

## Seminary training and black consciousness in South Africa in the early 1970s

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“While the black consciousness movement faced formidable obstacles in reaching for a mass audience directly or through workers’ organisations,” wrote Gail Gerhard, one of the best historians of the black consciousness movement, “it fared somewhat better among black churchmen. Seminary students were among the earliest and most ardent proponents of Black Consciousness and its particular application within the church under the rubric of black theology.”<sup>1</sup> Staff members and students of several South African seminaries played an important role in the South African Students Associations (SASO), the first vehicle of black consciousness. They were also involved in the Black Community Programmes (BCP), the Black People’s Convention (BPC) and the Black Renaissance Convention, the ever changing organisations created in the early 1970s to fill the vacuum left by the banning of the ANC and the PAC.

Black consciousness and its twin movement black theology have been the focus of a vast literature since their inception in the early 1970s. Most authors wrote on the political, social and theological thought systems of these two movements and on their relevance to contemporary society.<sup>2</sup> Less work has been devoted to their history. Authors such as John de Gruchy,<sup>3</sup> Peter Walshe,<sup>4</sup> Gail Gerhart,<sup>5</sup> Mbulelo Mzamane<sup>6</sup> and, more

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<sup>1</sup> Gail M. Gerhard, *Black Power in South Africa. The Evolution of an Ideology* (Los Angeles, Greenberg, 1999), 294.

<sup>2</sup> On black consciousness, see for example Robert Fatton Jr., *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The dialectics of ideological resistance to White Supremacy* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1986); C.R.D. Halisi, *Black Political Thought in the Making of South African Democracy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1999). On black theology: Itumeleng Mosala and Buti Tlhagale, eds, *The Unquestionable Right To Be Free: Black Theology from South Africa* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1986); Dwight Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture and Consciousness* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1989); Cornel W. du Toit, ed., *The legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko: Theological challenges* (Pretoria: UNISA, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> John de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2005), 144-183.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Walshe, *Church versus State in South Africa. The Case of the Christian Institute* (London, C. Hurst and Company, 1983), 149-171; *Prophetic Christianity and the Liberation Movement in South Africa*

recently, Daniel Magaziner<sup>7</sup> and Leslie Hasfield<sup>8</sup> are among those who attempted to write a history, based on archival sources and oral testimonies, of the early years of the black consciousness movement. Like Gail Gerhart in the quotation which opens this article, they recognised the role of seminaries, and of the Federal Theological Seminary in particular, in the development of black consciousness, but they did not dwell on it. The authors who studied the history of seminaries in South Africa,<sup>9</sup> on the other hand, while making cursory reference to black consciousness and black theology, generally ignored the sources available on the history of these two movements.

During the apartheid years clergy training in South Africa was, *de facto* if not *de jure*, segregated. With very few exceptions – for example at St Joseph’s Theological Scholasticate, Cedara, the training centre of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate during short periods of time in the early 1950s and again in the 1970s – black and white students for the ministry were trained in separate institutions. Even in churches with a unified structure such as the Anglican, Methodist and Catholic churches, the assumption was that white and black priests would minister to congregations of different races and therefore should be trained separately. This does not mean that the churches willingly accepted segregation. In 1956 Tiger Kloof, where the London Missionary Society had trained its ministers since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, was taken over by the government. In 1962, the Anglicans were forced to move St Peter’s College, their seminary for black ordinands, from Rosettenville, south of Johannesburg, to Alice in the Eastern Cape. It was under the

(Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Gerhard, *Black Power*. See also Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990*. Volume 5: *Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 1997), 120-155.

<sup>6</sup> Mbulelo Mzamane, Bavusile Maaba and Nkosinathi Biko, “The Black Consciousness Movement,” in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 2 (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2006), 99-159.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Magaziner, “Christ in Context: Developing a Political Faith in Apartheid South Africa,” *Radical History Review*, 99 (Fall 2007), 80-106.

<sup>8</sup> Leslie Hasfield, “Kwakungekhomkhethe – There was no Discrimination: Oral History and Black Consciousness Community Work in the King William’s Town Area,” paper read at the 5<sup>th</sup> Oral History Association of South Africa conference, East London, 7-9 October 2008.

<sup>9</sup> For example Roger T. Cameron, *Some political, ecumenical and theological aspects of the history of the Federal Theological Seminary : 1963-1975*, unpublished MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984, 80-97; Philippe Denis, *The Dominican Friars in Southern Africa. A Social History* (Leiden, Brill, 1998), 228-234, and “Clergy training”, in Joy Brain and Philippe Denis, eds., *The Catholic Church in Contemporary Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1999), 124-50; George Mukuka, *The Other Side of the Story. The Silent Experience of the Black Clergy in the Catholic Church in South Africa (1898-1976)* (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, forthcoming).

pressure of apartheid that the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, the soon-to-be-constituted United Congregational Church of Southern Africa and a cluster of Presbyterian churches opened, in 1963, an interdenominational seminary called the Federal Theological Seminary (Fedsem) in Alice, on a piece of land belonging to the Church of Scotland, at a short distance from the Fort Hare University campus. This highly politicised institution caused so much alarm in government circles that they eventually took the unprecedented step of expropriating it in November 1974 under the false pretext that Fort Hare University needed space for expansion.

Eight seminaries were listed in the directory of the University Christian Movement (UCM), a multi-racial Christian student organisation established in July 1967 with the support of the mainline churches,<sup>10</sup> shortly before the secession of a group of black students who constituted SASO in late 1968.<sup>11</sup> Two were interdenominational (Fedsem, Alice and Livingstone House, Grahamstown), three Catholic (St Peter's, Hammanskraal, St Joseph's Scholasticate, Cedara and St Nicholas Priory, Stellenbosch), two Anglican (St Paul's, Grahamstown and St Bede's, Umtata), one Lutheran (Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo) and one Moravian (Moravian Theological Seminary, Port Elizabeth). The UCM directory included the seminaries most likely to take part in resistance politics. Absent from the list were St John Vianney Seminary, the Catholic seminary for whites in Pretoria, the Dutch Reformed and Baptist seminaries and the Bible schools and Bible colleges of the evangelical churches.

The Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches – sometimes called, rather misleadingly, the “English-speaking churches” – trained their candidates for the ministry largely together.<sup>12</sup> The black, Coloured and Indian candidates

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<sup>10</sup> On the history of the University Christian Movement, see Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, 5, 72-75, Magaziner, “Christ in Context”; **Error! Main Document Only.** William John Houston, *A critical evaluation of the University Christian Movement as an ecumenical mission to students, 1967 - 1992*, Masters dissertation, University of South Africa, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> “Official addresses: University Christian Movement (Branches, affiliated societies and contacts) [n.d.], Lutheran Theological Institute, Pietermaritzburg (hereafter LTI), STU-IH. In this document, Steve Biko is still listed as the UCM representative at the University of Natal.

<sup>12</sup> Simon Gqubule's doctoral thesis, *An Examination of the Theological Education of Africans in the Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational and Anglican Churches in South Africa from 1860 to 1960*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Rhodes University, 1977.

were trained at the Federal Theological Seminary in Alice<sup>13</sup> and the white ones were sent to Grahamstown, either to Rhodes University with Livingstone House as a residential facility or, in the case of the Anglicans, to St Paul's College.<sup>14</sup> For historical reasons, the Church of the Province of Southern Africa had a second seminary for blacks, St Bede's College in Umtata.<sup>15</sup> The Catholic and Lutheran churches, which shared ground with the "English-speaking" churches in many areas, trained their candidates for the ministry separately. The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) ran two inter-diocesan seminaries, one of for whites, St John Vianney, Pretoria, and one for blacks, St Peter's, Hammanskraal. In addition, some religious orders had their own training centres like the Oblates of Mary Immaculate with St Joseph's Theological Scholasticate, Cedara and the Dominicans with St Nicholas Priory, Stellenbosch.<sup>16</sup> Since 1962, the Lutheran churches had a unified seminary for black students, the Lutheran Theological College (LTC), in Umphumulo in the Natal province. This institution primarily catered for black students.<sup>17</sup>

### **The seminaries' contribution to the development of black consciousness**

The black consciousness movement, with its component of black theology, was a diverse phenomenon ranging from SASO and other student groups to the Black Community Programmes and the umbrella organisation, the Black People's Convention. The term "black consciousness" entered SASO discourse during 1970, but it only received a definition the following year at the General Students Council held in Wentworth in July 1971. "Black Consciousness," the "SASO Policy Manifesto" adopted on this occasion read, "is an attitude of mind, a way of life. The basis tenet of Black Consciousness is that

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<sup>13</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.**A. Stubbs, ed., *The Planting of the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa* (Lovedale, Lovedale Press, 1973); Cameron, "Some political, ecumenical and theological aspects".

<sup>14</sup> J.C. Chichele Hewitt, "A History of St Paul's College," *The College of the Transfiguration Journal. First Anniversary Issue* (February 1994), 38-48.

<sup>15</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.**Livingstone L. Ngewu, "A Review of the History of St Bede's College: 1899-1992," *The College of the Transfiguration Journal. First Anniversary Issue* (February 1994), 20-37.

<sup>16</sup> Denis, "Clergy Training"; J.B. Brain, *St John Vianney Seminary: 50 Years of Priestly Training* (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.**A.E. Nsibandé, "The Founding of Umphumulo Seminary," in *Dynamic African Theology: Umphumulo's Contribution*, ed. H. L. Nelson, P. S. Lwandle, and V. M. Keding (Durban: Pinetown Printers, 1992), 6-13.

the Blackman must reject all value systems that seek to make him a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity”<sup>18</sup>.

Black consciousness as a (loosely structured) movement and as an ideology has deep Christian roots even though other influences, most notably the Black Power movement in the United States, also impacted on its development. Three Christian organisations, the University Christian Movement, the Special Project for Christian Action in Society (SPROCAS), and St Peter’s Old Boys Association (SPOBA), played a direct role in the foundation and growth of the black consciousness. The black seminaries – and in particular Fedsem, LTC and St Peter’s, Hammanskraal – had links with these three organisations and, through them, influenced the movement. Other Christian organisations also played a role, for instance the Interdenominational Association of African Ministers of South Africa (IDAMASA), the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and conference centres of Christian inspiration such as the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre in Roodepoort and the Edendale Ecumenical Lay Centre in Pietermaritzburg. No Christian institution, however, played a more important role in the development of black consciousness than the black seminaries. This can be explained by two reasons. The first was the segregation of clergy training in the South African churches and the differences in working conditions between black and white ministers, a practice in direct contradiction with the anti-apartheid discourse of most mainline churches, not to mention the egalitarian discourse of the New Testament. This form of hypocrisy fuelled resentment among black seminary students. The second was the age of the seminarians. Young people are more likely to be inflamed by a movement promoting a new social, political and ecclesiastical order. Black consciousness had an immediate appeal on black seminary students.

