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SWAPO, THE CHURCH, AND THE ROLE OF ACCOMPANIMENT
IN NAMIBIA'S LIBERATION

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1: INTRODUCTION

A. Lutherans, Theology, and Apartheid in Context

One of the more unique aspects of Namibia's liberation story is that its major revolutionary group, the *South West African People's Organization* (SWAPO), pursued a program of armed revolution with a simultaneous emphasis on humanitarian development and care for its young and elderly population while hiding in exile. The latter proved to be an agenda that churches could approve of, stand behind, and financially support. The Lutheran Church played just such a supporting role in Namibia's long struggle for independence. Various Lutheran denominations were physically active on the ground within the country as well as diplomatically and supportively engaged on the international level. Wartburg Theological Seminary also took part in advocating for the Namibians' cause, first from the seminary's basement in Dubuque, Iowa, and then later from the group's dedicated offices in Colorado.

The chapters that follow will focus on: the origins and character of SWAPO; the local churches' persecution under apartheid and their appeal to the global church for assistance; and, finally, the global church's response in accompaniment and the Namibian's eventual freedom. What follows directly, however, is an honest attempt to understand the theological and ideological contours of the region's dominant white culture, which eventually led to such

atrocities. The remainder of this chapter explores what elements of that culture's own history led to its implementation of apartheid segregation as an acceptable social practice and the native Namibian's initial unsuccessful political resistance to this agenda.

Our tradition's condemnation of apartheid typically finds its articulation in reference to Luther's theological paradigm of the two kingdoms.¹ Within this binary model, the right-hand kingdom represents the spiritual world of God's obvious sovereignty, and its elements include heavenly powers such as forgiveness and salvation in Christ. Within the right-hand realm God's glory and authority, as the maker and ultimate redeemer of all creation through the Son, are always apparent and manifestly effective. In contrast, the left-hand kingdom represents the earthly realm of the human world and its secular powers, such as governments, social institutions—including the earthly church, and the conventional social hierarchy which preserves civil order.

This left-hand kingdom also represents humanity's experience of God's fallen creation as an imperfect existence in a sinful and broken world. God's presence within this left-hand kingdom often seems hidden or obscured and it remains only perceptible to us through the lens of faith as a gift from the

¹ William J. Wright, "Interpretations of Luther's Idea of the Two Kingdoms during the Last Two Centuries," in *Martin Luther's Understanding of God's Two Kingdoms: A Response to the Challenge of Skepticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 11-45.

Spirit. For this reason, Lutherans traditionally consider Christ's liberating promise of justification as solely discernible in faith via the intervention of the Holy Spirit.²

Within this left-hand kingdom of our earthly existence, God's love often reveals itself only in the form of weakness or a concern for what seems like foolishness from society's dominant collective opinion.³ So we frequently confess that God seems hidden in this reality because God's glory and sovereignty remain questionable based on appearances. Humanity's failure to recognize Jesus as God's incarnate Word consistently is one example of this.⁴ The white SW Africans' failure to recognize the equivalent human dignity of the native population as fellow created beings equally loved by God is another example of this.

One of the initial complexities of studying twentieth century SW Africa from an American, or any Western, Christian perspective is negotiating the

² Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, "4.3. Justification by Faith and through Grace," in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans PC, 2000), 19-20.

³ Julius Nghistivali Mtuleni, "A Christian Attitude Towards Violence and Resistance: A Theological Appraisal of Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms with Reference to the Namibian Situation" (Master of Sacred Theology Thesis, Wartburg Theological Seminary, 1987) 34-36; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

⁴ Kazoh Kitamori, "The Pain of God and the Historical Jesus," in *Theology of the Pain of God: the First Original Theology from Japan* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 32-43.

temptation to prematurely judge the context and assign blame so as to be done with things. This often provides us with the illusion of having mastered a subject. It also frees us from bearing some share of the cultural shame for what transpired; in standing with the victims we may then also deny our connections and relation to the offenders. From a contemporary 'first-world' perspective it may sometimes seem more important to achieve consensus and empathize with one party rather than to struggle to understand the ideology and social history at play within an alternate culture's various conflicts. Yet it is precisely this approach that is essential to discourage human atrocities, such as those committed under apartheid, from being repeated in the future.

It is only in resisting the urge to condemn that we can find ourselves made ready to approach all parties from the understanding and in the reconciliation to which Jesus Christ calls us. This is also the radical approach to which contemporary liberation theology ultimately calls us.⁵ It is solely in this careful situational consideration of all the identities present in a conflict that we become able to respectfully differentiate these parties from each other and from ourselves.⁶ And it is in this great theological moment alone that we learn something about who we are, because we took the time to learn

⁵ Walter Altmann, "The Cross," in *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective* (Eugene, OR: 1992), 19-25.

