

Bruno Soliva, Stephan Tschirren

**"The time for action has arrived – for hopeful  
action, for action in faith and full of trust in  
God."**

(Kairos document)

The Catholic Church of Switzerland  
and its approach to apartheid in South Africa  
(1970–1990)

# **Index**

## **Introduction**

### **1. Isolated actions and statements (1970-1980)**

- 1.1 Racism and South Africa as a topic at the Synod 72
- 1.2 Solidarity work and direct contacts – the actions of the Young Christian Workers
- 1.3 Cautious approach of the mission societies
- 1.4 The work of the Fastenopfer with regard to South Africa
- 1.5 First contacts and statements of the Bishops' Conference

### **2. South Africa in the background (1980-1985)**

- 2.1 The South Africa Motion to the Pastoral Forum in Lugano
- 2.2 The topic “South Africa” at Justitia et Pax
- 2.3 The aid organisations under fire
- 2.4 Relationships with business circles and politics
- 2.5 The basis becomes active
- 2.6 Contacts of the SBC with the SACBC

### **3. Greater commitment and better networking (1985-1990)**

- 3.1 The Kairos document – a strong impulse for the solidarity movements
- 3.2 The commitment of the Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne (JEC)
- 3.3 An inter-disciplinary week at the University of Freiburg
- 3.4 The study “Our responsibility for South Africa”
- 3.5 “To Break chains” (“Ketten sprengen”) – an ecumenical campaign for human rights
- 3.6 Talks with the banks
- 3.7 The issue of sanctions at the centre
- 3.8 The AG Kairos and the conference “Christian solidarity with the victims of apartheid”
- 3.9 A round-table having a rapport with the Bishops' Conference
- 3.10 What's next after the release of Mandela?

## **Conclusion**

## **Abbreviations**

## Introduction

Switzerland and its banks have always maintained good relations with the white elite of South Africa. These became even closer when the apartheid regime was pressurised increasingly and was isolated internationally from the middle of the 1980s. The inhuman apartheid policy has, however, been criticised by human rights organisations and not least by church institutions since the 1960s. The *World Council of Churches (WCC)* condemned apartheid as a sin at the beginning of the 1970s already. With its anti-racism programme it undertook concrete steps against racial segregation, even if not all its members agreed therewith. In this context the churches in Switzerland were faced with the question whether they should condemn apartheid and if yes, how clearly. This study investigates how various protagonists within the Catholic Church faced this question during the period between 1970 and 1990. Special attention is paid to the *Swiss Bishops' Conference (SBC)* as the Governing Board of the Catholic Church in Switzerland. The *National Commission Justitia et Pax (J&P)* played an important role as the Advisory Board of the bishops in socio-ethical and political issues. A further protagonist was the *Fastenopfer (FO)* which supported projects in South Africa since the 1960s as an aid organisation of the Catholic Church. Thanks to direct relations with South Africa several mission societies and religious orders, particularly the Capuchins, the *Immenseers*, the *Menzinger Sisters of the Holy Cross* and the *Mariannahillers* became active in this regard. Eventually various organisations and working groups at the basis of the church played a key role in making apartheid an important topic in church circles. In the 1970s the *Young Christian Workers (YCW)* and in the 1980s the *Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne (JEC)* as well as the *Working Group Kairos of the Theological Movement for Solidarity and Liberation (AG Kairos)* ranked among these.

The contents have been divided into three chapters that have been organised chronologically. While the first chapter comprises the period from 1970 to 1980, the 1980s have been split into two parts. This structuring orientates itself by the proclamation of a state of emergency in South Africa in the year 1985, which also dynamised the commitment in Switzerland against apartheid and raised it to a new level.

After the visit of the delegations of the Swiss Catholic and Reformed Church in South Africa in 2001, the *Fastenopfer* as the driving force suggested that the role of the Catholic Church of Switzerland in the apartheid conflict should be reviewed. It offered its active support and repeatedly underlined the necessity of such a study towards the *Swiss Bishops' Conference*.

Although the *SBC* appeared to be impressed by the endeavours by South Africa to review the past of apartheid, and indicated that it was prepared to face its own past in this context, it was cautious at first. Two fears hung in the air: That Switzerland would be approached with claims for compensation on the one hand and on the other hand with an “instrumentalisation” by the aid organisation for their development goals within the scope of the “Jubilee 2000” campaign. As from 2002 the pressure on Switzerland and its banks decreased and the issue of the review of events could be addressed in a less emotional way within the Catholic Church. However, the search for a historian for this task proved to be more difficult than expected. In June 2007 the assignment for the study could finally be awarded to the historian Bruno Soliva. Beginning with archiving in the abovementioned institutions and various interviews with dedicated contemporary witnesses, extensive documentation took shape shining a light on the topic from the perspective of the Catholic Church of Switzerland.<sup>1</sup> Further investigations would be necessary for research in South African archives and thereby a South African view of the topic.

The current text is a summary of this extensive study of the approach of the Catholic Church of Switzerland with regard to apartheid in South Africa. This was also compiled by the historian Stephan Tschirren by order of the commission *Justitia et Pax*. Except in the case of word for word quotes no detailed references are provided in this study.

The work of Bruno Soliva as well as the work of Stephan Tschirren was supervised by the South African working group. The following persons are part thereof:

*Daniel Ammann*, member of the Theological Movement

*Wolfgang Bürgstein*, General Secretary of the Swiss National Commission *Justitia et Pax*

*Josef Elsener*, member of the Bethlehem Immensee Mission Society

*Claudia Fuhrer/Walter Ulmi*, persons responsible for the programme Southern Africa at the Fastenopfer

*Monsignor Felix Gmür*, General Secretary of the Swiss Bishops' Conference until the end of 2010

The current summary of the study is also available in French and English and free copies can be obtained from *Justitia et Pax*.

---

<sup>1</sup> A compilation of this material will be available second half of 2012 under [www.juspax.ch](http://www.juspax.ch) as a pdf document.

## **1. Isolated actions and statements (1970-1980)**

Until the 1970s South Africa and apartheid received little to no attention within wide circles of the Catholic Church of Switzerland. They only became a topic upon impulses by the Reformed side. Many Catholics initially perceived the issue of South Africa as a “problem of the reformists”; only isolated Catholic places or movements took actions against apartheid. By means of public action the *Young Christian Workers (YCW)* called attention to the topic in the 1970s. Many other groups kept a low profile in public with regard to their opinions of South Africa.

A first focal point of the examination of the topic was the anti-racism programme of the *WCC* which had been adopted in 1969 as a result of the World Assembly in Uppsala one year before. This programme was prompting large controversies in Switzerland just then. The *WCC* was accused amongst others of thereby supporting armed liberation movements in Africa. These disputes were also observed and picked up by the Catholic side. Influenced by the *Second Vatican Council* and the 1968 movement a new generation of Catholics emerged which took side for the blacks in South Africa and in the surrounding countries, besides their commitment to social issues. Further important reasons for this commitment were developmental challenges, a differentiated concept of violence or non-violence and not least, personal relations with Africa.

### **1.1 Racism and South Africa as a topic at the Synod 72**

With the *Synod 72* the Catholic Church of Switzerland implemented a resolution which the Swiss Bishops had passed one year after the end of the *Second Vatican Council* in 1965. After an overall preparation in Switzerland, own synods were held in all dioceses. This was done to be able to take all languages and cultures in Switzerland into account. Thematically the individual diocesan synods were accompanied by twelve Inter-diocesan Expert Commissions (ISaKo).

Beginning with the topic of racial discrimination, the situation in South Africa was also a topic for the ISaKo 10 which worked on the topic “Joint responsibility of Christians for the mission, the Third World and Peace”. As a result of the *Synod 72* the institutional church was also confronted with the topic. During the *Synod 72* the anti-racism programme of the *WCC*

was always clearly in the foreground of the discussions relating to South Africa.

The *Berne Declaration* (BD) succeeded in making topics such as “Racism in South Africa” better known in the “Catholic world” during the synod already, not least by means of the “*Interconfessional Conference Switzerland –Third World*” in autumn 1970 where documents were passed in which the clear reaction to racial discrimination was later unimaginable for the churches in Switzerland. These statements were mainly contributed by the “Jugendfraktion” (Youth Fraction) that showed personally and methodically close relations with the 1968 movement.

In the context of these discussions new questions were brought on the table during the Synod. The contents of these questions was the problematic activities and relations of the Western and thereby also of Swiss businesses especially in Southern Africa. The conflict around the economic measures which were initiated and implemented by the WCC in 1972 started shortly thereafter. The programme of the WCC was supplemented by the first CETIM study<sup>2</sup>, which took up the role of the Swiss industry once again, but in more detail.

The three main groups that characterised the discussions and disputes around South Africa until the beginning of the 1990s can already be recognised at the synod. They became apparent particularly in the disputes around the racism text passages and may simplistically be described as “*progressive*”, “*conservative*” and “*balanced*” participants.

The participants that are described as “progressive” spoke up, so that the statements on racism, also on apartheid in South Africa, would carry as much weight as possible, were formulated concretely and were brought up in the context of the Swiss industry.

As an antipole to the “progressive” participants, the “conservative” participants were represented considerably less at the Synod. They were in a defensive position and wanted to prevent the new starting points or at least put them into perspective. The “conservative” participants were particularly against the anti-racism programme of the WCC and against mentioning individual countries in the synod documents, but demanded an investigation of the oppression in the East.

Finally the third group, often persons in the role of a formal or informal leadership role within the synod process, mediated and endeavoured to find a compromise. Their concern was a “balance”. From their point of view the synod document had to represent a kind of mirror image of the average Catholic.

---

<sup>2</sup> CETIM (Centre Europe – Tiers Monde) (Publisher): Suisse – Afrique du Sud. Relations économiques et politiques. Geneva 1972.

What was absent during the entire synod process was the participation of people who were directly affected by apartheid and racism in order to address and assess the issue of apartheid seriously. Committed individuals or communities had endeavoured more or less effectively to make the concern of the black population known and credible in the form of an advocacy. The view of the majority of the black Southern African population was for example contributed by the *Berne Declaration (BD)* and within the Catholic Church especially by Anne-Marie Holenstein. As far as the issue of racism is concerned, the *BD* in Switzerland had taken over an important role as a pioneer. Its special credit was that it pooled the forces ecumenically which campaigned against racial segregation. However, the solidarity of the *BD* with the church institutions decreased significantly later. Because its opponents would have attempted to “deny the Christian motive of the movement, to label it as ideological and to push it away to the margin of the church or even beyond that”, “even some responsible church bodies became uncertain in the assessment of the *Berne Declaration*.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet, and this especially affects the side that is described as “conservative”, the main concern of most synod participants with regard to racial discrimination was to present their own political and economical positions more concisely. The main focus was on Switzerland; it was less about an investigation of the situations of people in Africa. On the whole South Africa thereby remained a side issue for the *Synod 72*.

For many participants the debate of the synod therefore did not have any long-term effect on the investigation of the topic of apartheid. Although the appeal to the Catholics to campaign for the overcoming of racial discrimination/apartheid in collaboration with other organisations was contained in nearly all the synod documents of the individual diocese, the synod did not result in any verifiable action or the emergence of groups that dealt with it concretely. In the preface and in the actual text of the study of *Justitia et Pax* “Our responsibility for South Africa” which had been commissioned by the Pastoral Forum in 1981 and was published in 1986, a reference to the *Synod 72* was for example omitted. Their texts had apparently fallen into oblivion, as far as South Africa was concerned.

---

<sup>3</sup> Private archive of Joe Elsener, letter by Peter Walter and Father Anton Peter on behalf of the Berne Declaration to the Board of the Swiss Protestant Churches, the Swiss Bishops’ Conference etc. of 7<sup>th</sup> July 1982.

## 1.2 Solidarity work and direct contacts – the actions of the Young Christian Workers

The Soweto riot in 1976 resulted in a clearer position of Catholic movements in South Africa which was also backed by the Church Board. Due to the increasing repression in the country it became increasingly difficult during the course of the years to adopt a moderate position, because opinions on the apartheid problem were accentuated on both sides - also in Switzerland - within a matter of only a few years. In December 1983 Pius Hafner of *Justitia et Pax* had to realise during a South Africa study conference in Freiburg that it was not possible to find something like a common denominator between the poles of the individual exponents anymore.

According to the current state of research, the affiliated movements of the German-speaking *Young Christian Workers (YCW)*, the French-speaking *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne (JOC)* as well as the JOC/E that caters to young Spanish immigrants were the first groups within the Catholic Church of Switzerland to perform solidarity work in connection with South Africa. As from 1977 the YCW and JOC supported the persecuted members of the partner organisation *Young Christian Workers (YCW(SA))* in South Africa by means of information events and creative action all over Switzerland. Within the scope of an “International Campaign” in the year 1977 which was held in all countries in which the YCW existed, the movement for the disadvantaged population of South Africa began. With its perspective of the “working class” and the method “see – judge – act” of its founder Joseph Cardijn, the YCW had a good approach to deal with the apartheid issue. A characteristic of the YCW which also applies to the student movement *Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne (JEC)* that can be traced back to Cardijn, was the fact that the movement did not confine itself to contacts within the Catholic environment, but was open for collaboration with various groups that were concerned about the topic “South Africa”.

With a magazine, events in various Swiss cities, multimedia shows, exhibitions, forms of action such as shadow plays, fliers and stickers the YCW drew attention to the situation in South Africa. In the context of boycott measures there were also contacts with the *Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM)*. When 30 *Young Christian Workers* were arrested in South Africa in spring/summer 1978, the YCW reacted world-wide with letters of protest and other actions. The protests against the arrest of YCW (SA) people in South Africa was a success in so far as nearly all the 30 arrested persons in South Africa were released again or were only imprisoned for a relatively short time. Presumably the international pressure, in which the SBC participated, played a role in this regard.