The University Christian Movement was created to foster interracial and ecumenical links among university students. At the second national UCM conference, gathered in Stutterheim in July 1968, already 60 percent of the members were black,<sup>19</sup> to a large degree thanks to the participation of seminary students who were predominantly black. It was at this conference that a group of black students who were uncomfortable

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<sup>18</sup> Karis and Gerhard, *From Protest to Challenge*, 100.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

with the “liberal” character of the organisation held a caucus, a move which led to the constitution of SASO, an organisation exclusively for black students, at a meeting in Mariannhill in December 1969. However, if they broke with the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) a few months later, they never completely severed links with UCM. While using UCM as recruiting ground, Steve Biko and Barney Pityana, then at a student at Fort Hare, they also began building a close relationship with Colin Collins, Basil Moore and several other whites in the UCM leadership.<sup>20</sup> Moore, the UCM director, played a major role in the early development of black theology, a project which SASO enthusiastically endorsed during the course of 1971. “We still feel,” Biko wrote in February 1970, “that the fact that the blacks are in the majority in the organisation has not been sufficiently evidenced in the direction of thought and in the leadership of the organisation. We nevertheless feel that UCM’s progress is commendable especially in the direction of provoking meaningful thinking amongst clergymen, and its members<sup>21</sup>.” The principle of double affiliation applied to all SASO branches, including those in seminaries. The black members of UCM simply became SASO members while retaining their affiliation with UCM.<sup>22</sup> SASO’s draft constitution, circulated after the Mariannhill meeting, spoke of “we, the student leaders of non-white Universities, University Colleges, Seminaries and other institutions of the higher learning,” while the final constitution, adopted at the inaugural conference of July 1969, simply referred to “we, the Black students of institutions of higher learning in South Africa.<sup>23</sup>”

In virtue of the SASO Constitution member institutions received three votes for the first 100 students and one vote for each additional 300 or part thereof. In June 1970 no less than four SASO branches – Fedsem, Mapumulo, St Peter’s, Hammanskraal and St Bede’s – out of a total of fourteen were established in seminaries. Each received three votes as they were deemed to have less than hundred students.<sup>24</sup> According to a list published in the SASO newsletter, “at least” eight students from Fedsem, two or more from Umphumulo and two from St Peter’s Hammanskraal were expected at the SASO

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>21</sup> “Letter to SRC Presidents”, February 1970, in Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like. A selection of his writing*, ed. Aelred Stubbs (Oxford, Heinemann, 1978), 14.

<sup>22</sup> This lasted until the dissolution of UCM in 1972.

<sup>23</sup> LTI Archives, STU-IN. On the history of the SASO constitution, see SASO, “Communique”, July 1969, in Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, 5, 459 (Document 38).

<sup>24</sup> SASO Newsletter, June 1970, p. 12. LTI Archives : STU-IK.

General Students' Council of July 1970 in Wilgespruit.<sup>25</sup> The participation of students from St Bede's was not confirmed. If a branch was ever established there, it soon became inactive.<sup>26</sup> An information leaflet mentioned visits of the SASO president and of vice-president to St Peter's, Hammanskraal, Umphumulo and Fedsem in March 1971.<sup>27</sup> A year later, the same three seminaries were still receiving visits from the SASO leadership, according to the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Council.<sup>28</sup> By then Fedsem's contribution to the SASO budget amounted to R100 and Umphumulo's R20.<sup>29</sup> There was no mention of a financial contribution from St Peter's Hammanskraal.

### **Student activism at Fedsem and Fort Hare**

Of all the seminaries the most involved in SASO and the other branches of the black consciousness movement was Fedsem. The history of the seminary accounted, to a degree, for this high degree of mobilization. All the member churches had been affected, in one way or another, by apartheid. They had been forcibly removed from their previous training centres and some of their staff members, especially when they were black, had been harassed or even imprisoned by the security forces.

The affinity of the Community of the Resurrection (CR), the Anglican religious order staffing St Peter's College at Fedsem, with black consciousness was another factor for the seminary's ongoing support for SASO. In 1963, within four months of their arrival in Alice, the CR fathers had been involved in the trial of a group of schoolboys from Lovedale College accused of being members of POQO, the armed wing to the Pan African Congress. Among these boys were Khaya Biko and his brother Steve. Although entirely innocent, the latter was expelled from Lovedale College on his return from a brief spell in prison. His relationship with Aelred Stubbs, the principal of St Peter's

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> In his survey of the history of St Bede's, Ngewu does not mention SASO, but he indicates that the delay in appointing a black rector caused some insatisfaction in the seminary. See Ngewu, "A Review of the History of St Bede's College: 1899-1992."

<sup>27</sup> "**Error! Main Document Only.** Students Politics. Black Power, New Movements and New Appraisals," undated pamphlet (LTI Archives, STU-IK).

<sup>28</sup> Minutes of the Proceedings of the Executive Council Meeting, Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre, Pietermaritzburg, 1-3 December, 19. LTI Archives, STU-IJ.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

College, dated from that time.<sup>30</sup> Two years later they started a correspondence on matters of faith and politics which continued after Stubbs' departure for Johannesburg in 1972 and only ended at Biko's death in September 1977. The Anglican monk was one of the few who could challenge the black leader on private matters.<sup>31</sup> It was he who published Biko's works the following year under the title *I Write What I Like*. Theologically and liturgically orthodox, the CR fathers were politically progressive. During his time at Fedsem Stubbs actively supported SASO. In October 1971 he asked the Anglican bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman to allow Sabelo Ntwasa, a third-year student from his diocese, to serve as the UCM's travelling secretary.<sup>32</sup> Ntwasa was the delegate of the SASO Reef branch and, together with Pityana, he had organised a series of seminars on black theology throughout the country.<sup>33</sup> The same year, another Anglican student, Rubin Phillip, future bishop of Natal, served as SASO's vice-president.<sup>34</sup>

Probably the most important reason for Fedsem's involvement in SASO was the seminary's geographical proximity with the Fort Hare campus. In 1959 the Extension of Universities Act had led to the take over of Fort Hare by apartheid-aligned bureaucrats, the sacking of some of its best staff and the resignation of prominent black academics such as Z. K. Matthews. The students regularly staged protests against the university management. The situation worsened with the appointment of Professor J.M. de Wet, a rigid Afrikaner with no desire to listen to the students' grievances, as rector in mid 1968. One of his first acts was to confirm the ban on NUSAS and to turn down a request made by Barney Pityana and Justice Moloto, two student leaders, to recognise UCM. This led to the disruption of his inauguration, the subsequent harassment of seventeen student leaders by the police and a sit-in demonstration by a large number of students. Aelred

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<sup>30</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.**Lindy Wilson, "Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life", in Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson, eds. *Bounds of Possibility. The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>32</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.**Aelred Stubbs to the (Anglican) bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman, Alice, 21 August 1970. University of the Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Papers (hereafter HP): AB2414 D2, quoted in Magaziner, "Christ in Context," 95. **Error! Main Document Only.**Stubbs suggested that not only would the young churchman benefit from the opportunity but that "theologically his orthodoxy would be salutary corrective to some of the UCM output. He referred to the unorthodox liturgies conducted during some UCM sessions and to the controversial statements made by leaders of the movement. On this see Houston, *A critical evaluation*, 23-47.

