Conclusion

Firstly, my considered view is that in the period under review, the *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev and the subsequent collapse of the Berlin Wall, followed immediately by the collapse of the Soviet Union present church historians with a new prism through which to interpret historical developments with a bearing on Church-state relations after the Cold War. From the three case studies discussed in this article, it is clear that the end of the Cold War serendipitously opened up space for churches to reconfigure their public role(s). In the cases of Malawi and Zambia, the new role(s) and responsibility thrust the church into an uncharted terrain where they became midwives of a new dispensation characterised by multiparty democracy, public accountability and open and transparent governance. In both cases, the churches became the voice of the voiceless. Although the state reacted viciously and tried to silence the voice of conscience coming from the church, local and international support created an environment for the voice of reason and popular will to prevail over dictatorship. Unlike the two cases referred to above, in the South African case, the post-1990

scenario created space for some *reproachment* between Church and the out-going state as both worked towards mobilising the society to focus on creating a new multiracial society based on values of equality, constitutionalism and democracy. This *modus vivendi* was only possible because the political leadership, in the name of President De Klerk and the leadership of the NGK publicly renounced the apartheid policy and declared their commitment to a new dispensation guided by democratic values and reconciliation.

Secondly, the end of the Cold War created an environment for Western financial institutions and donor agencies to revisit and change their funding policies. During the Cold War funding was primarily based on ideological grounds and shoring support for one-party state regimes. After the end of the Cold War, more emphasis was placed on the empowerment of communities and ordinary citizens. This change of policy became a source of affirmation for church bodies such as SACC, which had all along resisted injustice.

Thirdly, as the old global order characterised by the Cold War was dying, a new one was dawning. A new South Africa was born from the ashes of apartheid in South Africa, one-party dictatorship in Zambia and autocratic rule in Malawi. For a generation, each of the three political regimes had insisted that there was only one way of making and interpreting history, through the imposition of their political ideologies on the citizens. But for the vision of the rulers to succeed, religion was supposed to play the role of a handmaiden of the state. Hence, acquiescence, and quiescence were highly valued in all the three countries under discussion. For respect from the rulers, the church was only expected to be the priest and not prophet to the nation. Those churches that were not beholden to this vision of the rulers were therefore subjected to various bullying tactics and stratagems. The SACC in South Africa, the Jehovah's Witness members as well as the Catholic bishops in Malawi were at the receiving end of state violence because they took a different view from the ruling elites.

However, through the birth of multiparty democracy, it was now possible to imagine a society based on a competition of ideas, respect for human rights, public accountability and openness. The corollary of this new dispensation was borne out of the possibility of imagining multifarious ways of making and interpreting history. The three countries discussed above have crafted constitutions that entrench human rights and human dignity. In Malawi, South Africa and Zambia, a secular state model was adopted, wherein the freedom of belief and freedom of assembly are guaranteed. In this type of state, religion resides in the domain of the citizen's private affairs. Hence, a new set-up of Church-state relations was born. Metaphorically speaking, the nineties marked an 'end of history' as it used to be known during the Cold War. The history that was for a generation crafted by chroniclers of apartheid ideologues in South Africa, and tin-pot dictators, in Malawi and Zambia, has indeed ended as it gave way to a new history where the majority share their visions and horizons of

a democratic society. The end of the apartheid regime in South Africa and the end of dictatorship in Malawi and Zambia indeed marked the 'end of history'.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