An important component of the solidarity work of the *YCW* was the international coordination. The *YCW* was globally strongly interconnected, and back then in Switzerland a direct contact came about between the secretariat of the *YCW* and a representative of the *YCW(SA)* from South Africa, who had just been released from prison.

A few years after their campaign for the South African *Young Christian Workers*, the *YCW* in Switzerland discontinued its work. Although it was not appreciated appropriately in Switzerland, the commitment of the *YCW* in Switzerland for people in South Africa, but above all for the South African partners of the *YCW (SA)* was important. It is fair to say that the *YCW* together with the *JOC* and *JOC/E* within the Catholic Church of Switzerland were the only movements that had reacted directly to “Soweto”.

### **1.3 Cautious approach of the mission societies**

For Catholic mission societies that were active in Southern Africa, the racial segregation in South Africa had been a topic for quite some time. All of them rejected apartheid in principle. But a cautious approach prevailed among the majority of the mission staff in South Africa. The branches in Switzerland initially also joined this position and maintained silence with regard to racial segregation. The *Capuchins* and the *Mission Society Bethlehem (SMB)* were an exemption. They condemned apartheid clearly in the 1970s already. But neither of the communities did any practical mission work in South Africa. The motivation for the campaign of the *Swiss Capuchins* against the racial segregation must be regarded in the context of the solidarity of Tanzania under President Nyerere with the anti-apartheid movement. The *Swiss Capuchins* had focussed on Tanzania as missionaries. Furthermore the presence of Capuchins from Switzerland in the Mission Secretariat of the convent in Rome should be pointed out: As a result there was a high sensibility for international concerns. What is surprising is the fact, that the campaign of the *Capuchins* for people in Southern Africa in the decisive 1980s can hardly be proven anymore in the archives that were searched in Switzerland. The commitment of the *Capuchins* had been strongly interconnected with the *Synod 72*.

The commitment of the *Mission Society Bethlehem in Immensee (SMB)* against apartheid was of similar significance for the time of the *Synod 72*. Its activities at the time were, however, not as much in the limelight as those of the Capuchins. The commitment of the *SMB* in the movement against apartheid did not decrease in the 1980s. The “*Immenseers*” proceeded from a partially similar situation in former Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe), which it

knew very well. Their concern was supported strongly by the management of the *SMB*, particularly by the Superior General Josef Amtstutz and later Joe Elsener und this support was provided in various ways, but also on the level of basic missiological groundwork.

As far as could be ascertained, other congregations with missionary activities in South Africa itself were only involved on the sidelines at the Synod 72. This may be related to the fact that the sister congregations that are strongly represented in South Africa perhaps did not wish to speak out due to their understanding of the role of men and women. However, at the latest after 1980, isolated sisters in Switzerland started acting with a new self-confidence, became involved by means of providing information and making others aware of the human rights violations and the problematic business deals of the Swiss industry with the white regime. In this case the development was probably triggered by the transformation of churches in South Africa from rather “silent” churches to churches that adopted a clear position against the apartheid regime and acted accordingly.

#### **1.4 The work of the *Fastenopfer* with regard to South Africa**

Since the 1960s the *Fastenopfer* supported projects of mission societies in South Africa time and again. One can therefore assume that sufficient knowledge of the situation in South Africa was present in the 1970s, although the aid organisation kept a low profile until the mid-1980s with regard to this issue, compared to later phases. On the one hand the project work in the South was only associated loosely with the publicity work in Switzerland, on the other hand statements of contemporary witnesses create the impression that a clearer approach to South Africa was avoided for fear of losing friends and donors from the *Christian Democratic Peoples' Party (CVP)*.

The *Fastenopfer* came into existence in 1961 and had its origins in the mission year of the Catholic youth leagues. After the overwhelming success of the mission year the federal leader of the *Schweizerischer Jungwachtbund* (a Catholic Youth Movement for boys) launched the idea of an annual training event and fund-raising campaign during Lent. The first campaign took place in 1962 under the motto “We share”. The early *Fastenopfer* had a strong religious and spiritual orientation, the campaigns of the 1960s were characterised by specific church topics, for example the sacraments. But the first changes started to show in the second half of the 1960s. The atmosphere of change within the Catholic Church also influenced the work of the *Fastenopfer*. The documents of the *Second Vatican Council* and the encyclical *Populorum progressio* of the year 1967 played an important role in this regard. Within the Catholic Church of Switzerland the *Fastenopfer*

soon took up a central position and characterised the view of the Catholics with regard to the countries of the South strongly. With the Reformed partner organisation *Bread for Brothers* (since 1991 *Bread for All*) it also set an important example in the ecumenical cooperation from the 1970s.

The projects which supported the *Fastenopfer* in South Africa in the 1970s mainly involved pastoral projects without political impact. Often buildings (for example churches or parish centres) or education projects took centre stage. The applications for financing or cooperation came about through missionary communities which had a branch in Switzerland, partly also via South African dioceses. During the course of the 1980s it became common practice at the *Fastenopfer* not to process the projects in South Africa via the mission societies with a branch in Switzerland so much, but nearly entirely via the *Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC)*. Thus the projects were to be safeguarded against the arbitrariness of the government bodies by means of protection “from above” with connections into the whole world. The support of the project *Fastenopfer* in South Africa was therefore marked by an element of continuity: With only a few exceptions, at least one project per year was supported financially in South Africa. On the other hand there is no indication that any co-workers of the *Fastenopfer* travelled to South Africa before 1985. The persons who were formerly responsible at the *Fastenopfer* regarded South Africa as a particularly difficult work environment, also due to the racial segregation. What is interesting in this context is a petition by the *Menzinger Sisters of the Holy Cross* in 1966, in which they requested support for the building of a provincial house of the “Coloured sisters” (in Parow, Cape Province) as part of a complex with an orphanage and a primary school for coloured children. Due to forced resettlement the house had to be built again. The *Fastenopfer* attempted to establish contact with the South African Embassy to prevent the unnecessary “waste” of donations. It remains unclear what exactly happened then. But what is certain is that the *Fastenopfer* eventually granted a contribution to the project.

At the time the *Fastenopfer* hardly described apartheid as a human rights issue. By contrast, it is conspicuous that the *Menzinger Sisters* argued with human rights in their project application. The Superior General Sister Irene Sganzeni recommended the project with the following words:

“(…) I therefore believe that I may appeal to the helpfulness of the Swiss Catholics on behalf of a race whose human rights have been violated.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> *Fastenopfer*, State archives of Lucerne, Parow (South Africa): Building of a provincial house of the teaching nurses of the Holy Cross

Nevertheless the audience in Switzerland was regularly informed about South Africa by means of an agenda which the *Fastenopfer* had been publishing together with *Bread for Brothers* since 1973. The driving force for the contributions in the agenda that were critical of apartheid and for further documents relating to South Africa was the *Aid Organisation of the Protestant Churches of Switzerland (AOPCS)*. But *Bread for Brothers* as well as the *Fastenopfer* had to give their blessing to the contributions to the agenda.

As a general rule the *Fastenopfer* left the public relation related to apartheid to its Reformed partner *Bread for Brothers* for a long time. This was not least due to the founder and director of the *Fastenopfer*, Meinrad Hengartner, who left a strong mark on the *Fastenopfer* and discussions around the orientation of the aid organisation. Under his leadership the *Fastenopfer* only approached the topic of racial segregation in South Africa and particularly the role of businesses in Switzerland as supporters of apartheid very cautiously. Initially the solidarity of the *Fastenopfer* with circles of the *Christian Democratic Peoples' Party* and a critical approach to the concerns of the 1968 movement hampered a more aggressive investigation of the topic.

The *Fastenopfer* obtained important impulses for the rethinking process in respect of South Africa from the Catholic network *Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité (CIDSE)*, which had its secretariat in Brussels. The secretariat had direct contacts to the *SACBC* and was always well informed with regard to affairs in this country.

### **1.5 First contacts and statements of the Bishops' Conference**

Due to a request by the *Swiss Protestant Churches (SPC)* for participation in the “Inter-confessional post for human rights” and in the “Church - Business Circle” the *Swiss Bishops' Conference (SBK)* as an ecclesiastical management body of the Catholic Church of Switzerland was faced indirectly with the apartheid issue for the very first time. Both initiatives of the *SPC* were reactions to the anti-racism programme of the previously mentioned *WCC* and comprised a fund that supported organisations that were committed against racial discrimination. In 1970 these were the *Unita* and the *ANC* for example. The *SPC* feared a “support of violence” and disassociated itself from the *WCC*. The appeal by the *WCC* in 1972 to discontinue investments in South Africa and other countries with racist regimes was also refused by the management of the Reformed Church of Switzerland.

With respect to the business circles in Switzerland the aim of the strategy of the *SPC* was to distinguish itself as being business-friendly and anti-communist on the one hand, and on the other hand to seek a separate way for the church in the approach to racism or human rights which is guided by the idea of “good services”. The *SPK* sought talks with the church of the white Boers, the *Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)* whereof the majority endorsed apartheid, and thereby clearly disassociated itself with the course of the *WCC*. The conduct of the Church Board resulted in fierce disputes within the reformed church, and even in a type of split. As a consequence the counter movement to the Church Board which orientated itself by the positions of the *South African Council of Churches (SACC)*, and was organised in various groups and organisations was also boosted.

Therefore the *SPC* commissioned the compilation of its own human rights programme in 1974-75, without including the aid organisations. According to its own words this programme was supposed not to concentrate solely on racism and South Africa. Instead of concentrating on the economic isolation of South Africa, it focussed on the dialogue with Swiss business representatives.

The aim was to win over other churches in Switzerland to “counter projects” of the *SPC* which were directed against the *WCC* and to enforce the strategy of the *SPC* in this manner. Initially the responsible persons of the Catholic Church welcomed the two ideas in good faith. Their original and controversial intentions only became clear to isolated Catholic protagonists as time drew on.

While the collaboration with regard to the human rights programme failed due to the opposition of the aid organisation *Caritas* and due to financial reasons, the representatives of the Catholic Churches continued to participate in discussions between church and business representatives. These meetings took place until the early 1980s. Like the subsequent bank discussions they mainly served as image cultivation and could therefore not achieve any rethinking process there.

Two events during the second half of the 1970s also confronted the *SBC* with the topic: In December 1976 the first press officer of the *SBC*, the “*Immensee*” Father Bruno Holtz reported on the difficult situation in former Rhodesia (today “Zimbabwe”)<sup>5</sup>. The *SBC* subsequently declared its solidarity with the missionaries publicly. In January 1977 the Secretary of the *SCC*, Anton Cadotsch, asked the Superior General of the *SMB*, Father Josef Amstutz, to orientate the *SBC* quickly, “should important events occur” in Rhodesia. On behalf of Bishop Pierre Mamie he requested “a somewhat more detailed report on the situation of your missionaries

---

<sup>5</sup> Amongst others the Rhodesian government attempted to introduce apartheid laws similar to those in South Africa. – In the case of Rhodesia the interest of the Swiss industry to prevent a political change was considerably less than in South Africa.

in Rhodesia” from him for the attention of the *SBC*. “The Bishops’ Conference wishes to remain in close contact with the persons concerned during these trying hours.” In July 1977 Father Josef Amstutz could deliver a report on Rhodesia to the *SBC* during the *O.A.* and received lots of sympathy. The *SBC* could also be won over for protest campaigns against the arrest of numerous South African members of the *Young Christian Workers (YCW)* in spring/summer 1978. It is remarkable, that the *SBC* did not only participate in the action of the *YCW* compared to its otherwise rather hesitant mode of practice, but developed commitment beyond that which exceeded the concerns of the initiators. Only approximately two weeks after the *YCW* had informed the Benedictine Abbot Georg Holzherr of the monastery Einsiedeln by means of a letter with regard to the situation in South Africa, the request for support of the protest campaign reached the *O.A.* of the *SBC*. The following was recorded in the minutes:

“The Bishops’ Conference declares its solidarity with the South African bishops who request the release of the arrested members of the *YCW*. In a letter to the South African Embassy in Switzerland the Bishops’ Conference demands immediate intervention in favour of the arrested persons. It will also oppose all violations of human rights in future, wherever they may occur.”<sup>6</sup>

What is surprising in this context is the fact that the South African bishops were not mentioned at all in the letter of the *YCW* to Abbot Georg Holzherr and in the enclosed sample protest letter. Obviously the *SBC* obtained additional detailed information.<sup>7</sup> However, documents in this regard cannot be traced at the *SBC* anymore. The phrase “The Bishops’ Conference declares its solidarity with the South African bishops” was to become characteristic for the statements by the *SBC* with regard to South Africa.

The letter which the *SBC* sent to the South African Embassy (with a copy to the Federal councillor Pierre Aubert) contained additional information that was not included in the sample letter by the *YCW*. It was not only signed by the secretary, Anton Cadotsch, but also by the president of the *SBC*, Bishop Pierre Mamie. The number of arrests was increased and specified in the letter; furthermore the topic “communism” was addressed in a differentiated manner and the *YCW* provides the following defence:

“Your Excellency, you may perhaps reply that your government is very concerned about the threat by the

---

<sup>6</sup> Archive of the *SBC*, minutes of the 160<sup>th</sup> open assembly dated 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> July 1978, 15.5, South Africa: Arrest of nineteen members of the *Young Christian Workers*.