<sup>33</sup> Karis and Gerhard, *From Protest to Challenge*, 5, 479-481.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 480.



Stubbs, an eye-witness and confidante of many of the students, described the ensuing events as follows:

The students demanded to see the new Rector in an attempt to persuade him to treat them as responsible human beings, not as a lower form of human life. Yielding to the negative advice of a senior African Professor, a notorious “sell-out”, the Rector refused. There ensued a well-disciplined and entirely non-violent strike, in which nearly 500 out of a total of about 550 students took part. Beginning at the end of the third term it was resumed after a short break, and was only broken up when police were asked by the Rector to come on to the campus with dogs and teargas and to escort the striking students, who were all suspended, to the railway station. Each student had to re-apply for admission in person with his father, or a parent – a punitive device which not only fell heavily on the family purse, but was also calculated to get the parents on the side of ‘law and order’. One father even brought a *sjambok* (whip) and thrashed his son in the Rector’s presence in order to persuade the Rector to re-admit him!<sup>35</sup>

The seminary authorities gave full support to the students, both at Fedsem and at Fort Hare. Blamed by the rector for allowing Duncan Innes, the president of NUSAS, to address staff and students at Fedsem, the Methodist minister David Bandey, president of the seminary, gave the following response:

It has always been our belief that our students should not be protected from encounter with ideas. As they meet the opinions of others, and discuss them openly with us, we believe that these opinions can be rightly understood, criticized and evaluated. Only by such means can we enable the students to become wise guides to the youth in their Churches.<sup>36</sup>

In May 1971 it was at a formation school organised by SASO at Fedsem that the statement known as the “Alice declaration” was adopted. It condemned the expulsion from Turfloop of 1146 students who had protested against the exclusion of Ongkopotse Tiro, the author of a graduation speech against segregation in universities. The participants resolved to boycott lectures on June 1 when the students from Turfloop would be returning.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Aelred Stubbs, “Martyr of Hope. A Personal Memoir”, in Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like*, quoted in Mzamane et al., “The Black Consciousness Movement,” 108-109.

<sup>36</sup> D. Bandey to J.M. de Wet, 4 March 1969, in Cameron, *Some political, ecumenical and theological aspects*, 72. Original in the Fedsem Archives at the University Library, University of Fort Hare.

<sup>37</sup> Karis and Gerhard, *From Protest to Challenge*, 5, 126. Turfloop was the name given to the University of

On 10 August 1973, the Fort Hare students staged another sit-in. As he had done before, de Wet summoned the police to deal with the situation. A large number of Fort Hare students fled to the seminary campus when they were harassed by police with police dogs. The rector was reported in the press as saying that Graham Brown, the president of the seminary, had refused to tell Fort Hare students, who had sought refuge at Fedsem, to return to their own campus.<sup>38</sup> Njongokulu Ndungane, the future archbishop of Cape Town, then a third-year Anglican student, gave a vivid report of this incident:

Fedsem prepared us for effective contextual ministry. I recall one incident when a visiting lecturer, the Revd Theo Kotze of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, was addressing us on the subject of “how to be non-violent in a violent world”. As we looked through the window we saw students from neighbouring Fort Hare being chased and beaten by police and they were heading towards Fedsem. One of my colleagues raised a point of order and said, “Sir, look out of the window – let’s go and put into practice what you have been teaching us.” So off we went and provided a buffer between the students and the police and told the police to leave Fedsem as it was private property. We won the day. It was this kind of witness that angered the government and later led to the expropriation of the Fedsem property.<sup>39</sup>

### **Lending a hand to the Black Community Programmes**

SPROCAS 2 or the renamed Special Project for Christian Action in Society gave Steve Biko, in the words of Mamphela Ramphele, the “base from which to pursue his activism”.<sup>40</sup> Launched in January 1972, this project was jointly supported by the Christian Institute and the South African Council of Churches. The reports presented at the conclusion of SPROCAS 1 – the first phase of a four-year programme – had highlighted the need for the Christian church to engage in community development activities. The most significant outcome of this process was the establishment of the Black Community Programmes (BCP), a project sponsored by the churches but managed by a group of black consciousness activists led by Steve Biko, who was restricted to King

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the North. In 1974 Tiro was killed by a parcel bomb in Botswana.

<sup>38</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.** Simon Gqubule, *The story of the Federal Theological Seminary*, unpublished manuscript [2006], 23. Graham Brown was a British citizen. He was refused re-entry when he tried to come back to South Africa after the Christmas holidays in early 1974.

<sup>39</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.** Njongonkulu Ndungane, *A World with a Human Face. A Voice from Africa* (Cape Town, David Philip, 2003), 9. Theo Kotze was the Cape regional director of the Christian Institute and in this capacity deeply involved in SPROCAS.

<sup>40</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.** Mamphela Ramphele, *A Life* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1995), 66-67.