⁶ Craig Nesson, "The Ultimate and the Penultimate," in *Many Members, Yet One Body: Committed Same-Gender Relationships and the Mission of the Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 9-20.

something about who all these others were, and in the midst of this we come to learn something more about who God is, too.

The theologian M. Thomas Thangaraj calls this approach *crossing boundaries* theology and it is especially useful for the study of difficult and ugly episodes of historical inhumanity such as the practice of apartheid in SW Africa.⁷ Thomas Thangaraj claims that the act of crossing boundaries always carries with it a theological dimension because it involves the human journey of translating our core spiritual understandings into practice. So when new contexts challenge our core theology we learn more about the contours of our own personal confessions because we define ourselves in comparison and contrast to these new others. From this approach, human consciousness is primarily about relation and its subsequent social dialogue. Such experiences increase our awareness that God's creation is a world of many different cultures. They also remind us that we as humans are all struggling to know and to honor the ultimate in our own idiosyncratic and limited ways.

⁷ M. Thomas Thangaraj, "Let God be God: Crossing Boundaries as Theological Practice," in *Border Crossings: Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 94.

For Thangaraj, idolatry and sin result from humanity's frequent mistaking of penultimate or proximate concerns for ultimate ones.⁸ From this perspective there can be no theology of apartheid since the practice itself implies a forced antithesis to *boundary crossing*. Apartheid comes from the Afrikaner word for "separateness" and it represents by definition the prohibition of any dialogue between certain members of God's creation.⁹ Apartheid denies human relationship as one of God's chief purposes and it denies healthy social communities as one of God's major intended blessings for all to all in Christ Jesus. Hence any attempt to articulate a theology of apartheid is ultimately a false substitution of flawed human ideology for the divine revelation of God's self to God's creation. So apartheid is not theologically defensible.

The intent of this chapter's inquiry is to provide some understanding of how and why a bible-literate Christian people could come to believe that it was God's will that they should practice such systematic social and physical violence upon their human neighbors. The rest of this study will focus on the SW African resistance group that formed in response to apartheid's implementation and the global Church's eventual support of that group.

⁸ Ibid, 91; **also** H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1956), 39.

⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second edition, 1989; online version March 2011. s.v. "apartheid," <http://oed.com:80/Entry/9032> (accessed May 2, 2011).

The Union of South Africa's early theological heritage was a blend of classic Dutch Reformed Calvinism and Anglicanism with some Lutheran accents from the region's earlier German colonial heritage. The Roman Catholic Church was also actively present, although it remained ecumenically isolated within the region during this time.¹⁰ Within this context, Luther's two kingdoms model was not the dominant paradigm. Calvin's doctrines regarding *election* and *predestination*, however, were very culturally influential in the White-dominated Dutch Reformed Church. Predestination convinced them of their superior role over the natives as God's will, and election fed their belief in both an ultimate hierarchy where they would spiritually dominate while the hopeless native population remained incapable of being saved. Such ideology was used by the Dutch colonial descendants, also known as Afrikaners or Boers, to justify their seizure of the native's lands and resources.¹¹

Afrikaner history involves a massive migration inland by these Boer people during colonial times. This movement is known as the *great trek* and it carries a cultural relevance for them akin to that which Americans often

¹⁰ Richard Elphick, "The Benevolent Empire and the Social Gospel: Missionaries and South African Christians in the Age of Segregation," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1997), 347-348.

¹¹ Patrick A. Kalilombe, "Black Theology," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell P, 1992), 207-208.

associate with their own colonial revolution in 1776-1783. The Dutch colonial Boers completed this long northern migration on foot and afterwards they endured numerous British attempts to drive them from these settlements.¹² Because they retained their settlements and they maintained their Calvinist faith, the Afrikaners came to understand their history as a sort of contemporary exodus in which God had delivered southern Africa into their keeping like God had delivered the Promised Land into the Israelites possession. By this same logic, these Afrikaner Christians came to perceive southern Africa's native population as something like the current equivalent of the Canaanites—meaning, they felt free to enslave and/or execute them at their own discretion.¹³

Much has been made of Calvinism's role in the exploitation and mistreatment of southern Africa's indigenous people of many tribes. There is a majority voice within the historic criticism that favors this interpretation.¹⁴ Towards the close of the twentieth century, however, the example set by English imperialism had also come to be seen as equally complicit in the

¹² David Bosch, "The Roots and Fruits of Afrikaner Civil Religion," in *New Faces of Africa* (Pretoria, South Africa: U of South Africa, 1984), 21-25.