<sup>7</sup> It remains unclear who provided it. Did the auxiliary bishop Gabriel Bullet, who was working in the same diocese as Mamie, establish contacts by means whereof the current affairs in South Africa and the approach of the *SACBC* could be ascertained?

international communism. In this regard it may be said: the most effective method in the battle against communism is a fair constitutional and economic order. As proven by experience, communism cannot be conquered with repressive means. For the Young Christian Workers social justice is, however, one of the most important concerns. If your government is really concerned about justice, these young people are your best allies. It is important to acknowledge that not everyone who wishes to improve the political and economical situation of the black population in South Africa can be described as a communist just because thereof.”<sup>8</sup>

Bishop Pierre Mamie and Anton Cadotsch met the reply by the ambassador, Jan François Wentzel, in which he attempted to refute all accusations, with a detailed description of the events which were based on the reports of a freeman, amongst others.

In general the great confidence which the Swiss bishops had in their “colleagues” in South Africa in those days already, and which was to stay, is conspicuous. At the time it was confidence in the institution of the Bishops’ Conference. Later personal contacts with the South African bishops were to improve and extend the relations even further.

The isolated case of commitment in favour of victims of racial discrimination shows that the *SBC* had channels and networks at its disposal with which it could obtain information about the human rights violations in South Africa. At the same time it was able to react quickly, confidently and masterfully at the request of the *YCW*.

If the approach of the *SBC* in the case of human rights violations in Rhodesia and South Africa in the 1970s is analysed, it is a matter of isolated statements only, but it becomes clear notwithstanding that the *SBC* was willing during these years to deal with such topics with more commitment and more trenchantly than in the previous years. Both cases also prove that Bishop Mamie in particular was prepared to campaign against human rights violations, while receiving strong support from a sensitised environment in the Romandy (the French-speaking part of Switzerland), according to contemporary witnesses.

For the approach to the topic “South Africa” within the *SBC* it is fair to draw the following conclusion for the years 1970 to 1980: It was important, *who* approached the *SBC* with a concern. Father Josef Amstutz was the prominent personality in Switzerland, where the Catholic mission was concerned, and Abbot Georg Holzherr was a respected member of the *SBC*. Furthermore the approach of the responsible person at the *SBC* to such issues was decisive.

---

<sup>8</sup> *SBC*, “Roter Ordner”, C. 7.1, letter by Bishop Pierre Mamie to the South African Ambassador in Berne dated 15/7/1978.

## **2. South Africa in the background (1980-1985)**

While the reaction of the Catholic Church Board in Switzerland to human rights violations in Southern Africa in the 1970 was largely covert in isolated cases, but quick and proactive, a considerably more cautious and hesitant approach can be ascertained during the first half of the 1980s. Therefore the topic faded into the background for some years, especially on the official ecclesiastical side. On the one hand this was due to the fact that fewer attempts were made by Catholic organisations to win over the bishops as overt adversaries of racial segregation. The Bishops' Conference did not become active of its own accord. On the other hand this was not least due to the fact that, because of structural conditions, the *SBC* only had limited resources at its disposal and concentrated more on other topics during these years. Furthermore the churches had to reckon with severe criticism by conservative circles if they departed too far politically from the course of the civil parties in Switzerland. Eventually the distance between the *SBC* and movements such as the *Berne Declaration* or the *Theological Movement for Solidarity and Liberation (TheBe)* which was founded during the 1980s increased; the latter two were particularly committed towards the issue of the role played by the Swiss industry as a pillar of the apartheid regime. On the one hand the *SBC* expressed its difficulty with the style of these groupings, on the other hand reasons involving church policy and personal differences also played a role.

### **2.1 The South Africa Motion to the Pastoral Forum in Lugano (1981)**

The Pastoral Forum which had already taken place for the first time in Einsiedeln in 1978 was convened by the bishops after the idea of a pastoral council, a permanent institution that was intended to succeed the *Synod 72* in terms of a supra-diocesan pastoral care council, was refused by Rome. The Pastoral Forum only had an advisory nature and did not have any decision-making powers. In March 1981 two motions were submitted simultaneously, one with regard to the Bank Initiative<sup>9</sup> and one with regard to South Africa, which were both addressed to the Forum. The person who had actually launched *both* motions,

---

<sup>9</sup> The Bank Initiative was launched as a reaction to the "Chiasso affair" (1978) of the Credit Suisse by the Social Democratic Party (SP). The focus was on the call for stricter control and greater transparency at the banks. In connection with the Bank Initiative the development organisations addressed the topic of flight capital.

The “*Immenseer*” Toni Peter only acted as a contact person concerning the Bank Initiative motion with regard to the secretariat of the Pastoral Forum. As far as the South Africa Motion was concerned, he remained in the background. The traces of the initiative group South Africa Motion for the Bank Initiative lead to the mission seminary “Schöneck” in Lucerne and thereby also to the environment of the *Working Group Southern Africa*.

With regard to the contents at the “South Africa Motion” the focus was on the attitude of the Swiss banks in contrast with the apartheid government. At the time the Swiss banks began to fill the gaps which had arisen because the financial institutions of other countries had withdrawn from South Africa.

Only a few weeks before the beginning of the Pastoral Forum in Lugano the WCC had withdrawn the funds from two Swiss high street banks. The topic “Swiss banks and South Africa” was therefore of current interest. At the Pastoral Forum reactions to the motions were cautious. Generally, many participants were not prepared to investigate these topics due to the risk of exposure to “controversial” economic-political issues.

Finally the motion was passed on to the Swiss National Commission *Justitia et Pax* with the commission to work on a study with regard to this topic. Thus the tendency that could be observed at the Pastoral Forum as well as elsewhere in the Catholic Church, namely to leave economic issues to experts henceforth, became apparent. Therefore the bishops could withdraw from the line of fire and the discussion around economic issues – officially because they did not have the professional competence.

The attitude of the SBC and the executive committee of the Pastoral Forum with regard to the motions remains unclear. On the one hand the SBC had not prevented the inclusion of the motions on the agenda, but neither the General Secretary of the SBC, Anton Cadotsch, nor the President of the Pastoral Forum, Amédée Grab, put themselves out to facilitate the questions posed during the occasion. It is reported that the executive committee was greatly relieved when the “controversial issues” could be passed on to *Justitia et Pax*, which confirms this attitude.

The original intention of the signatories of the motion “Solidarity with the victims of racial discrimination in South Africa” to adopt a declaration which would have called on the parishes and church institutions to put the banks doing business with South Africa under pressure until their account withdrawal, should it be necessary, could not be achieved as such.

## 2.2 The topic “South Africa” at *Justitia et Pax*

The commitment to South Africa at *Justitia et Pax* commenced with the South Africa Motion during the Pastoral Forum 1981 in Lugano. Pius Hafner, who had been elected as secretary of *Justitia et Pax*, was commissioned to perform an extensive investigation of the topic of South Africa, apartheid and the request for a boycott. This made sense because the *National Commission Justitia et Pax* of the *SBC* was one of the few institutions within the Catholic Church that had the necessary competencies. The institution had already attended to the related topic “Bank Initiative” while *Justitia et Pax* simultaneously dealt with topics where human rights played a central role. Therefore *Justitia et Pax* had sufficient knowledge and competencies at its command for the analysis of apartheid and for a convincing commitment against racial segregation.

The initial plan at *Justitia et Pax* was to extend the study with regard to the Bank Initiative within a relatively short period to such an extent that the special problem of sanctions could have been dealt with in addition by using the example of South Africa. However, the effort for the project became much greater than anticipated and the completion of the planned study was delayed. After completion of the first work of the working group, a conference on the subject took place in Freiburg. As the acting spokesmen had very different backgrounds and had diametrically opposed opinions to some extent, the working group became uncertain. Hafner’s idea to reach some kind of consensus by means of different opinions, did not work out. The fronts with regard to the apartheid issue had hardened. Because the boycott issue was generally being discussed very controversially in the meantime, the working group wanted the study not to show any factual deficiencies in this respect, and this took time.

The result of the study, namely that a boycott is justified in certain cases, was fixed roughly from the outset. The working group at *Justitia et Pax* was reinforced in its opinion by the European *Justitia et Pax* network and the commitment of the Catholic Church of the United States against racial segregation in South Africa. In many countries all over the world, church and political circles have meanwhile dared to go considerably further than the church boards of the large churches of Switzerland. This was not only related to the large influence of business circles on society and politics, but also to the isolation of Switzerland which continues to exist and which became apparent in numerous international organisations due to the fact that it stood on the sidelines.

The work on the study increased the interest and also changed Pius Hafner’s view of the topic. Until summer 1985 there were only a few indications of commitment for

South Africa besides the work on the study. However, upon the aggravation of the local situation, the *J&P* Secretary became increasingly active and became a central person within the Catholic Church in Switzerland who campaigned against apartheid. Caring for the disadvantaged persons in South Africa had become his personal concern.

### **2.3 The aid organisations under fire**

After *Bread for Brothers* had triggered a storm of protest with the production of a flier relating to the arms embargo initiative in 1972 already, by which the *Fastenopfer* had not been affected yet, criticism of the campaigns hit both partners equally as from the 1980s. Provocative actions and tests in the agenda had the result that the *Fastenopfer* and *Bread for Brothers* came under fire. It was the first time that this happened to a larger extent than during the campaign “Courage to establish peace” (“Frieden wagen”) in 1981 where criticism of the military unleashed strong reactions from conservative circles that had gained strength in the meantime. In the *Fastenopfer* these reactions caused some tension. Especially the Director, Meinrad Hengartner, saw that the existence of his hitherto almost undisputed work was at risk. The socio-ethical development commitment of the *Fastenopfer* was also the reason why various Swiss bishops sounded a note of caution. In 1984 the ecumenical campaign under the title “Money and Spirit” (“Geld und Geist”) was held. Inspired by the Bank Initiative and with the support of a study which *Justitia et Pax* and the *Institute for Social Ethics (Institut für Sozialethik)* of the Swiss Protestant Churches had prepared on this topic, the role of the Swiss banks in relation to South Africa was also addressed. In the agenda the account withdrawal of the *WCC* in 1981 was presented, which had also affected a Swiss high street bank. Although the number of critical reactions from outside was less in 1984 than three years before that, this topic was not undisputed either. The responsible persons at the *Fastenopfer* felt at a loss once again.

### **2.4 Relationships with business circles and politics**

In view of the silence of the Catholic Church with regard to the question of possible economic sanctions in respect of South Africa, the business side was also maintaining a low profile towards South Africa and only attempted sporadically to influence the *SBC*, for example with arguments during the “Discussion group Church – Economy” (“Gesprächsgruppe Kirche – Wirtschaft”). At most the topic aroused more emotions in the left and right political camp at the time. The centre which was represented strongly by the “*Catholic Party*” *CVP* was, however, not particularly interested in the apartheid issue. Because politicians of the

party were in many cases identical with the decisive economic protagonists or were connected otherwise, the business circles were able to win over the largest part of the *CVP* for the concerns of the economy. On the other hand the *CVP* attempted to exercise its influence on the *SBC* and the *Fastenopfer* through informal contacts.

The shift of the public discussion away from the anti-racism programme to the question of sanctions against South Africa and to the problem of business relations of the Swiss industry with the apartheid government, however, prompted the economy lobby that was connected with the civil parties to advertise their concerns more accurately in Switzerland. With the increasing boycott measures by other countries Swiss banks, trading companies and industrial enterprises recognised additional possibilities to take over these business fields and thereby to earn money in South Africa. But the more instable the situation in South Africa was becoming, the higher the risk for the Swiss investors. Bank representatives kept asserting to the churches in Switzerland that they were withdrawing from the business with South Africa. Due to the incomplete official statements it is very difficult to verify whether this was the case. Business representatives were able to influence the Catholic Church particularly successfully if they cautioned against a communist revolution in South Africa.

At the end of 1986 or beginning of 1987 Pius Hafner established contact with the member of the SP National Council, Paul Rechsteiner. The *J&P* secretary made arrangements to have the text of the vote and information in respect of the “Association of West European Parliamentarians for Action against Apartheid” sent to him by the member of the *CVP* National Council, Theo Fischer, during the sanction debate in December 1986. He was able to ascertain from an attached list that in Switzerland 45 members of the SP National Councils and 12 further representatives of small left and centre parties were members of the organisation. Not a single member of the *CVP* National Council could make up his mind to join the movement.

On 17<sup>th</sup> February 1987 Pius Hafner addressed a letter to a selection of four members of the *CVP* National Council of which he could assume that they would sympathise with the approach of *Justitia et Pax* to the South Africa sanctions. These were three women and one man: Elisabeth Blunschy-Steiner, Josi Meier, Rolf Seiler and Judith Stamm. The attempts of Pius Hafner to influence the *CVP* with regard to their approach to the question of sanctions and South Africa were, however, not crowned with success, at least seen from a short-term perspective, even though they were not completely ineffective. They failed due to the strong connection of the fraction with the interests of the banks and due to the fact that the Christian Democrats in Switzerland could not be influenced by their partner parties in other European countries with regard to this issue. But it is not clear, to what extent all politicians of this party were aware of the significance of the high street banks in Switzerland for the apartheid regime. Whenever possible, the stakeholders of the banks avoided

mentioning the topic.