William's Town since March 1973.<sup>41</sup>

From the start, local clergy, Anglican clergy in particular, gave active support to BCP. Also involved were the staff and students of Fedsem, who made frequent travels to King William's Town. Soon after his arrival, Biko came in contact with David Russell, an Anglican priest who lived in a small house in the grounds of a disused church in the heart of King William's Town white residential area. In agreement with the priest-in-charge Russell agreed that the building should be used as an office for SASO and BCP. Very shortly all three organisations were functioning, the BCP existing through the facilities of the other two with no official status of its own, and a new community began to form.<sup>42</sup> Ramphela Mamphela's memoir contains a colourful description of the SASO and BCP headquarters:

There was little evidence of a traditional church atmosphere in the disused Anglican Church building at 15 Leopold Street, where an office took shape. Mapetla Motlhabi also set up the regional SASO office in the same premises, further expanding the range of activities conducted from the same address, to the great displeasure of the local security police. Student activists from Fort Hare and the Federal Theological Seminary in nearby Alice called regularly to enquire about new developments or to participate in community development projects."<sup>43</sup>

During its four-year existence BCP and related black consciousness organisations initiated various community development projects in the Eastern Cape in which staff and students from Fedsem had a share. In July 1973 Pumwile Majeke reported to the SASO annual General Students' Council that the Fort Hare local committee and Fedsem jointly ran several projects:

A visible contact has been established and there is a healthy exchange of ideas, material, co-operation where feasible etc e.g. when Jeff [Baqwa] came around for literacy training, joint sessions were organised to include both the Fed Sem and BPC, King William's Town. [...] The Fed Sem has become our twin, with whom we work together in projects, organise joint celebrations, etc. Together with the Fed Sem we are establishing a bursary scheme called the Fed-Fort Bursary Scheme.

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<sup>41</sup> Walshe, *Church versus State*, 134-145;

<sup>42</sup> Wilson, "Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life," 42-43.

<sup>43</sup> Ramphela, *A Life*, 94.

Several lecturers from Fedsem actively supported BCP. Stanley Mogoba, a Methodist minister, was on the Board of Directors.<sup>44</sup> A member of the Pan African Congress, he had spent three years at Robben Island in the mid 1960s before coming to the seminary in 1971 and joining the staff soon after his graduation in 1974. From Alice he regularly attended the meetings of the BCP Board in King Williams' Town until the organisation was banned in 1978.<sup>45</sup>

In 1974 Timothy Stanton, a religious of the Community of the Resurrection based at Fedsem, started Njwaxa Home Industry, a BCP-initiated leather work factory, on Anglican land in the village of Njwaxa, near Middledrift in the Eastern Cape.<sup>46</sup> He had been moved, Ramphela Mamphela wrote, by the extreme poverty of the people of the villages surrounding Alice, and induced some British parishioners to finance a home industry producing leather purses and tobacco pouches.<sup>47</sup> Under the joint direction of Mxolisi Mvovo and Voti Samela, a qualified leather artisan, the project relocated, in 1977, from its humble premises in a mud house to a well-constructed and well-equipped corrugated iron factory, financed by ICCO, a Dutch church group which funded development work. It supplied small and large clients all over the Eastern Cape and farther afield, even as far as Durban.<sup>48</sup>

Aelred Stubbs, Biko's friend and mentor, made regular visits to the Zanempilo clinic, a comprehensive health care centre run by Ramphela Mamphela in Zinyoka, near King William's Town. He was so used to come that he participated in the daily chores in the house. Writing on the dynamics of gender within black consciousness organisations a few years later, Ramphela Mamphela recounted this anecdote:

I remember arguing one day with Father Aelred Stubbs, a member of the Community of the Resurrection who used to visit Zanempilo quite often to see Steve Biko, about his insistence on helping me wash up after supper. Although I resented the fact that my peers would not lend me a hand, I felt uncomfortable about a man nearly old enough to be my father, washing up with me. It was as if I was being disrespectful towards

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<sup>44</sup> Black Community Programmes Limited, *Projects and People* (Durban, n.d.). [www.disa.ukzn.ac.za:8080/DC/pam1977000.032.009.271/pam1977000.02.009.271.pdf](http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za:8080/DC/pam1977000.032.009.271/pam1977000.02.009.271.pdf) (accessed on 21 October 2008).

<sup>45</sup> Stanley Mogoba, interviewed by the author in Phokwane on 23 October 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Wilson, "Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life," 166.

<sup>47</sup> Ramphela, *A Life*, 101.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

him by allowing him to help me. But he just pressed on regardless of my protests.”<sup>49</sup>

### **Black consciousness at Umphumulo**

Founded in 1962 the Lutheran Theological College at Umphumulo in the Natal province was less militant than Fedsem. Run by German and Norwegian missionaries it only started to employ black lecturers in the late 1960s. One of them was Manas Buthelezi, who would soon be known as one of the earliest proponents of black theology in South Africa. He left however the seminary in 1970, after less than two years of teaching, to work as a pastor in Sobantu, Pietermaritzburg, from where he was handpicked, in mid 1973, by Beyers Naudé to become the regional director of the Christian Institute in Natal. In 1971, contacted by Sabelo Ntwasa who wanted to recruit black theologians for his project, he organised a seminar on black theology at the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre with Barney Pityana, Steve Biko being one of the speakers. Buthelezi, a very articulate speaker and a man of deep faith, became immediately popular, not only in church circles but among teachers, union leaders and ordinary people, Christian or not.<sup>50</sup>

As mentioned earlier, SASO – and UCM, a movement closely associated with it – had a branch at the Lutheran Theological Seminary. Some lecturers expressed sympathy for the organisation, others not. But at least, unlike in other theological institutions, they did not ban SASO. At most they expressed scepticism. SASO leaders would come for the day or sometimes overnight to raise awareness among students. Only a minority of seminary students participated in SASO activities.<sup>51</sup> According to Manas Buthelezi, it was only later that the seminary as a whole gradually became supportive of black consciousness.<sup>52</sup>

One of the first SASO members at Umphumulo was no other than Sibusiso Ndebele, better known as premier of the KwaZulu-Natal province in the first decade of the twentieth century. The son of a Lutheran minister, he did some work in the archives of the Lutheran Theological College in the early 1970s while studying library science at the University of Zululand. His official biography states that he was “actively involved in

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<sup>49</sup> Mamphela Ramphele, “The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations”, in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 219.