¹³ Eugene M. Klaaren, "Creation and Apartheid: South African Theology since 1948," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Berkley, CA: U of California P, 1997), 371-375.

¹⁴ Shekutaamba Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia* (USA: Lutheran Quarterly, 1994), 127-131.

development of the South African civil-religious identity which led to apartheid. This perspective views the Union's twentieth-century, neo-fascist policies as arising from their cultural affinity for and imitation of their own British imperial conquerors from the previous century.¹⁵ It also blames British scholarship for pursuing and promoting the *Calvinist-cause* theory as a means of disguising their own culpability for culturally precipitating some of the ideology behind the social atrocity that would later emerge as apartheid.

Recent scholarship also suggests that a minority of Anglican missionaries during this period infused the theological culture of Afrikaner civil religion with a premillennial Christian perspective, which perhaps informed their cultural reluctance to embrace issues of human rights and social justice during the past century.¹⁶ Premillennial Christians believe there can be no just society on earth until Christ returns and establishes God's kingdom as the start of the millennium of peace as foretold in Revelation 20:1-6. The Afrikaners deep belief in this doctrine is now thought to have also contributed to their nearly universal moral quietism with regard to apartheid despite the practice's evident inhumanity.

¹⁵ Bosch, "The Roots and Fruits," 29-32.

¹⁶ Wallace G. Mills, "Millennial Christianity, British Imperialism, and African Nationalism," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1997), 337-346.

Some Afrikaners, however, were less quiet. Stellenbosch University's famous microbiologist and vintner, W. J van Zyl, for example, in a 1924 address regarding the prospect of interracial socializing is recorded as saying that "it is impossible to fraternize in society: we must be *brothers in the spirit*. [They] stand too far below us in morals. Friendly advances in practical life are impossible, and according to God's word also sinful."¹⁷ Zyl's comments remain shocking even when read in context because of their absolute nature. His use of the phrase "brothers in the spirit" evidences a Christian literacy distorted by social ideology into meaning its very opposite. Zyl's is a perspective which clearly views boundary crossing as "sinful," impractical, and forbidden. Yet it is also apparent from this same statement that Zyl considers himself a highly moral person and a Christian. One struggles to appreciate the ideological concession present within his own acknowledgement of the native population as "brothers in the spirit." This simple phrase, which was intended as a polite social concession by Zyl, can also be read ironically as evidence of God's prophetic agenda peeking through.

With attitudes such as this representing the dominant white culture of southern Africa in the early twentieth century, it is no wonder that SW Africa's educated natives' response was one of optimistic diplomacy followed

¹⁷ Elphick, "The Benevolent Empire," 361.

by thoughtful revolution. It is also no wonder that southern Africa's churches were divided over this issue for much of the conflict.¹⁸ It was incredible how SW Africa's revolutionaries struggled to remain practical in the midst of such brutality and how they managed to remain insightful about matters of ultimate concern. It was also miraculous how God's Holy Spirit remained present for these people even in the midst of such obvious and lengthy suffering.

B. Resistance Prior to SWAPO

Formal resistance to apartheid by native SW African political dissidents began as early as 1957.¹⁹ Documentation of the Union of South Africa's oppression of natives in this region, however, goes at least as far back as somewhere between the Union's origins as a self-governing, or "home ruled," English dominion around 1910 and Britain's declaration of SW Africa

¹⁸ Reginald H. Green, "Christianity and Political Economy in Africa: Notes toward Identification of Issues," in *Ecumenical Review*, 30, no. 1 (January 1 1978): 3-17; **also** Charles E. Brewster, "African Impatience for Change," in *Christian Century*, 94, no. 14 (April 20, 1977): 382-384; **and** Editorial, "Christian Conscience of South Africa," in *America* magazine, Vol. 91, Issue 25 (September 18, 1954): 582-583.

¹⁹ Roy J. Enquist, *Namibia: Land of Tears, Land of Promise* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated UPs, 1990), 66.

as its territorial possession in the years between 1920 and 1923.²⁰ The boundaries of what eventually became known as South West Africa, or SW Africa, were significantly expanded during this three year interval as the English claimed the land and forcibly subdued its indigenous people. This is not to say that exploitation and abuse of SW African natives did not occur prior to this period, rather it is meant to distinguish between colonial and modern post-colonial atrocities or a manifest slavery system and its more insidious hidden contemporary counterpart. The colonials were at least public about their exploitation and frank about their malice, while the Union's *modus operandi* was to clothe its systematic brutality within a facade of humanitarian propaganda based on cultural principles grounded in what we have already shown to be a false theology.²¹

Formal resistance by natives to the Union's numerous human rights violations did not occur prior 1957 for several reasons. South Africa's own history during this period between 1910 and the 1950s was turbulent, nebulous, and complicated. In the lead up to World War I, the Union was still a British dominion. South Africa initially took control of the neighboring colony known as German SW Africa in 1914 acting under British authority. Germany officially surrendered SW Africa to Britain the following year and

²⁰ Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, 124-126.