## 2.5 The basis becomes active

The observation that it had become quieter around the topic “South Africa” at the beginning of the 1980s does not only apply to the Catholic “basis”. Catholic resistance movements came about in a similar manner as those that arose within the Reformed Church in the 1970s already, also as a counter movement to the development described above. These movements - in the first line this applies to the Catholic environment - had been influenced strongly by Liberation Theology. In the case of the apartheid issue the committed persons were able to benefit from the impulses, the experience and contacts of the solidarity work of the *Working Group Southern Africa (ASA)* and the *Cooperation Protestant Churches and Missions (KEM)*. An important personality in the first attempts to sensitise people at the basis for the problem of apartheid was the *Menzinger Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat*, who could report on the situation in South Africa from her own experience, also because of her work in the country for decades. She came back to Switzerland from South Africa in 1980 to support the order at the “headquarters” with her knowledge of French and her experience during her long stay in South Africa. She got to know various situations there and had participated actively in the ecumenical process of the churches in the direction of more social and political commitment.

In Switzerland this Jurassian became a person who was able to build up a network of contacts – perhaps the most extensive network – to support a campaign in the Catholic Church of Switzerland for “les petits gens”, to use an expression of Father Albert Nolan – in South Africa. Her fellow sister, Sister Thomas Limacher, who served in South Africa many years later than Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat, writes the following about her:

“In my view she is a very strong personality. During the past years her work in South Africa brought her together with people from the church and politics who had played a great role during the transition. I believe that she has always been strongly politicised due to her biography. (...) She lived in Johannesburg and a part of her work had been in the large black settlements. When she came to South Africa, she still experienced that sisters went into the “townships” and worked there. In my days this was not possible anymore. (...) I experience her as very trenchant where justice and peace are concerned.”<sup>10</sup>

Sister Claire-Marie became very active in Switzerland and persistently and constantly called attention to the concerns of fellow Christians in South Africa, partly against bitter opposition. The reports on South Africa in the Swiss media did not make this work easier. Because she also spoke German, she was able to establish various relations with

---

<sup>10</sup> Sister Thomas Limacher’s answers to questions by Bruno Soliva on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2010.

German-speaking Switzerland. The contacts of Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat with regard to the anti-apartheid commitment also involved solidarity movements which had arisen within the Reformed Church, as well as South Africa movements which were actually not church-related. Furthermore she had direct *international* relations with various authorities and persons in South Africa, with the WCC, also with the *Catholic Institute for International Relationship (CIIR)* in London. She saw to it that significant documents from South Africa were translated into French while doing some of the translations herself.

Her hope was to initiate and supervise new groups “at the basis” for the concern “South Africa”. But by “basis” the *Menzinger Sister* understood something different than the Reformed ASA that was supported by contacts with parishes and could reach many groups there, especially women’s groups. Based on her positive experience in the country of her former mission, Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat had something similar to a basis group in mind as the ideal South Africa solidarity group, which would investigate theological issues intensively:

“Unless we gather in small basic (Christian and others’) communities (...), the people will be as people dispersed with no shepherds of their own and no hope. Albert (Nolan) wrote about that.”<sup>11</sup>

Toni Peter, who joined the “*Immenseers*” also played an important role in the Catholic solidarity movement. Besides the abovementioned motions to the Pastoral Forum he played a key role in founding the *Theological Movement for Solidarity and Liberation (TheBe)* in 1982. Like the initiative of the motion to the Pastoral Forum, the idea of the *TheBe* had also emerged from the environment of the Theological Faculty of Lucerne. The circle of members was, however, extending rapidly and also attracted interested persons outside the Catholic Church. From the outset the movement was strongly connected with the “*Immenseers*”, but selectively, via isolated members, also with the *Fastenopfer*, the Reformed *OeME* Department in Berne and with small alternative political parties. The *TheBe* distinguished itself as a Christian solidarity group that was influenced strongly by Liberation Theology. Initially the commitment was concentrated on Central America. In 1984 a large conference with the title “Christian solidarity with Central America” was organised. An important part in the church commitment – especially for the *Fastenopfer* and *Justitia et Pax* – was played by the *Mariannhiller* Father Damian Weber. He had also worked in South Africa and had returned to Switzerland a bit later than Sister Claire-Marie, probably in February 1984. Before the arrival of Father Damian Weber, no *Mariannhiller* with South African experience had stayed in Switzerland.

---

<sup>11</sup> E-mail by Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat to Bruno Soliva dated 27/7/2010.

The campaign of the *Mariannahillers* against apartheid was made up mostly by the commitment of Father Damian Weber as an individual, and was not so much an effort of the order in Switzerland as a whole. The situation that the management of the community could provide little support may partly be compared with that of the *Menzinger Sisters*. However, due to their smaller size the *Mariannahillers* had less influence and possibilities with regard to public relations.

Father Damian Weber belonged to those committed persons who did not discontinue their commitment after the release of Mandela by any means. Within various initiatives of the Catholic Church of Switzerland which were against apartheid and support of the racist regime, he represented a rather moderate policy. This was probably related to the approach of his community in South Africa in general. Father Damian Weber participated in the bank talks and liaised closely with the Director of the *Fastenopfer*, Ferdinand Luthiger, while supporting him with his South African experience on various occasions. But he also realised the limitations, especially in the bank talks, which limited the scope of action of the church representatives. In March 1987 he therefore attempted – unfortunately unsuccessfully – to add authority to the delegation of the churches by means of an official mandate by the *SBC*.

Pius Hafner of *Justitia et Pax* became a further important reference person of Father Damian Weber. The abovementioned contacts with the “cheekier” *ASA* and the *Group Kairos* of the *Theological Movement* were also added. The fact that Father Damian Weber participated in the *Kairos* conference in Lucerne shows that he did not see it as a problem to work with groups who made stronger demands from the Swiss industry.

His approach to the banks was distanced at the end of the bank talks and was marked by profound disappointment. In a letter which he wrote to the *Kairos* member, Daniel Ammann, one of the most active critics of the bank talks, after the scandal concerning the fifth bank talk, this disappointment comes across clearly:

Dear Daniel,

in the meantime I have arrived “in the world” again and the penny has dropped.... The consequences not only for our delegation, but also for the churches as such must now be contemplated seriously.

Perhaps this will result in somewhat more courage for testimony into our structures. Because this action calls for re-action and thereby I mean deeds and not merely words.

May the Lord help us!

Kind regards,

Damian”<sup>12</sup>

## 2.6 Contacts of the SBC with the SACBC

The secretariat of the SBC was only confronted with the South Africa concern again upon the visit by Father Smangaliso Mkhathswa, General Secretary of the SACBC in summer 1984. In February 1985 Ferdinand Luthiger, the new Director of the *Fastenopfer*, had furthermore asked the SBC to become active in the case of proceedings - which had been announced for February 1985 - against Archbishop Denis Hurley, President of the SACBC. The President of the SBC, Bishop Henri Schwery, reacted relatively late with a letter to the South African President Botha, without making it public. This discrete method was selected due to a hint from one of the persons that were “favourably disposed” towards the church at the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs. The internal solidarity with Hurley resulted in success: The process in South Africa was discontinued.<sup>13</sup> The event seems to have brought about some rethinking process amongst a couple of Catholic protagonists already. Now it became clear that even the Catholic Church in South Africa could be affected by the policy of the rulers in South Africa that violated human rights.

For the Catholic Church of Switzerland these events mark the beginning of closer contacts between churches in Switzerland and South Africa. The statements of the bishops in South Africa became increasingly important for their colleagues in Switzerland. This development could also be ascribed to the fact that the SACBC in collaboration with the SACC began to assume a much more active, internationally aligned role. In the subsequent years the Swiss bishops orientated themselves strongly by the position of the SACBC as far as their statements on apartheid were concerned. This can be elucidated using the example of the question of international sanctions against South Africa.

The visit of Father Smangaliso Mkhathswa in 1984 also helped to accelerate the change in the policy with regard to South Africa that could partially be traced back to personnel changes and that was apparent at the *Fastenopfer*. With Ferdinand Luthiger as the new Director and successor of Meinrad Hengartner who had passed away on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1984, the *Fastenopfer* was becoming more open for commitment against apartheid. This development was also promoted by Walter Ulmi, the Head of Department of Mission, who directed his special attention towards the South Africa projects and supported the cause of a consequent South Africa policy at the *Fastenopfer*. The decision to focus on the topic of human rights during the campaigns of 1985 to 1987 is an expression of these changes. For the campaign “To Break chains” (“Ketten sprengen”) in 1986

---

<sup>12</sup> Archive of the Working Group Kairos, letter by Father Damian Weber to Daniel Ammann dated 30/10/1989.

<sup>13</sup> Remark by Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat dated 27/2/2010: “Actually Denis Hurley was sorry that he couldn’t go to Court, because he could have told the truth!”

South Africa was even elected as the priority country.

A further conference between the *SBC* and a delegation of the *SACBC* was held in December 1986 on the occasion of a trip by the latter through Europe. This delegation was under the direction of the Vice President of the *SACBC*, Bishop Wilfrid Napier. Besides Napier, the bishops Hugh Slattery, Herbert Lenhof as well as Noel Bruyns (Information officer of the *SACBC*) and the Jesuit Father Xolile Keteyi were part of this delegation. During the conference of the bishops which had been organised by the *Fastenopfer*, Bishop Wilfrid Napier suggested inter alia how the “potential sanctions” should be applied. In answer to the question what the *SBC* could do, Bishop Herbert Lenhof replied that the least was a declaration of solidarity that also required respect for human rights. Although the *SBC* declared its solidarity with its colleagues in South Africa subsequent to this relatively short discussion, it was not prepared to become more concrete during the following months, and for example to plead the cause of the delegation from South Africa in respect of economic issues with respect to the Swiss public. Thus the possibility of economic pressure was not addressed, just as little as the church delegation received support for the bank talks in the form of an official mandate by the *SBC*.

The *SBC* therefore remained cautious with the issue of South Africa. This was not least due to the personnel constellation within the *SBC* and some changes in the chairmanship and in the general secretariat. The confusion around a press release that had been held out in prospect orally after the conference with the *SACBC* illustrates the difficulties of the *SBC* to comment on this topic. The press release that had been announced was later described as a “misunderstanding of the press” and was depicted as a request of the media people and Father Damian Weber during the Ordinary Assembly (O.A.) of the Bishops’ Conference

Even so the *SBC* allowed itself to be influenced significantly by the information and contacts with the *SACBC* with regards to its approach towards South Africa. In a pastoral letter of 1<sup>st</sup> May 1986 the *SACBC* argued in favour of targeted and drastic economic pressure from outside on South Africa. In contrast to the basis movements and the *SACC* it did, however, not take up position for a general boycott. The rather cautious approach of the *SACBC* in this matter was decisive for the *SBC* in the subsequent years and probably suited it. By international comparison the Swiss bishops exercised restraint. In other countries, for example the USA, the Benelux countries and Great Britain, where the *CIIR* plays an important role in particular, the churches expressed themselves more openly in respect of the boycott claims.

Until 1987 the *SBC* did not express itself with regard to South Africa. Amongst other factors, this was due to the abovementioned personnel changes. In spring 1987 the former General Secretary, P. Amédée Grab was ordained Bishop, and the time until the commencement of the office of Father Roland-B. Trauffer as the new General Secretary was bridged by an interim solution. As a Dominican, Father Roland-B. Trauffer had good access to the topic due to the work of Father Albert Nolan. With him as the General Secretary, the *SBC* became considerably more active in the apartheid issue during the second half of the 1980s.

### 3. Greater commitment and better networking (1985-1990)

In South Africa the period from 1985-1991 was characterised by increasing violence and fierce disputes. By means of declaring a state of emergency several times, which thereby became an everyday reality, the regime attempted to give the human rights violations as little legality as possible. The contacts of the churches with foreign countries provided an element of protection against despotism by the state. The church groups also enjoyed an element of freedom in comparison to e.g. political parties or trade unions, because the rulers themselves did not officially reject Christianity. In many cases the church groups used this freedom during that critical period to act as a mouthpiece of the oppressed. It is conspicuous that the Catholic Church Board only reached the public with clearer words and deeds relatively late, approximately as from 1985, and supported the course of the SACC. The new "course" of the Catholic Church Board had become possible, amongst others, due to the Pastoral Plan; thus the bishops could increasingly include the concerns of the "basis". At the same time the contacts between the two intensified because of the artificial "separation" of parts of the church within the Catholic Church of South Africa, the black missionary church and the white settler church.

The later commitment of the Catholics in Switzerland against apartheid is also directly related to this development in South Africa which generally took place later, in comparison to the Reformed Church of Switzerland. The campaign against apartheid within the Swiss Catholic Church only had a public effect as from approximately 1986/88. Finally the SBC started to support the various actions, even though it did so cautiously and belatedly. During this time numerous uncomfortable persons in charge of the churches were arrested, tortured or killed. The local churches, organised by the SACC and, having priority for this study, by the SACBC, increasingly sought contact with foreign countries in order to provide their activists with an element of protection. In summer 1986, when a new state of emergency aggravated the situation, the arrests of Father Smangaliso Mkhathshwa and Reverend Jean-François Bill also caused great concern in Swiss Catholic circles. Pius Hafner of *Justitia et Pax* was the driving force behind the joint reaction of the SBC and the SPC in September 1986 to these events and human rights violations.

The deterioration of the circumstances in South Africa was, however, not yet perceived with particular attention and concern by the majority of the Swiss public. The view of the meanwhile well-organised and networked business side that was also equipped with financial means, prevailed

and communicated the perception - due to pseudo-reforms of the government under President Pieter Willem Botha - that the apartheid systems was already moving in the direction of democracy of its own accord. In turn some solidarity groups and offices within the Catholic Church made a special attempt to counterbalance the biased public opinion by providing truthful information on the situation in South Africa.