<sup>50</sup> Manas Buthelezi, interviewed by the author in Pietermaritzburg on 27 October 2008. **Error! Main Document Only.** For a biography of Manas Buthelezi during this period see Walshe, *Church Versus State*, 158-163

<sup>51</sup> Conversation with Dr Vivian Msomi, Pietermaritzburg, 27 October 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Manas Buthelezi, interviewed by the author in Pietermaritzburg on 27 October 2008.

the University Christian Movement and later with the South African Students Organisation” and that, in 1972, he was “appointed publicity secretary of SASO for the University of Zululand”.<sup>53</sup>

In 1971 the SASO “convenor” at Umphumulo was Simon Maimela, who later became professor of theology at the University of South Africa. The archives of the Lutheran Theological Institute in Pietermaritzburg contain a letter he wrote to the staff of the Lutheran Theological College in March 1971 to raise their awareness on black consciousness. Here is an extract of this unpublished document:

Realising that we are being trained to be leaders in the future congregations, [the] majority of which will be in the SASO’s thinking, we have felt obliged to make acquaintance and contacts with these people to guide them in order that we may cope [with the] changes that occur in our black sectors. Our knowledge of their thinking and aspirations will enable us to present meaningful Christ to these people.

1. We go for SASO because it strives to release us from our feeling of inferiority because our blackness of which we should be proud of as Gods gift.
2. Because SASO aims at helping blacks within the present political structure, it helps make us independent beings. Because SASO emphasises black consciousness, it will give us a feeling of being full human beings and not a problem.
3. We like SASO because it serves as a link between students, thus establishing fellowship which is the basic Christian principle. Black students and communities from which they come have common problems that need their attention.
4. We like SASO because it revives interest in our black consciousness and feeling proud of this will do away a sense of being cursed by God, yet we belong also to the body of Christ. We will realise that we are not hopeless creatures as it is often thought by some of us.
5. SASO tries amongst the important things to create hope for those who are in the rural areas to use every possible means in trying above breadline through encouragement of self-help and literacy campaigns, etc.

From what has been said above, it is clear that SASO though [it] does not claim to be a Christian movement, its objectives can be reconciled with Christian values. Therefore we feel that SASO needs theologians and pastors in the great task before them. Hence we find ourselves being obliged to stand for SASO in spite of difficulties that may arise.<sup>54</sup>

Every year the Missiological Institute, a research centre of the Lutheran Theological

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<sup>53</sup> [www.info.gov.za/leaders/provgovt.kzn.htm](http://www.info.gov.za/leaders/provgovt.kzn.htm) (accessed on 21 October 2008).

<sup>54</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.** Simon Maimela to the staff of the Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo, 8 March 1971. LTI Archives: STU-IL.

Centre, held a theological consultation which attracted big number of scholars and lecturers. Black theology dominated the 1972 consultation. The theme – “Relevant Theology for Africa” – made reference to a theme which was very popular at the time: to be relevant theology had to be black or, as some speakers preferred to say, African. Black theologians such as Manas Buthelezi, Desmond Tutu, Douglas Makhathini, Matthew Makhaye, Ephraim Mosothoane and Mashwabada Mayatula, many of whom were or had been associated with seminaries, gave papers.<sup>55</sup> All expressed, without necessarily be overt about them, ideas familiar to the black consciousness movement. Buthelezi, elaborating on earlier papers, explained the difference between black theology and African theology.<sup>56</sup> Makhathini, a lecturer at the Lutheran Theological College, explained what black theology meant for him “A Black Theologian,” he wrote, “ought to be literally a Black man who knows the ‘itness’ of being black, and can express his mind, his heart and his feelings as he knows how they are affected by the Scriptures”.<sup>57</sup> Tutu, then the director for Africa of the London-based Theological Education Fund after a few years at Fedsem as a lecturer, contrasted the Western values and the African worldview.<sup>58</sup> Mosothoane, a lecturer at St Bede’s College, looked at the New Testament in an African perspective. “Are these beautiful but empty words,” he emphatically concluded, “especially to those who are looked upon by their fellow men as scum?”<sup>59</sup>

The only presenter openly associated with SASO and the black consciousness movement was Mashwabada Mayatula, a pastor of the Bantu Bethlehem Christian Apostolic Church of Africa and student at Umphumulo. In his paper he argued that black theology had started a century before with the apparition of the African independent churches.<sup>60</sup> While pursuing his studies, Mayatula was involved in political activities. In July 1972, two months before the Umphumulo consultation, he had been elected interim

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<sup>55</sup> Hans-Jurgen Becken, ed, *Relevant Theology for South Africa. Report on a Consultation of the Missiological Institute at Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo, Natal, September 12 – 21, 1972* (Durban, Lutheran Publishing House, 1973).

<sup>56</sup> Manas Buthelezi, “African Theology and Black Theology: A Search for a Theological Method,” in Becken, ed., *Relevant Theology for Africa*, 18-24.

<sup>57</sup> Douglas Makhathini, “Black Theology”, in Becken, ed., *Relevant Theology for Africa*, 8-17, here 12.

<sup>58</sup> Desmond Tutu, “Viability”, in Becken, ed., *Relevant Theology for South Africa*, 34-39.

<sup>59</sup> Ephraim Mosothoane, “The message of the New Testament seen in African perspective”, in Becken, ed., *Relevant Theology for South Africa*, 55-67, here 67.