References

- Babalota, J.B., Lungwangwa, G. & Adeyinka, A.A., 1999, 'Education under structural adjustment in Nigeria and Zambia', *McGill Journal of Education* 34(1), 78–98.
- Boswell, V., 2012, 'Adrian Vlok and the truth and reconciliation Commission', 2012, pp. 3–4, viewed 17 August 2017, from <http://scholar.google.co.za>
- Campbell, H., 1990, *The Siege of Cuito Cuanavale*, The Scandinavian Institute of African Affairs, Uppsala.
- Carter, J., 1994, 'Foreword', in D. Johnston & C. Sampson (eds.), *Religion, the missing dimension of Statecraft*, pp. vii–viii, OUP, New York.
- Catholic Bishops of Zambia, 1990, *Zambia Episcopal Conference, Economics, Politics and Justice*, Pastoral Letter.
- De Wet, F., 2014, 'The role of Prophetic action in Public Theology – The implications for addressing corruption in a context of sustainable development', *In die Skriflig/ In Luce Verbi* 48(1), Art. #1718, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v48i1.1718>
- Du Preez, M., 2015, *F D de Klerk's 'quantum leap': Did he jump or was he pushed?* viewed 12 August 2017, from <http://mgco.za/article/2015-01-09>
- Du Toit, B.M., 1984, 'Missionaries, anthropologists, and the policies of the Dutch Reformed Church', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 22(4), 617–632. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00056263>
- Duval, A., 2010, *Why F. W. de Klerk let Mandela out of prison*, viewed 16 August 2017, from <http://the-guardian.com/world/2010.Jan/31/Nelson Mandela>
- Fukuyama, F., 1992, *The end of history and the last man*, Free Press, New York.
- Goranzon, A., 2010, 'The prophetic voice of the SACC after 1990- searching for a newer Kairos', PhD thesis, University of Free State.
- Gous, G., 1993, 'From church struggle to a struggling church: A tale of three conferences; Cottesloe, Rustenburg and Cape Town', *Missionalia* 21(3), 253–271.
- Henriot, P.J., 2006, 'A church in the modern world of Africa: The Zambian Experience', *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 3(2), 301–319, viewed 08 August 2017, from <https://stthomas.edu/media/catholicstudies/centre/ryan/.../2005.../Henriot.pdf>
- Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 2013, 39(1), viewed 13 August 2017, from <http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?>
- Jacobsen, D., 2011, *The world's Christians, who they are, where they are, and how they got there*, Wiley-Blackwell, UK.
- Kritzing, J.J., 1994, 'The witness of the Reformed Church in South Africa: A certain past and an uncertain future', *International Review of Mission* 83(328), 179–184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.1994.tb02360.x>
- Leon, T., 2014, 'If we rise up, then walls fall', *The Times*, 06 November, viewed 23 September 2017, from <http://tonyleonblog.blogspot.co.za/2014>
- Meinhardt, H., 2001, 'How it began: External actors in the early phase of the democratic transition in Malawi' Law and politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America', 34(2), 220–240.
- Mitchell, M., 2002, 'Living our faith': The Lenten Pastoral Letter to the Bishops of Malawi and the Shift to Multiparty Democracy, 1992–1993', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41(1), 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5906.00096>
- Nsereko, D.D., 1986, 'Religion, the State, and the Law in Africa', *Journal of Church & State* 28, 269–280. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/28.2.269>
- Pauw, C.M., 1980, 'Mission and Church in Malawi: The history of the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian', DTh. thesis, University of Stellenbosch.
- Phiri, I., 1999, 'Why African Churches Preach politics: The case of Zambia', *Journal of Church and State* 41(2), 323–347. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/41.2.323>
- Ross, K., 2006, 'The transformation of power in Malawi 1992–1995', *Ecumenical Review* 48, 38–52.
- Simatele, M.C.H., 2006, 'The impact of structural adjustment on food production in Zambia', viewed 24 September 2017, from <http://www.researchgate.net/profile>
- Storey, P., 1998, 'Remembering the Ecumenical struggle against apartheid', *Word & World* 18(2), 187–193.
- Usborne, S., 2010, *The day I ended apartheid*, viewed 24 November 2017, from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/>
- Van der Borgh, E., 2011, 'Unity that sanctifies diversity: Cottesloe revisited', *Acta Theologica* 31(2), 315–328. <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v31i2.16>
- Van der Merwe, J., 2010, 'Cottesloe 50 years later: Did the Dutch Reformed Church answer to the call?', *In Dutch Reformed Theological Journal* 51(3&4), 154–163.

- Van der Merwe, J., 2013, 'The Dutch reformed church from human relations and the South African scene in the light of scripture to church and society: The struggle goes on', In *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39, 1, viewed 13 August 2017, from <http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?>
- Velthuisen, A., 2009, 'The significance of the battle for Cuito Cuanavale: Long-term foresight of the current strategic landscape', *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies* 37(2), 107–123.
- Walshe, P., 1977, 'Church versus State in South Africa: The Christian Institute and the Resurgence of African Nationalism', *Journal of Church and State* 19(3), 457–479. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/19.3.457>
- Zeze, W.S., 2013, 'Christianity: A state-sponsored religion in Malawi? A critical evaluation of the relationship between the CCAP Nkhoma Synod and the MCP-led Government (1964–1994)', Paper presented at the Conference on Law and Religion in Africa, University of Ghana, 14–15th January 2013, viewed 28 July 2017, from <https://www.iclrs.org/content/events.28/751pdf>
- Zvanyika, M., 2013, 'An ethical assessment of the relationship between the Mainline churches and the state in Zambia', A dissertation submitted to the University of Zambia in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Ethics.