### **3.1 The Kairos document – a strong impulse for the solidarity movements**

During this time increased impulses and information from South Africa came to Switzerland, for example through the writings of the Dominican Father Albert Nolan. The investigation of the aggravating situation in South Africa resulted in the fruitful further development of “Contextual Theology” – not least due to the influence of the Latin-American Liberation Theology. Amongst the Catholic contributions to this development those of Father Albert Nolan played an important role. In the time after 1985 the Dominican caused a stir with his thesis and has remained active and influential to this day.

The *Kairos* document also has to be classified in this context. Its first version was published in autumn 1985. Father Albert Nolan awarded a central meaning to it because this document was written by a community of Christians from various churches and therefore represented an ecumenical product which came directly from the African townships. The text was written on the basis of a Relecture of the Bible, the contents whereof were applied to the situation of the oppression. The method and aims of the Liberation Theology were the force behind it, a “prophetic theology”, which also coined the language style. The situation was assessed by means of a “social analysis”, such as ordinary people would apply instinctively. Critics therefore maintain that the text has a Marxist influence. The point of departure of the political, social and theological analysis in the text was the unbearable suffering of the people. The question why only statements of official churches could not achieve anything against apartheid during this crisis was also addressed. “Neutrality” was described as a dangerous temptation. It was said that the time had come, to cease empty talks and to act instead. The crisis is regarded as a time of opportunity, as “Kairos”.

Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat wrote the following comment on the *Kairos* document:

The Kairos document is a prophetic text. Naudé gave me the very first draft as he passed through Zurich and told me it would be one of the most unique documents he had ever read. It was an extraordinary support and

encouragement to many of us. Not all Church leaders accepted it, but no one could forbid us to propagate it and use it. This document is actual when we analyse the state of our society today.”<sup>14</sup>

With the state of emergency in South Africa that commenced in summer 1985, the pressure on the SBC to react to it, increased. Circles with a developmental commitment called upon the Swiss bishops to become active against apartheid. The *Theological Movement* made the suggestion to the Church Board to arrange a meeting with a delegation of the SACBC. The *Berne Declaration* and the *Action South Africa Boycott* expected a clear word from the bishops with respect to the Swiss banks. The former General Secretary of the Bishops' Conference, Father Amédée Grab, reacted very differently to such requests each time. Because the *TheBe* had stirred up discontent at the Bishops' Conference in connection with the Lucerne Declaration in support of Leonardo Boff, its call with regard to South Africa was not exactly received positively. The *Caritas Switzerland* also distanced itself from the call by the *TheBe* and refrained from signing the letter to the SBC. Soon thereafter the *Caritas Switzerland* contacted the *Fastenopfer*, *Justitia et Pax* and the SBC with regard to the issue of South Africa. This was in accordance with the first serious endeavour within the Catholic Church of Switzerland to co-ordinate the South Africa policy of the individual office better and to arrive at a joint approach.

The “moderate” forces within the church, to which the *Fastenopfer*, the abovementioned national Commission *Justitia et Pax* and, even if it was less important at this time, *Caritas Switzerland* may be added, were definitely orientated and worried about the situation in South Africa. The European networking of the institution played a role in this regard: Thus it was realised in Switzerland that the commitment for South Africa was well advanced in many countries, also within the Catholic Church. In Switzerland it was believed for a long time that the campaign for more justice in South Africa could be left to the Reformed Church.

### **3.2 The commitment of the Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne (JEC)**

An important role in the resistance against apartheid was played by the *JEC* which was particularly active in the Romandy (the French-speaking part of Switzerland). As part of the international network of the *Young Christian Students (YCS)* which was active in South Africa as well, the *JEC* had direct contact with partner organisations in South Africa and therefore had access to reliable information. The international way of lived solidarity with regard to South Africa was similar to the work of the YCW in Switzerland which did not exist anymore since the middle of the 1980s. It also referred to Joseph Cardijn and worked with

---

<sup>14</sup> Remark by Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat dated 28/7/2010. – However, most Catholics in Switzerland got to know the document via reformed Christians in Switzerland, not via a direct contact with South Africa.

his method of “see – judge – act”. While the members of the *YCW* were mostly trainees and young workers, high school pupils and students were involved in the *JEC*. In Switzerland the *JEC* was practically only active in the Romandy and in the 1980 it was rather on the fringes of the Swiss Catholic Church. However, through the auxiliary bishop Gabriel Bullet who was connected with the “jécistes” and had a good relationship with Bishop Pierre Mamie, the *JEC* had a “hidden” rapport with the *SBC*. But there are no direct references that these connections prompted Bishop Mamie at the end of the 1970s to support the *YCW* initiative in connection with South Africa. In contrast to the working group “*Kairos*” in German-speaking Switzerland which became active a bit later, theological students did not play an important role at the *JEC*. This was probably also the reason why the *JEC* had less contact with other Catholic groups and organisations and largely operated independently from Catholic movements.

One of the driving forces in the commitment of the *JEC* against apartheid was Lucine Miserez. She worked in Geneva as one of three part-time employees in the national office of the *JEC*. As a delegate of Switzerland, she took part in the World Council of the *YCS /JEC* in Brussels in 1986 which became the actual starting point for the commitment of the *JEC*. In Brussels the *JEC* representatives of Switzerland met committed people of the *YCS* in South Africa. Through their “National Chaplain”, Father Albert Nolan, these were under the strong influence of the Liberation Theology and were active in the movement against apartheid. The South African delegation informed those present in Brussels with regard to the situation in South Africa and asked for their support as well as for assistance in spreading the boycott idea in Europe. As a result the *JEC* in Switzerland started a broad commitment, for example by organising a visit of a delegation of students from South Africa in Switzerland or by means of the petition for the “Reform of the educational system in South Africa” which called upon the federal authorities to support the blacks with regard to educational issues and the increase of pressure on the South African government by means of economical, political and cultural means. Because of this concentration on the educational system, the representatives of the official Swiss foreign policy were more well-disposed to the *JEC* than to the organisations which focussed their activities on the economical relationship of Switzerland with South Africa and the related issue of sanctions. In fact, a meeting was even held with the State Secretary Edouard Brunner on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1986. Subsequently the *Federal Department of Foreign Affairs* encouraged the visit of the South African delegation of the *YCS* in Switzerland with a deficit guarantee.

After the release of Mandela the commitment of the *JEC* for South Africa ceased, as was the case in many other solidarity groups.

### 3.3 An inter-disciplinary week at the University of Freiburg

Attempts to establish solidarity groups amongst pupils and students who only wanted to consecrate themselves to the fight against apartheid, were encouraged by the Reformed side, for example by the *ASA/KEM*, but also by the *Mouvement Anti-Apartheid Suisse (MAAS)*. On the Catholic side, an “Interdisciplinary Week” of the Theological Faculty at the University of Freiburg in January 1986 played an important role. The idea to approach the topic “South Africa” in this form came from a student who knew the boycott movement in connection with South Africa from Germany. Various speakers were invited, such as Vreni Schneider Biber of the *ASA*, the “*Immenseer*” Al Imfeld, Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat, Mascha Madörin of the *Action South Africa Boycott*, Paul Rutishauser of the *AAM* and a representative of the *ANC*. The topics discussed covered a broad range, but referred to theology as well. This was mainly brought about via the *Kairos* document which had only been known for half a year at the time. Daniel Amman, who was later involved in establishing the working group *Kairos*, described his impressions of this week in an interview:

“For me it was the approach to the Bible that was at the centre of my resistance with regard to the topic “South Africa”. And for me it was mainly a great concern. I had previously studied theology in Latin-America for a year, lived in the simplest circumstances with Gustavo Gutierrez, the Liberation Theology, a church of the poor and a fight due to a basic Christian motivation. The analysis there was that the USA dominated the Latin-American continent economically, politically and ideologically. I was given an analysis instrument, and now I am told by Mascha Madörin that Switzerland is for South Africa, what the USA is for Latin-America. The banks, the political establishment, everything is one to one in the service of injustice in South Africa. This is underpinned by Al Imfeld, who is a renowned Africa expert, a theologian, an “*Immenseer*”. It is supported by a Reformed pastor, Paul Rutishauser, who says: “Not like this! We are on the side of the World Council of Churches and we are fighting for liberation, for justice, for human dignity.” Then the contact with Eva Militz. – Simply ‘la crème de la crème’, theologically, human, poetic, literary. (...) And if there is a Sister Claire-Marie in addition, who works on you – she as a *Menzinger Sister* who was in the resistance movement in South Africa (...) – it became clear to me: I cannot say no now. Now it is vital “to take sides”, that was then the second catch phrase, later, with Albert Nolan.”<sup>15</sup>

The forces that resulted from this development, were open to adopt methods of non-violent resistance, they organised demonstrations, for example in front of banks, they

---

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Daniel Ammann and Gallus Weidele, 27/10/2009.

propagated the boycott against South Africa and applied it. They also attempted to influence established church institutions, for example the *SBC* and the *Fastenopfer*. Due to a general polarisation within the Catholic Church, where the dispute around the Liberation Theology played a role amongst others, the Church Board had a strong mistrust against the requests of new solidarity movements. It was suspected that they were aimed against the Catholic Church in principle and that they were infested by socialism. In addition, some members of the *SBC* did not wish to comment on an issue in a way that the majority of believers who had a middle-class orientation, would have been snubbed. For other bishops human rights issues such as socio-political topics did not have priority. It is possible that there was a certain degree of submission to the loud criticism of right-conservative groups and individual persons. The “delicate problem”, especially the issue of the economic relations of Switzerland with South Africa, was left to *Justitia et Pax*.

### 3.4 The study “Our responsibility for South Africa”

The aggravation of the situation in South Africa as from July 1985 caused Pius Hafner – perhaps also as a result of the letters of the *Berne Declaration*, the *TheBe Group South Africa* and the initiative of the *Caritas Switzerland*,<sup>16</sup> - reached the public with a statement in respect of South Africa on behalf of the *Justitia et Pax* commission on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1985, even before the South Africa study. The text proceeded from the current human rights situation which had escalated. The apartheid system was condemned strongly and was described as “sin against God”. In a second item the white regime was summoned to release the political prisoners. This was followed by a last, third passage in which the conduct of the Swiss industry, particularly the Swiss banks, was questioned in light of the investment embargo of many countries and businesses. In the text of the *J&P* study that was nearly finalised, Hafner did not go so far as to request a general boycott.

When the previously mentioned talks in December 1985 between representatives of *Caritas Switzerland*, the *J&P* commission, the *Fastenopfer* and the *SBC* took place in Zurich, *Justitia et Pax* was very well informed about South Africa, especially as far as the issue of sanctions was concerned. Hafner had built up an extensive collection of publications in respect of South Africa and the boycott issue. Thereby *J&P* obtained something like a leadership role within the “established” circles of the

---

<sup>16</sup> Suggestion by the *Caritas* on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1985: *Caritas*, *Fastenopfer*, *J&P* and *SBC* should sit together to deepen the opinion with regard to South Africa. This initiative was triggered by a letter by the Theological Movement to the *SBC* on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1985.

Catholic Church of Switzerland on this topic.

Nearly simultaneously, at the end of 1985, the text of the study “Our responsibility for South Africa” was authorised by the *J&P* commission. The decision of the USA not to grant credits and loans to the South African government anymore, had become known in autumn 1985 and could still be included in the text. Now it could be argued that Switzerland was undermining the measures of other countries with its business activities. The secretariat of the *SBC* which was confronted with repeated requests to the bishops as from summer 1985 to become more active due to the aggravation of the situation in South Africa always passed the relevant letters on to the *J&P*. This made sense as the *J&P* was investigating the topic intensively at the time due to the study that was about to appear. But the impression is created to some extent that the *SBC* or its secretariat passed the problem “South Africa” on to the *J&P*, so that it did not have to take care of it.

The study “Our responsibility for South Africa” whereof a large part had been written by Hilar Eggel as a first step, was published in approximately August 1986, thereby coincidentally at an “ideal” time, as the state of emergency that had been declared as from the middle of June 1986, caused great distress to the churches in South Africa, also to the Catholic Church, inter alia because of numerous arrests. Nearly at the same time the *Fastenopfer* started giving more weight to the topic “South Africa” in its public relations.

With regard to the contents, the study came to the conclusion that, without pressure from outside, the apartheid regime was not prepared to abolish racial segregation. Therefore “dosed and selective boycott measures” were necessary.<sup>17</sup>

Although the study “Our responsibility for South Africa” was partially described as being too theoretical, it attracted great attention and found recognition in committed circles, also within the Reformed Church of Switzerland which did not have a similar research paper on the problem of sanctions at the time. The socio-ethical analysis satisfied a need, although it was not what the persons at the Pastoral Forum 1981, who requested the study, had wanted to achieve.

---

<sup>17</sup> Justitia et Pax (Publisher): Unsere Verantwortung für Südafrika. Analyse der Situation in Südafrika sowie sozioethische Überlegungen zu Wirtschaftsbeziehungen mit rassistischen Staaten am Beispiel Südafrikas. [Our responsibility for South Africa. Analysis of the situation in South Africa as well as socio-ethical considerations with regard to economic relations with racist countries by using the example of South Africa.] From the series of the Commission Justitia et Pax, volume 14, Berne 1986. Page 120 et seq.

### 3.5 “To Break chains” (“Ketten sprengen”) – an ecumenical campaign for human rights

As from 1986 the topic “South Africa” became a stronger focus for the *Fastenopfer* as well. The campaign “To Break chains” (“Ketten sprengen”) during Lent 1986 placed South Africa into the centre of the action as one of three countries. In the agenda several aspects of apartheid were addressed directly. For example the forced resettlements, the approach of the SACC and of Beyers Naudé with regard to the withdrawal of investments, the role of the Swiss high street banks as finance providers for South Africa and the significance of Switzerland as the centre for the gold trade. An interview with Winnie Mandela and a text on the boycott with regard to fruit from South Africa followed.