<sup>60</sup> Mashwabada Mayatula, “African Independent Churches contribution to a relevant theology,” in Becken, ed., *Relevant Theology for South Africa*, 174-177.

head of the Black People's Convention, a confederation of black organisations initiated by SASO.<sup>61</sup> In true messianic fashion he saw black consciousness as the realisation of the kingdom of God, “blurr[ing],” as Magaziner noted, “the lines between political and religious talk almost beyond recognition”.<sup>62</sup> The speech he delivered at the Convention's first national congress in December 1972 was remarkable from that point of view:

Black brothers and sisters, I am grateful that today we begin to open the first page of the history book of the newly resurrected Black nation in South Africa. At long last, the LIBERATOR, namely, the promised Black Messiah, “the very God of the very God”, has come. He has freely given us what we prayed for, for decades, that is, the HOLY SPIRIT – the spirit of Black Consciousness, of Black Solidarity, and Black unity.<sup>63</sup>

### **Student discontent at St Peter's Seminary**

St Peter's Seminary, Hammanskraal, the Catholic seminary for blacks, was also touched by black consciousness but, unlike Fedsem and the Lutheran Theological Centre, the students who were politicised faced heavy opposition from the seminary management. Former students and staff members joined some of the organisations of the black consciousness movement.

Until 1970 the rector of the seminary, Oswin Magrath, an English Dominican, openly expressed support for the cause of black clergy. Aware of the influence of Pan-Africanism among his students, he reckoned that the best way for the church to fulfill its mission was to hand over power to the new generation of indigenous leaders. Magrath was instrumental in the establishment of St Peter's Old Boy Association (SPOBA), a black priests caucus which played a key role in the politicisation of St Peter's in the 1970s.<sup>64</sup>

During its first years of existence SPOBA sent a series of petitions to the Catholic bishops requesting structural change in the church. As these fell on deaf ears, they resolved to publicise their message in a secular newspaper, the *Rand Daily Mail*, on 27

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<sup>61</sup> Karis and Gerhard, *From Protest to Challenge*, 5, 131.

<sup>62</sup> Magaziner, “Christ in Context,” 100.

<sup>63</sup> Speech by Reverend Mashwabada Mayatula, first national congress of the Black People's Convention, Hammanskraal, December 16, 1972, in Karis and Gerhard, *From Protest to Challenge*, 5, 519-520.

<sup>64</sup> Denis, *Dominican Friars*, 224-225.



January 1970.<sup>65</sup> They were true pioneers. By then, SASO had not yet been formally constituted and black theology did not exist as a movement. Basil Moore's seminar paper "Towards Black Theology" only started to circulate later during the course of the same year as support material to the seminars organised by UCM throughout the country.<sup>66</sup> The "Black Priests Manifesto", as it was to be known, bore the signature of five Catholic priests: Patrick Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, David Moetapele, John Louwfant, Clement Mokoka and Anthony Mongameli Mabona. Only, Mabona, was a lecturer at the seminary. The others were parish priests. The manifesto accused the church leadership of racism:

There was a time when most people believed that Africans had infinite patience. Their mental inertia and natural laziness were partly responsible for this.

Be as it may, we want to state that the African is capable of an agonising "ENOUGH! ENOUGH! In spite of our ordination to the priesthood, we have been treated like glorified altar-boys."<sup>67</sup>

The Black Priests Manifesto left a lasting impression on the seminary students. Then a student at St Peter's, Mokgethi Motlahbi recalled in an interview reading the document in the newspaper and suddenly awakening to the political problem of his own training for the priesthood.<sup>68</sup> Magrath, the rector, expressed solidarity with the signatories of the document in the Catholic newspaper *The Southern Cross*.<sup>69</sup> Not everybody supported his views, however, and at the end of the year he was asked to resign on the grounds that he was no longer able to maintain discipline in the seminary.

His successor, a Dutch friar by the name of Dominic Scholten, took a radically different approach. A good manager, he clamped down on drinking and redressed the financial situation of the seminary, but he had no time for restless students. Even though he found money to send black priests for further studies, the perception long remained

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<sup>65</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.** "Our Church has let us down", *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 January 1970, reproduced in *African Ecclesiastical Review* 12 (1970), 175-178; Karis and Gerhard, *From Protest to Challenge*, 5, 424-427.

<sup>66</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.** Basil Moore, "Towards a Black Theology" (1970). HP AD1126 A6(a), 1-23. See Magaziner, "Christ in Context," 96-97.

<sup>67</sup> Karis and Gerhard, *From Protest to Challenge*, 5, 424.

<sup>68</sup> Mokgethi Motlahbi, interviewed by Daniel Magaziner on 3 March 2006 in Pretoria. See Magaziner, "Christ in Context," 105.

<sup>69</sup> Denis, *Dominican Friars*, 227.

among students and priests that he was opposed to the upliftment of black clergy. SPOBA confronted him on the day of his installation and at regular intervals during the rest of the year. One day, he received an anonymous letter with this warning: “We will use spies to get rid of you from our place. This seminary is for blacks.” Tension built up to the point that in October 1971 the bishops decided to close the seminary. When it reopened in February 1972 more than half of the staff were new and the student body was also different. In 1971 nineteen students out of a total of thirty eight had been dismissed or decided themselves to leave the seminary. Edmund Hill, an English Dominican who supported the banned students, went to teach at Fedsem. He soon received a banning order from the apartheid government, however, and was forced to leave the country.<sup>70</sup>

SASO had a branch at St Peter’s. Leaders of the organisation had spent a night at the seminary towards the end of 1969 while on their way to Turfloop and met with students on this occasion.<sup>71</sup> From what we know the then rector, Oswin Magrath, had no objection to SASO being present at St Peter’s. His successor, Dominic Scholten, had a more ambiguous attitude. He allowed the student organisation to use the newly-opened conference centre of the seminary for its national conference in July 1972<sup>72</sup> and he did the same with the Black People’s Convention in December of the same year.<sup>73</sup> This was a brave move as SASO’s presence at St Peter’s made the police suspicious. They were convinced that arms were stored at the seminary and regularly sent “observers” to find out about them.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, Scholten did not authorise the SASO representatives to address the seminary students. In the 1972 annual report he expressed his misgivings about the black consciousness movement. SASO was welcome in the conference centre, he stressed, but not in the seminary. He had to admit though that black consciousness was “in full swing” among the students:

Inside St Peter’s – during the holidays we were host to one exponent of black militancy and intelligentsia (SASO) which, at least in theory, stands for severing all links with the white (student) world. [...] It is true that there has been no direct outside interference. In the only case when the president and the secretary of a

<sup>70</sup> See his letter to *The Southern Cross*, 15 March 1972, p. 10. See also Denis, *The Dominican Friars*, 231-232.