The campaign 1986 caused controversies amongst the Swiss public. It was, however, not as much the emphasis on apartheid as the accusation that human rights violations in communist countries had not been emphasised as well, that was at the centre of the criticism. The result of these attacks was that the “soft” approach towards the economy was reinforced at the *Fastenopfer*. Although the decrease in donations at the *Fastenopfer* was not only ascribed to the campaign, the accusation of one-sidedness with regard to the selection of countries had to be taken into account. In order to meet the alleged “leftism”, the conservative opponents were even granted the opportunity to inspect the agenda texts before final editing. But the basic policy of the *Fastenopfer* was not questioned. The course, as expressed in the “Manifest 2000” which had been prepared in 1986 together with *Bread for Brothers* for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Fastenopfer*, was retained.

The renewed declaration of the state of emergency in South Africa in summer 1986, the arrest and torturing of the General Secretary of the SACBC, Father Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, and the visits of representatives of the churches in South Africa encouraged the *Fastenopfer* to adopt a more active approach. Thus South Africa had priority once again during the campaign in 1988. The bishops Zithulele Patrick Mvemve and Wilfrid Napier, who could not travel to Switzerland eventually though, and Father Albert Nolan were invited as guests of the campaign which was held under the motto “Encounter”. This visit represented an important reinforcement for the church commitment in Switzerland against apartheid. In his sermon on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1988 in the Jesuit church, Bishop Zithulele Patrick Mvemve found clear words with regard to the relationship of Switzerland with South Africa:

“I come from South Africa, a land that is well-known for its apartheid or racism. And I am a guest here in Switzerland, a land that is well-known for its international banking system. (...) What is the link between South Africa and Switzerland? What is the link between South Africa, Switzerland and the gospel of Jesus

Christ? The answer is quite simply **money**.”<sup>18</sup>

In addition Bishop Wilfrid Napier had the opportunity in the agenda of the action to comment on the issue of sanctions from the point of view of the *SACBC*. The campaign in 1988 increased awareness of the fact that the topic “South Africa and apartheid” also affected the Catholic part of Switzerland. In South Africa itself the *Fastenopfer* was supporting an increasing number of projects that aimed at political changes in the country. A journey of the Director of the *Fastenopfer*, Ferdinand Luthiger, to South Africa in summer 1987 reinforced the relations between the aid organisation and the local church institutions. This journey was triggered by the protracted bank talks in which Ferdinand Luthiger represented the *Fastenopfer*. Ferdinand Luthiger wanted to get an idea of the situation in the country while visiting some projects simultaneously. Max Hofer, the closest collaborator of Bishop Otto Wüst, the President of the foundation council of the *Fastenopfer*, accompanied him to South Africa. Max Hofer also had a seat at the joint Theological Commission of *Bread for Brothers* and *Fastenopfer*.

Numerous personal contacts played a significant role for the further stability of the relations of the *Fastenopfer* with South Africa. According to a report, the visitors from Switzerland went home with the impression that there was no uniform opinion in respect of the economic sanctions in the country. The fact that the *SACBC* did not recommend a *general* boycott was acknowledged and was to coin the approach of the management of the *Fastenopfer* towards the Swiss industry during the next years, for example during the bank talks.

### **3.6 Talks with the banks**

As from summer 1986 until October 1989 the “moderate” forces of the two large churches in Switzerland, tried to persuade the high street banks during talks to withdraw from the business with South Africa. These “bank talks” could be traced back to a joint initiative of the *SBC* and the *SPC* that had reached the Banker Association with this suggestion in February 1986. Because it was agreed at the beginning that the discussions would be kept secret and only reached the public with a few significant statements, committed progressive persons were annoyed. A further rift appeared between the moderate church representatives and those who were more radical in their requests.

---

<sup>18</sup> State archives Lucerne, *Fastenopfer*, Sermon by Bishop Patrick Mvemve, Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February 1988, File information 0102B, guest tours, Bishop Mvemve, Father A. Nolan, Bishop Wilfrid Napier; South Africa (1988). (Dossier not yet recorded at the time of the research in the archives.)

Bishop Johannes Vonderach had already emphasised during the “Discussion group Church – Economy” (“Gesprächsgruppe Kirche – Wirtschaft”) which has been discontinued in the meantime, that he was expecting a strong commitment from *Justitia et Pax* in this task. It is therefore not surprising that Pius Hafner, also due to his competent knowledge of economic issues, obtained a leadership role amongst the representatives of the Catholic Church as from August 1986 during the bank talks that concentrated on South Africa even more clearly. As mentioned before, the persons involved in the bank talks from the Catholic side were the Director of the *Fastenopfer*, Ferdinand Luthiger, and the *Mariannahiller* Father Damian Weber. On the Catholic side as well as the Reformed side, no one of the actual Church Board was represented in the delegation.

This church delegation expected a serious and critical examination from the banks with regard to their evaluation of the will to reform of the Botha government, an absolute waiver of granting new credits to the South African government and the South African bank system, greater transparency in the bank relations Switzerland – South Africa, as well as acknowledgement of the ecclesiastic sources in respect of South Africa.<sup>19</sup> In case no convergence was possible during the talks, the ecumenical delegation considered an approach with four steps, which ranged from the withdrawal of church finances of high street accounts to the call upon rectories and parishes to do the same, to the refusal to effect payments into accounts of high street banks and a public poster campaign to declare the adopted measures.

The talks proved to be difficult. From the outset their course was determined by the representatives of the banks who regarded them as a non-binding exchange of ideas, while they were connected with great expectations on the side of the churches. Furthermore the bank representatives managed to emphasise technical aspects, while the ethical issues on which the church representatives could have commented were of marginal importance.

The “dialogue” with the churches hardly affected the bankers, but served to improve their image. On the other hand the members of the church delegation in the bank talks were in an awkward position. For a long time neither the *SPC* nor the *SBC* had been prepared to support the “delegates” sufficiently. Although the bank talks were presented from the point of view of the aid organisations in a surprisingly positive manner in the *Fastenopfer / Bread for Brothers* agenda, the delaying tactics of the banks gradually resulted in a more critical approach on the side of the churches. This becomes particularly clear in a reaction

---

<sup>19</sup> See BfA-Archive, Action Committee until the end of 1986, Swiss banks and South Africa. Statement by the delegation of churches and aid organisations at the opening of the talks on 19/8/1986 in Berne with a delegation of the Swiss Banker Association, 11/8/1986, 2 f.

of Ferdinand Luthiger after the last bank talk:

“In the meantime my confidence in the bank representatives has been shattered severely. The financial restructuring agreement was signed only a few days after our talks. During the meeting the impression had, however, been created, that the discussion would drag on for a considerable time. I feel absolutely cheated and I am disgusted. It cannot carry on like this anymore, or else we shall expose ourselves to ridicule.”<sup>20</sup>

This scandal happened in 1989 after the fifth round of talks. The disappointment with regard to the attitude of the banks was so great amongst the dialogue partners of church, that the talks were not continued after this incident.

### **3.7 The issue of sanctions at the centre**

In September 1985 the US government resolved to enforce sanctions against South Africa. In October the same year 49 Commonwealth countries adopted boycott measures. The risk that Switzerland could be used for evasive transactions therefore increased. As a consequence the issue of a boycott against apartheid, which had already been introduced at the Pastoral Forum in Lugano, received increasing attention from the committed persons. But parts of the Church Board and some other responsible persons who felt strongly connected to the middle-class elite of Switzerland, particularly to the *CVP*, found that these requests went too far. To avoid conflicts, they did not wish to support the requests that were “radical” in their view, at least not at the beginning. At the same time the right-conservatives who also argued in a hidden racist manner, were increasing their pressure on the churches in Switzerland.

Upon the initiative of the member of the *CVP* National Council, Elisabeth Blunschy-Steiner, Pius Hafner was able to give a 15 minute lecture on “South Africa and boycott measures” before the Commission for Foreign Affairs of the National Council on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1987. During this conference prior consultations were held regarding the “parliamentary initiative Rechsteiner dated 9<sup>th</sup> October 1986 in respect of sanctions against South Africa; evasion by Switzerland”. Hafner proceeded from an assessment of the year 1977 by Hans-Balz Peter, the Head of the *Institute for Social Ethics of the SPC (Institut für Sozialethik der SEK)*, and then stressed the fact that violent oppression had reached even greater magnitude in South Africa since the Soweto riots in 1976. Hafner pointed out that the credits of Swiss banks in South Africa had already increased from 1,6 billion Francs in 1975 to 2,6 billion Francs in 1976. With regard to the question whether Switzerland was used for evasive transactions again *today*, the

---

<sup>20</sup> Archive of the J&P, remark by Ferdinand Luthiger: My impressions of the talks with bank representatives in respect of South Africa on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1989, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1989, RZA/13-7302, South Africa, preparation of study.

*J&P* Secretary expressed himself carefully with reference to Swiss statistics, but then referred to the gold and diamond trade that did not appear in the records. Hafner mentioned the possibility that further important business deals could be added which he could not reveal, however, as he was not a specialist in this regard.

Subsequently the measures of Switzerland that were necessary from the point of view of *Justitia et Pax*, were formulated: Evasive transactions had to be prevented, regardless of whether they were already taking place, in order not to become accomplices of the apartheid regime. It was stated that Switzerland had previously decided in the case of South Rhodesia to restrict the business transactions with a country and that the current situation in South Africa was comparable. Hafner referred to the sanctions by numerous communities of states and states against South Africa:

“In my view the consequence is that Switzerland should introduce the “courant normal” in respect of South Africa, at least in those areas where other important trade partners of South Africa had imposed sanctions. Should important exponents of the international communities of states or even of the UN resolve to impose sanctions in further areas during the coming months, the “courant normal” would have to be extended to these areas accordingly.”<sup>21</sup>

In this context the *J&P* Secretary also addressed the necessity not to forget the business with gold and rough diamonds when applying the “courant normal”, as this served as compensation for South Africa for the losses caused by the economic sanctions.

Finally Pius Hafner emphasised that he only regarded these suggestions as a minimum solution. He said that it was a political question whether Switzerland wanted to take further economic measures against South Africa or even joined the sanctions. According to the point of view of important experts in international law it was indeed possible to pursue a politically neutral “consequent policy of neutrality” or a policy of solidarity towards the oppressed people in South Africa.

On 21<sup>st</sup> April 1987 Pius Hafner addressed the public with a “correction”, after the middle-class rightist *Action Switzerland South Africa (asa)*, a counter movement to the *AAM* that had spread the news that the *SACBC* would not support the economic sanctions anymore. As from 1988 it was easier for Pius Hafner to convince the *SBC* to be clearly committed against apartheid. This was directly related to the new General Secretary of the *SBC*, Father Roland-B. Trauffer, and indirectly to the working method of the new President of the *SBC*, Bishop Joseph Candolfi.

---

<sup>21</sup> Archive of J&P, Vote during the Hearings of the Commission for Foreign Affairs of the National Council, on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1987, Pius Hafner, RZA/3-7203, South Africa – Switzerland. Parliament, 1985-1993.

The visit of Bishop Zithulele Patrick Mvemve and Father Albert Nolan during Lenten 1988 was a reason for Pius Hafner to convince the *SBC* to make a statement in respect of South Africa – as had actually been planned in winter 86/87 already with “Solidarity with the victims of apartheid”. As far as the issue of the economic relations of Switzerland with South Africa was concerned the bishops were, however, only willing to make cautious comments, while the *J&P* Secretary, who could obviously assess the situation, had already formulated this aspect in his draft along these lines. The statement therefore contained a cautious formulation with regard to the “extensive economic relations” of Switzerland with South Africa. Hafner had written the draft after consultation with Father Roland-B. Trauffer and made the following comment in the covering letter to the General Secretary:

“After a statement of the Bishops’ Conference with regard to South Africa had already been discussed after the first visit of the South African bishops (December 1986), I would appreciate it if such a declaration would at least be realised after the second visit. In my opinion it is urgently required that the Swiss church expresses its solidarity with the oppressed people in South Africa more clearly. I believe that we owe this to the fellow Christians in this country. In this process they (the responsible persons in the economy and in the politics of our country) will have to examine *how* their relations with South Africa can be reconciled with basic human rights claims.”<sup>22</sup>

### **3.8 The AG Kairos and the conference “Christian solidarity with the victims of apartheid”**

As from the beginning of 1988, a working group that concentrated fully on South Africa became active with the *AG Kairos*. Partially it consisted of students who had participated in the Interdisciplinary Week in Freiburg that was mentioned previously, and aimed at organising a large Swiss conference with regard to South Africa. The solidarity conference “Christian solidarity with Central America” of 1984 served as their example. Sister Clarie-Marie Jeannotat had been of significance for the formation of the group. As indicated by its name, the *AG Kairos* emanated from the *Kairos* document. They began to maintain intensive contact with the *ASA*, also with Mascha Madörin of the *Action South Africa Boycott*. Thus the group *Kairos* could profit from the vast know-how. This new working group on the Catholic side sought talks with various other offices and works so as to have an influence and to extend its existing

---

<sup>22</sup> Archive J&P, letter by Pius Hafner to Father Roland-B. Trauffer dated 29<sup>th</sup> February 1988, RZA/5-7205, South Africa, actions J&P, 1985-1992.

knowledge. Collaboration with the *SMB* which offered room for several South Africa events in the Romero House in Lucerne that was new at the time, were in the offing. There were joint interests and aims.

Meanwhile it had transpired that Bishop Wilfrid Napier<sup>23</sup> from South Africa would visit Switzerland within the scope of the *Bread for Brothers / Fastenopfer* campaign in February 1988. The idea occurred to meet the guest, in order to include the South African partner church in the process of preparations for the conference. The circle *AG Kairos* the Freiburg theology students and young theologians was extended. Apart from Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat, a further *Menzinger Sister*, Sister Thomas Limacher became involved in the group. A priest, Christoph Schönenberger, who was about to travel to Namibia and South Africa, was also involved, as were other interested persons. The group endeavoured to simplify the contact with the partner church by means of Reformed members. In January 1988 the participants of the “Working seminar South Africa and Sanctions” in Wildhaus or the *AG Kairos* addressed a letter to the *SBC*, requesting information with regard to the status of the bank talks. Father Roland-B. Trauffer sent a copy of the letter to *Justitia et Pax* and asked Pius Hafner to reply to the questions as the “most competent member” of the Catholic representatives in the bank talks. Daniel Ammann of the *AG Kairos* was subsequently put off by telephone till later. However, Pius Hafner was interested in the South Africa conference in January 1989 which was planned by the *AG Kairos*.

During preparations for the conference the contacts between the *AG Kairos* and *ASA/KEM* intensified. The *ASA* had already started to fight apartheid more than ten years previously, and had a lot of experience with this work. Due to its numerous contacts with South Africa the *ASA* had current and reliable information. The involved Reformed persons were very interested in bringing about a commitment in the Catholic Church, similar to the commitment they had begun.

In the meantime individual *Kairos* members had made further contacts extending beyond German-speaking Switzerland. Paul Rutishauser of the *AAM* consented to assist during the large conference. The *Mariannhillier* Father Damian Weber did not want to participate as a member of *Kairos* as he lacked the time, but he assisted with addresses etc. Contact with the *Mouvement Anti-Apartheid Suisse (MAAS)* in the Romandy and with committed people in Italian-speaking Switzerland was also sought. Nevertheless it was not possible to maintain permanent contact with

---

<sup>23</sup> Eventually it was not Bishop Wilfrid Napier who came, but the auxiliary bishop Zithulele Patrick Mvemve and Father Albert Nolan.

Italian-speaking activists.

The meeting with the auxiliary bishop Zithulele Patrick Mvemve and Father Albert Nolan on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1988 had a significant meaning for the *Kairos* members. The two guests were able to devote approximately three hours of their time to the working group. The discussion was described by members of the *AG Kairos* as having been very impressive; they felt that they were taken seriously by Father Albert Nolan and Bishop Zithulele Patrick Mvemve. Numerous practical issues were also discussed. For example a logo was necessary or some tips as to which representatives from South Africa were to be invited. The two guests consented to provide their further support for the intended conference with regard to South Africa.

In comparison to other Catholic institutions that were fighting apartheid, the *AG Kairos* was not bound to institutional interests and could make its requests without having to take anyone into account. Nevertheless it was submitting its requests in a way that argued in a task-oriented manner and without verbal attacks. It was well-known at the *AG Kairos* that the established institutions would not go as far with their requests as they did, however, they were starting to influence the protagonists with critical questions and suggestions. A large knowledge base was soon available at the *AG Kairos*, especially due to its collaboration with the *ASA*.

Furthermore the working group had good contacts within the Catholic Church. Daniel Amman knew various persons at the *Fastenopfer* through his Master's thesis. Gallus Weidele had a good rapport with the *SMB* due to his schooldays. The two *Menzinger Sisters*, Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat and Sister Thomas Limacher had contacts with Catholic mission circles. Furthermore there were relations with the youth work, the *Junge Gemeinde*, the *Jungwacht/Blauring* (a combined Boys and Girls Catholic Youth Movement) and other organisations.

Soon the *AG Kairos* also had detailed knowledge of economic issues and there were attempts to make this knowledge available to the church representatives who attended the bank talks. But Ferdinand Luthiger, Pius Hafner and Father Damian Weber felt compelled to observe the duty of secrecy in accordance with the agreement with the bankers, and did not dare to show the agenda to the members of the *AG Kairos*. Prior to this one of the three participants to the bank talks had once gone public with information too early, whereupon the bankers had reacted with a massive protest.

Against this background the members of the *AG Kairos* were able to win over further groups to support the South Africa conference. A small political party, the former "*Grünes Bündnis Luzern*" ("*Green Alliance Lucerne*") promised its support, for example.

The strong participation of Reformed institutions, whether financially or with their year of know-how or by means of actual collaboration was pivotal for the *AG Kairos*. The Catholic Church had just started recently to investigate the situation in South Africa and apartheid intensively. Towards the outside world the *AG Kairos* acted as the organiser of the conference, but in the background many Reformed committed persons were actively involved for the conference.

The title of the event “Christian solidarity with the victims of apartheid” was an analogy to the Latin American event of 1984, but could also be regarded as an allusion to the declaration by the *SBC* of 10<sup>th</sup> March 1988.

The focus was on the countries South Africa and Namibia. The range of topics included church, theological, economical, political and cultural aspects. Education, the media in Switzerland, the situation of women, peace work, health, trade unions and homelands were also discussed.

Some studios of the event were at particular risk of being disturbed by actions of the opponents of the *AAM* who had smuggled themselves in. During the preparations already the *AG Kairos* assumed that the *asa*<sup>24</sup> and similar groups from Switzerland as well as the intelligence service and the South African Embassy would deploy their employees and allies to hamper the discussions and to spy on the “leftists”. Disturbances occurred in six “workshops”. The studio “What does the future in South Africa look like?” addressed the views of the ANC and was inhibited exceptionally by pointless questions and other counteractions.

From various Catholic offices, movements and communities, Pius Hafner of *Justitia et Pax*, Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat and Sister Thomas Limacher of the *Menzinger Sisters*, Al Imfeld of the *Immenseers* and Ferdinand Luthiger of the *Fastenopfer* had made themselves available as studio managers. Further workshop leaders from Catholic circles were also involved, for example from *Jungwacht/Blauring* and the *JEC*. Father Damian Weber of the *Mariannahillers* participated in the media conference. The fact that the General Secretary of the *SBC*, Father Roland B. Trauffer, had taken the time to participate in the event during the entire Saturday, pleased the members of the *AG Kairos* particularly. None of the bishops had shown up.

After the final work in connection with the conference in Lucerne the *AG Kairos* continued to remain active for South Africa. The members had grown together due to the successful organisation of the large project. Important relations, for example with the *ASA* and the *Table ronde*,

---

<sup>24</sup> The abbreviation in small letters indicates the middle-class rightist fighting organisation “Working Group Southern Africa”.

were maintained further.

The next attempt was to motivate parishes to withdraw their accounts at high street banks. The *Fastenopfer* was also approached later with regard to this possibility. To convince aid organisations such as the *Fastenopfer* to change their house bank, numerous investigations were made. It was necessary to find out how larger organisation that had changed their banks to protest against the South Africa policy of the financial institutions, were doing their financial operations with foreign countries. Because the *AG Kairos* had no institutional connections with Catholic institutes, they could act more “cheekily” than for example the *Fastenopfer*, *Justitia et Pax* or the *SBC* dared to do and could go further in their requests from the industry in Switzerland or the federal authorities. The *AG Kairos* was also prepared to propagate the controversial methods of non-violent resistance in their various forms.

By having acquired profound knowledge of the problems of South Africa through its members who were specialised in individual fields, it could act competently and thus created the possibility to influence various church institutions. A former member says:

“The group works with great innovation and commitment. I was especially pleased that younger people from various professions and backgrounds, with various motivations, were active. All of them had one thing in common: A new South Africa was necessary!”<sup>25</sup>

The method employed by the *AG Kairos* was based on a realistic assessment of the socio-political and economic relations in Switzerland and was strategically well-prepared.

Friendships existed between individual members of the *Fastenopfer*, also the Director, Ferdinand Luthiger, and *Kairos* people and a basic trust, which made the contact easier, although the parties had different views of the economical issues or believed that they had to hold different views.

Through the new platform *Table ronde*, the *AG Kairos* was also able to establish ties with further protagonists within the Catholic Church. The mistrust which the *SBC* in particular had shown in respect of the requests by *TheBe* circles for a long time had also dispersed in the meantime, also due to a new personnel constellation in the secretariat of the *SBC*.

Other than at the *Fastenopfer*, at *Justitia et Pax* or at the *SBC*, the solidarity work of the *AG Kairos* was less geared to the traditional Catholic milieu. The focus was rather

---

<sup>25</sup> Answers given by Sister Thomas Limater on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2010 to questions from Bruno Soliva.

on a new, more ecumenical, alternative scene that had developed within the churches, but also beyond that. Some of the persons in the mission circles also regarded themselves as part of this environment and supported the aims of the *AG Kairos*.

The close connection of the *AG Kairos* with South African Christians was expressed by the fact that the group proceeded strongly from the *Kairos* document and had thus established a solid theological basis to work in Switzerland for the purpose of the oppressed people in South Africa. Through Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat, who rather acted in the background, but acted consequently for the idea of a “prophetic church”, the concerns of the *Kairos* document were tied up with the concrete actions of the *AG Kairos*.

### **3.9 A round-table having a rapport with the Bishops' Conference**

As from winter 1988/89 the Catholic commitment in Switzerland against apartheid entered a new and more active phase. Two reasons were decisive in this regard: On the one hand the new President of the *SBC*, Bishop Joseph Candolfi, placed great confidence in his General Secretary and supported his numerous initiatives and actions in respect of South Africa. On the other hand a coordination medium was created through the *Table ronde*, which improved the communication between the solidarity movements and the Church Board considerably. Ferdinand Luthiger of the *Fastenopfer* had recognised at the time that a South Africa platform which was to be open for various groups of the Catholic Church could be an opportunity for a closer collaboration and a more united approach. The difficulties during the bank talks and the increasing criticism with regard to the aid organisations and church authorities which could not or would not provide information on the course of the talks were one of the reasons for launching this idea. Ferdinand Luthiger introduced it to the Mission Council in April 1988. A probe at various authorities proved that there was a need for the new institution. The first meeting of the platform that was called “*Table ronde*” or “*Table ronde Afrique australe*” from then on and which was affiliated to the Mission Council, took place in December 1988. Thereafter meetings were held in regular intervals. The *ASA* on the Reformed side had found a Catholic counterpart. The round-table which served the communication and coordination was open to a wide circle of protagonists. Movements and authorities in the Romandy also sent several reporters; the contact with the Reformed Churches was secured via the *ASA* or *Bread for Brothers*. Father Roland-B. Trauffer was connected to the *Table ronde* on behalf of the *SBC*. He was often unable to attend the meetings, but followed the process and was willing to take over tasks that were suitable for the *SBC* or to pass them on to the bishops.

The *JEC* that was also partially connected with the *Table ronde*, but that was relatively independent, continued to be involved intensively in the fight against apartheid. For example the “Jécistes” were present at schools and universities, not only in the Romandy, or maintained intensive contacts with organisations and movements in South Africa. A further group, the *Groupe anti-apartheid Jura* was also active in the Romandy. It was supervised by Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat who secured the contact of this group with the *Table ronde*. Mainly young people who had become active even before Sister Claire-Marie participated and who had protested against a bank in Delémont due to a transaction with South Africa, were involved in the *Groupe anti-apartheid Jura*. It comprised a broad spectrum of committed persons. Some originated from the church environment, while other group members came from the political group *Combat socialiste*.

Meanwhile the problem “South Africa” was increasingly regarded as a problem of the entire region in Africa, as the *Immenseers* had for example done for a considerable time by means of their bonds with Zimbabwe. The cooperation of the church groups with parliamentarians improved. In spring 1989 two female civil politicians could also be found for the “Frontline State delegation”<sup>26</sup>. After the visit in Southern Africa, the tour group suggested the creation of a “Groupe de Concertation” (Coordination Group) as the advisory commission for the *FDA* and the federal council. Ecclesiastical aid organisations would also have to be represented in this group. This suggestion could be realised as from December 1990.

At the same time Willem de Klerk was elected as President in South Africa. His willingness to tackle the reforms was initially doubted strongly due to the experience with Pieter Willem Botha. The repression in South Africa did not decrease in the least at that time. Thus the Catholic newspaper “New Nation” that was also supported by the *Fastenopfer* was threatened with closure in autumn 1989. The *Fastenopfer* and the General Secretary of the *SBC*, Father Roland-B. Trauffer, reacted quickly and straightforward.

As from summer 1989, during the financial restructuring negotiations the *SBC* and the *SPC* ventured to use a somewhat harder course against the banks and thus gave more support to the delegates in the bank talks. The church delegation consulted inter alia with the USA during the “dialogue” with the banks. Encouraged by good results in other countries, some internationally connected participants in the discussion believed, that success

---

<sup>26</sup> The starting point for the Frontline State delegation was the declaration of Lusaka (Zambia) of 8<sup>th</sup> May 1987: The international community and the churches were to increase their aid and support for the “Frontline States”. The initiative for the trip had emanated from *HEKS* and *Bread for Brothers*. The *Fastenopfer* and the *SMB* from the Catholic side also committed themselves.

with regard to the influence on the banks in Switzerland was about to materialise. The church representatives were indeed successful in gaining support from politicians for their position in the bank talks. The disappointment was so much worse when the banks entered into an agreement with South Africa which did not meet the demands from the church side at all. The previously mentioned scandal during the bank talks resulted in the fact that even moderate protagonists such as Ferdinand Luthiger or Father Damian Weber started to speak out similarly to the *JEC* or the *AG Kairos* and wanted to act with more pressure against the Swiss banks and the Swiss export industry. Apparently the General Secretariat of the *SBC* had similar considerations because Father Roland B. Trauffer made inquiries at the *SACBC* again as to whether the approach of the bishop in South Africa with regard to the sanctions had changed. The reply was that the position as in May 1986 was still retained. The question of how the economic pressure was to be exerted was left to the specialists. Although this letter was not able to encourage the *SBC* to propagate the boycott, the remaining committed persons started closing ranks against apartheid in the Catholic Church of Switzerland at the end of 1989. Although this newly found collaboration unfolded a new capacity, the South Africa issue faded into the background somewhat in the public perception during this time due to other international and internal church events. Because of the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 the global public did not concern itself with the events in South Africa so much any longer. At the same time the Catholic Church of Switzerland concerned itself with the personnel policy in Switzerland that was controlled from Rome: Within the church the disputes around Bishop Wolfgang Haas were in the spotlight. Under these circumstances the beginnings of change in South Africa only captured little attention in public.