<sup>71</sup> Oswin Magrath, interview with the author in Cedara on 19 July 1996.

<sup>72</sup> Karis and Gerhard, *From Protest to Challenge*, 5, 519

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 533.

<sup>74</sup> Bernard Connor, letter to the author, Cape Town, 24 September 1993.

militant black organisation [presumably SASO during school time] had “decided” to to come and address the students, the staff “decided” to the contrary. However, for the rest, ‘Black Consciousness’ was in full swing. It was shown in uncouth behaviour towards white guests, refusal to write examinations, undue criticism of lecturers, unwillingness to co-operate, or simply passive resistance, sometimes also in the celebration of the liturgy.”<sup>75</sup>

That black consciousness was influential at St Peter’s is shown by the fact that former students of the seminary exercised various positions in the movement. The first to join were the SPOBA leaders. Smangaliso Mkhathswa, by then a member of the SACBC Secretariat in Pretoria, was one of the main organisers of the Black Renaissance Convention in December 1974.<sup>76</sup> Mongameli Mabona, while still a lecturer at St Peter’s, gave a paper on “white worship and black people” at the national seminar on black theology organised by UCM at the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre in March 1971.<sup>77</sup> Released from his duties to do further studies in Rome in May 1972, he eventually joined the ANC in London.<sup>78</sup> Clement Mokoka, another signatory of the Black Priests Manifesto, co-hosted in December 1971 a SASO workshop in Winterveld where he had a parish.<sup>79</sup> Sent to jail for his political activities in 1976, he escaped and took refuge in Holland.<sup>80</sup>

Seminary students also became SASO activists. One of them was Mokgethi Motlhabi, a student at St Peter’s who refused to resume his studies at the beginning of 1972 after the temporary closure of the seminary by the bishops. He became acting director of the UCM Black Theology Project in March 1972 when Sabelo Ntwasa was banned. He later coordinated a black theology initiative in the Johannesburg-based Association of Black Churchmen.<sup>81</sup> Dan Mthembeni’s case was similar. Expelled from St Peter’s during his final year in 1971, he enrolled for a teachers certificate at Fort Hare the

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<sup>75</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.**[Dominic Scholten], St Peter’s Major Seminary, Annual Report, 1972, 6. Archives of the Dominican Southern African Vicariate, Springs.

<sup>76</sup> Report by Father Smangaliso Mkhathswa on the Black Renaissance Convention, Hammanskraal, December 13-16, 1974 in Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, 5, 533-542.

<sup>77</sup> Karis and Gerhard, *From Protest to Challenge*, 5, 477-478. This paper was later included in *Essays in Black Theology*. See Basil Moore, ed. *Black Theology. The South African Voice*. (London, C. Hurst, 1973), 104-108.

<sup>78</sup> Denis, *Dominican Friars*, 225.

<sup>79</sup> Ramphela Mamphela, *A Life* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1995), 63.

<sup>80</sup> Joel Letupu, “The priest who came back from the cold,” *The Southern Cross*, 11 August 1996.

<sup>81</sup> Moore, ed., *Black Theology. The South African Voice*, xi-xii.

following year. In January 1973 he was appointed SASO regional director for the Eastern Cape region.<sup>82</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Aimed at filling the vacuum left by the banning of the ANC and the PAC and the incarceration of their leaders, black consciousness was, first and foremost, a political movement. By affirming the identity of black people it challenged white power and white governance. But black consciousness was more than a political movement. It embraced all aspects of life including religion. This is why black theology, while distinct from black consciousness, was so intimately related to it. There was, as Basil Moore, suggested, an organic connection between black theology and the liberation movement.<sup>83</sup>

This paper shows that in at least three South African seminaries – the Federal Theological Seminary in Alice, the Lutheran Theological College in Umphumulo and St Peter’s Seminary in Hammanskraal – a substantial number of staff and students developed a symbiotic relationship with the black consciousness movement in the early part of its history. For the people trained in these seminaries, the involvement in SASO, the Black Community Programmes and the other components of the black consciousness movement had a lasting effect on their understanding of ministry or, if they left active church service, on the orientation of their professional life. While studying for the ministry, they discovered ways of integrating spiritual life, social action and political engagement that they had never imagined before.

The seminaries, on the other hand, significantly contributed to the vitality of the black consciousness movement in the early 1970s. They did not only play a role in the development of black theology, as one would expect of theological institutions, but in social and political organisations such as SASO, the Black People’s Convention or the Black Community Programmes. This was especially true of Fedsem which developed, until it was expropriated by the state, strong links with the SASO’s Fort Hare branch, the BCP office in King William’s Town, Jwaxa Home Industry and the Zanempilo clinic.

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<sup>82</sup> **Error! Main Document Only.** Minutes of [SASO] Executive and Staff meeting, 2 January 1973. LTI Archives: IJ.

<sup>83</sup> Basil Moore, “Black Theology Revisited,” *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* 1 (1994). Available online: [www.sorat.ukzn.ac.za/theology/bct/moore.htm](http://www.sorat.ukzn.ac.za/theology/bct/moore.htm) (accessed on 25 October 2008).

Seminary staff and students or former students occupied key positions in SASO and related organisations. This was also true, although to a lesser degree, of the Lutheran Theological College, where support for the black consciousness grew at a slower pace and in St Peter's Seminary, Hammanskraal where, after 1971, black consciousness faced opposition from the seminary authorities.