### **3.10 What's next after the release of Mandela?**

When Nelson Mandela was released from prison on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1990, a broad general public in Switzerland thought that apartheid had been conquered now. However, news of the outburst of extreme violence in South Africa was soon received. Initially there was disorientation in Switzerland which was countered by a joint trip by the Reformed and Catholic aid organisations in spring 1990. Many solidarity groups, aid organisations and missionary communities were sceptical whether the democratic reforms could now be met without pressure from abroad. Nonetheless no common denominator could be found amongst those anymore, who had previously been involved

in the fight against apartheid. The individual reactions within the churches in Switzerland turned out to be quite different.

According to the records, the release of Nelson Mandela did not set off euphoria at the *AG Kairos* by any means. An attempt was made to carry on working as previously. Vreni Schneider Biber of the ASA and Mascha Madörin were two important experts who were well-informed with regard to the development in the direction of more violence in South Africa. They helped to ensure that the *AG Kairos* continued to assess the situation in the country as very unstable and assented to the view that the pressure against the government in South Africa had to continue or had to be reinforced.

This assessment was characteristic for many of the organisations who were represented at the *Table ronde*. The position was taken up that the apartheid system had not been abolished by any means and that the process could be reversed at any time.

The *SBC* that was advised by Father Roland-B. Trauffer in particular, did not want to join the conclusion that the pressure had to continue in this severe form, but it reacted to the announced visit of De Klerk to Switzerland in May 1990 by means of a letter that dealt with the Swiss industry in a relatively harsh way. The draft of this letter had come into being within the *Table ronde*. The platform increased to become an organ that did not only serve the communication, but which acted actively as well. This was also applicable with regard to the ecumenically arranged planning of a large consultation which was aimed at the future economical relations between Switzerland and South Africa.

During the ecumenical fasting campaign 1991 Bishop Wilfrid Napier visited Switzerland at the invitation of the *Fastenopfer*. The contact between the churches in South Africa and Switzerland was strengthened thereby.

## Conclusion

Which positions did the Catholic Church take up with regard to the topic “apartheid in South Africa”? Which protagonists from the Catholic environment took part in the discussions and became active? Which reasons can be pointed out in retrospect for becoming active or for the lack of commitment? Which concerns were at the centre of interest for the individual protagonists? These and other questions appeared at the beginning of the investigation of the topic “Catholic Church in Switzerland and South Africa/apartheid”. The results of extensive archiving at various church institutions suggested three phases of various levels of intense work with South Africa and the system of apartheid:

In the 1970s the topic became of current importance within the Catholic Church at the Synod 72. Influenced by the statements and activities of the *WCC* it was primarily approached under the aspect of racial discrimination; the economic support of the apartheid system by Switzerland did not have priority yet. A public investigation of the topic was undertaken during the 1970s within a limited scope only. The *YCW* that had been sensitised for the situation in South Africa through direct contacts, became active for South Africa. Thanks to connections with the *SBC* it was able to obtain support from the bishops in some cases. Other groups and organisations still remained in the background at that time. This is especially true for the *Fastenopfer* which was in fact supporting projects in South Africa, but hardly addressed the situation in the country within the framework of providing information in Switzerland. Even the mission societies hardly expressed themselves. Although the *Capuchins* had campaigned strongly for the condemnation of racism at the *Synod 72*, their commitment decreased thereafter - quite contrary to the *Immenseers* who had already played an important role, especially for the movements at the basis, during the second half of the 1970s and above all during the 1980s. In other mission societies it was mainly individual persons with experience in Southern Africa who committed themselves for the topic.

Upon the beginning of the 1980s the topic of sanctions and the question of the economic collaboration of Switzerland with South Africa gained centre stage. The “South Africa Motion”, which involved the conduct of the Swiss banks, was accepted very cautiously by the Pastoral Forum and was passed on to *Justitia et Pax*. This step had implications in two respects: South Africa and apartheid became less important to the Church Board for a certain time. In return *Justitia et Pax* became a “competence centre” within the Catholic Church of Switzerland. The General Secretary Pius

obtained a central role in this regard. While the work on the study “Our responsibility for South Africa” had priority during the first half of the 1980s, he extended his commitment considerably as from 1988. The new Director of the *Fastenopfer*, Ferdinand Luthiger, was an important partner for him in this regard as from 1984. When Father Roland-B. Trauffer assumed office as General Secretary of the Bishops’ conference in autumn 1987 the Church Board also took on a more active role. For the bishops in Switzerland personal contact with their colleagues in South Africa was important. Visits were made - for example within the framework of the Lenten campaigns of *Bread for Brothers* and *Fastenopfer* - by delegations of SACBC. Although these meetings could not really break down the cautious and reserved approach of the Swiss bishops, they led to the fact that in their positions, for example in the issue of sanctions, they largely orientated themselves by the attitude of the South African Bishops’ Conference.

With the *JEC* in the Romandy and the *AG Kairos*, two groups that were mainly characterised by younger people became active at the basis as from the middle of the 1980s. While the *JEC* focussed on education issues, solidarity with the victims of apartheid and the support of sanctions by Switzerland had priority at the *AG Kairos*. Both movements went considerably further with their demands than the Church Board and also than the *Fastenopfer*. Thus the *AG Kairos* in particular declined the dialogue with the banks within the scope of the bank talks between 1986 and 1989. The issue of apartheid found diverse entrance into the campaign documentation of *Bread for Brothers* and *Fastenopfer*. While the financial aspects had priority in 1984, South Africa was one of the example countries at the human rights campaign “To Break chains” (“Ketten sprengen”) of 1986. Within the course of these campaigns bishop delegations from South Africa were also invited repeatedly. These personal contacts were of great importance for the bishops as well as the basis protagonists of the *AG Kairos* and other committed persons.

Towards the end of the 1980s the various parties committed to South Africa converged within the Catholic Church with regard to their positions and demands. This can mainly be ascribed to the development of the political situation in South Africa. A speedy improvement of the situation was not expected. In the case of moderate protagonists such as the *Fastenopfer* and *Justitia et Pax*, the unsatisfactory course of the bank talks and the impression that the banks regarded the talks as a non-binding exchange of ideas led to an increasingly critical approach. The large South Africa conference of January 1989 in Freiburg which had been organised by the *AG Kairos* was for example attended by Ferdinand Luthiger and Pius Hafner as studio managers. The *Table ronde* was founded in December 1988 already. Thereby there was a broad platform which was to simplify the communication between the groups within the

Catholic Church from all parts of the country. Furthermore it guaranteed the connection with the ASA, the affiliation of the Reformed institutions that were committed to South Africa and that had been in existence for quite a while.

Finally it may therefore be recorded that a cautious and rather hesitant approach to the topic “South Africa and apartheid” prevailed during the 1970s and the early 1980s. Between 1985 and 1991 the commitment against apartheid increased steadily within the Catholic Church. During this time the protagonists networked better – also with Reformed groups and secular movements. The commitment was increasingly perceived by the general public. It was recognised even in politics that the Catholic Church also had something to say about the problem of apartheid. In many cases the verdict in respect of the role of the Swiss banks and the economy was not uniform. Although it was clear to most of the protagonists on the side of the church that one may not remain silent with regard to the human rights violations, political considerations and economical interests often prevailed.

Particularly the Church Board of the Catholic Church of Switzerland was not prepared initially to investigate the topic in depth. For various reasons diverse enquiries and requests for support in the commitment against racial segregation were met with resistant and delayed reactions. The approach to the situation in South Africa was strongly dependent on those persons within the *SBC* who were responsible for these questions. In retrospect it is also clear that in the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s the Church Board was still very busy with itself and its role in a changing community which had to be redefined. It was torn between a spiritual-pastoral task that was characterised by conservative thinking on the one hand and clear confessions and firm demands against the inhumane racial segregation on the other hand. The latter did not only upset the church members that were influenced by traditional-conservative thinking, but was also denounced by the political-economical side as one-sided and “leftist”. The Church Board lacked clear and uniform orientation in this matter.

But gradually and always with an element of caution, the *SBC* backed up the concerns of their brothers in South Africa whom they trusted and to whom they felt connected, not least due to the personal contacts that had been established. An important contribution to this slowly growing change of heart of the *SBC* was made by Pius Hafner of *Justitia et Pax* whose influence on the *SBC*, besides that of the *SACBC*, has to be recognised as having been decisive for a change in the direction of more commitment in the fight against the apartheid regime, and by Ferdinand

Luthiger of the *Fastenopfer*. In addition, there were impulses and there was concrete information from the Mission Council and individual persons for example Sister Claire-Marie Jeannotat of the *Menzinger Sisters* and Father Damian Weber of the *Mariannahillers*. Events and actions such as the South Africa conference that emanated from the basis also played a central role. The *Table ronde* finally presented an extraordinarily broad platform for the topic.

The investigation of the existing archive materials and the interviews with contemporary witnesses illustrate that the commitment of various protagonists in the Catholic Church of Switzerland against the apartheid regime reflects the relationships in the Swiss community at the time. There was neither a uniform assessment of the situation nor a uniform approach to a political and economical responsibility in Switzerland. In retrospect, a little more commitment and determination by the Swiss Catholic Church Board in its action campaign for human dignity and the rights of all people in South Africa would have benefitted its credibility in these issues. The sometimes indecisive hesitation and ignoring of urgent human rights issues speak for a deep insecurity and not being competent in such important issues. It would have been wise if the Church Board had acknowledged the voices of the committed basis and experienced members of mission societies earlier and more seriously. Human rights issued burst stereotype political left-right schemata, and political considerations are at risk of being caught up by history.

## Abbreviations

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| AAM/MAAS  | Anti-Apartheid Movement / Mouvement Anti-Apartheid Suisse  |
| AG Kairos | AG Kairos der Theologischen Bewegung für Solidarität und Befreiung<br>/ Working Group Kairos of the Theological Movement for Solidarity and Liberation   |
| ANC       | African National Congress  |
| ASA/KEM   | Arbeitsgruppe Südliches Afrika der Evangelischen Hilfswerke und<br>Missionen)/Kooperation Evangelischer Kirchen und Missionen<br>/ Working Group Southern Africa (of the Protestant aid organisations and missions)/<br>Cooperation Protestant Churches and Missions |
| asa       | Working Group Southern Africa (Counter movement to the AAM, middle-class<br>rightist fighting organisation, good relations with parliament)  |
| BD        | Berne Declaration  |
| BfB       | Bread for Brothers (today: „Bread for All“)  |
| CETIM     | Centre Europe – Tiers monde Genève   |
| CIDSE     | Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité  |
| CIIR      | Catholic Institute for International Relationship  |
| CVP       | Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei / Christian Democratic Peoples’ Party<br>(as from 1958 to 1970 “Konservativ-Christlichsoziale Volkspartei” / “Conservative<br>Christian Social People’s Party”)  |
| DRC       | Dutch Reformed Church  |
| FDA       | Federal Department of Foreign Affairs  |
| FO        | Fastenopfer / Swiss Lenten Fund (This the Lenten Fund of the Evangelical-Reformed<br>Church in Switzerland. This organisation works together with both the Roman<br>Catholic side and the Old Catholic Church. The name has changed in the meantime.)                |
| HEKS      | Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz / Aid organisation of the<br>Protestant Churches of Switzerland  |
| ISaKo     | Interdiözesane Sachkommission (Synode 72) / Inter-diocesan Expert Commission<br>(Synod 72)   |
| J&P       | Swiss National Commission Justitia et Pax  |
| JEC       | Jeunesse étudiante Chrétienne (equivalent to Young Christian Students)   |
| JOC/E     | Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne / Juventud Obrera Cristiana Española Emigrante<br>(equivalent to Young Christian Workers)   |
| MAAS      | Mouvement anti-apartheid de Suisse   |
| O.A.      | Ordinary Assembly (of the SBC)   |
| OeMe      | Fachstelle für Ökumene, Mission und Entwicklung /Department for Ecumenism,   |

|          |  |
|----------|--|
|          | Mission and Development (central in relation to the topic “South Africa”: OeME office of the Reformed Churches Berne – Jura) |
| SACBC    | Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference  |
| SACC     | South African Council of Churches  |
| SBC      | Swiss Bishops’ Conference  |
| SDP      | Social Democratic Party  |
| SMB      | Mission Society Bethlehem in Immensee (“Immenseers”) / Societas missionaria de Bethlehem                                     |
| SPC      | Swiss Protestant Churches  |
| TheBe    | Theologische Bewegung für Solidarität und Befreiung / Theological Movement for Solidarity and Liberation                     |
| YCS      | Young Christian Students   |
| YCW      | Christliche Arbeiterjugend / Young Christian Workers (meaning the institution in Switzerland)                                |
| YCW (SA) | Young Christian Workers (meaning the institution in South Africa)  |