²¹ Klaaren, "Creation and Apartheid," 373.

the colony remained an interim English territory until the end of the First World War. Majority opinion regarding the colony's indigenous people during this period suggests illiteracy and post-war optimism—or the Namibians' hopeful belief that their own freedom would surely follow the new peace—as the two main reasons for an absence of political reactivity during this time.²² When SW Africa became a mandated territory of the Union in 1920, most first-world governments were still in the process of recovering from the War and a few of the new national boundaries remained atypically fluid for a time as treaty details were firmed up and definitively hashed out.²³

Much has been made of South Africa's radical interpretation of the League of Nations' *mandated territory* terminology with regard to SW Africa. The West insisted it meant that the Union was henceforth to be solely responsible for the "material and moral well-being and the social progress" of all SW Africa's people, including the native population, meaning both those of African as well as Asian Indian descent.²⁴ The Union, however, insisted that the League's *mandate* terminology bestowed full South African sovereignty upon the region or that it at least implied as much.

²² Enquist, *Namibia: Land of Tears, Land of Promise*, 61.

²³ Elphick, "The Benevolent Empire," 353.

²⁴ *Namibia in the 1980s* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations and the British Council of Churches, 1981), 10.

From 1920 to 1923 South Africa set about formally occupying the less developed northern lands of what the Union now considered to be its fifth, and newest, province called *South West Africa*. This northern territory had been the homeland of the Ovambo people and it was divided in 1890 between Portugal and Germany, in what later became Angola and SW Africa; the Ovambo people were thus split and they remain divided between both nations to this day.²⁵ Because of this history the Union made it their first priority to occupy, claim, and control SW Africa's northlands lest Angola encroach on their sovereignty.

As part of South Africa's early control agenda, in 1922, the Union passed legislation restricting the legal rights of all SW Africa's native people. Personal documentation became required of all non-White persons and any natives found outside of their government prescribed employment zones could be arrested as vagrants.²⁶ The League of Nations continually challenged these South African policies in international court until the start of World War II, but without any ground presence in the region to intercede on behalf of the natives such diplomatic advocacy remained too far removed to be effective in deterring the Union. During this same time, for example, the Union leveled new fees for the SW African natives' dog licenses and popular

²⁵ Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, 28.

²⁶ Enquist, *Namibia: Land of Tears, Land of Promise*, 62.

rumors of a labor demonstration led to a massacre in which the Union police machine gunned a crowd, killing over a hundred native people.²⁷

Animosity between the various immigrant ethnic groups within South Africa's White population decreased during this time as the white population consolidated its power by cooperating in the oppression of the native SW African victims. By 1925, the contract labor system was in place, a first draft application of what would come to be known as apartheid, wherein native men were forced to leave their families and live in either factory dorms or farm barracks closer to their prescribed work.²⁸ This legislation also made it possible for the government to separate resistance conspirators via forced labor relocations. Thus the Union would dissipate resistance movements before they had gained significant social momentum. SWAPO's founder Sam Nujoma learned to circumvent this social control early on by meeting in and around the national railway system where it was harder to identify individuals because of the setting's typical overcrowding. This would later prove crucial to the formation of his Ovambo People's Organization (OPO), SWAPO's predecessor party, in 1957.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid **and** Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, 131.

²⁸ Sam Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma* (London, Panaf Books, 2001), 50-51.

²⁹ Ibid, 53-62.

International intervention on behalf of SW Africa's native population remained bogged down during this interval. South Africa continued diplomatically to argue its sovereignty over the territory well into the 1970s. At the same time, they also argued that the United Nations lacked the authority to enforce the mandate of its predecessor body, the League of Nations, and that the UN lacked the influence to claim any new mandates of their own with regard to SW Africa.³⁰ By the time the UN became involved on the ground level, in 1988, the Union's apartheid agenda was already in full swing and this is the context in which SWAPO arose.³¹

During the 1950s, the white populations in several cities had grown and needed more land for housing development. So South Africa accelerated its racist programming. Natives in settlements that were adjacent or at least proximal to extant white neighborhoods were forcibly relocated. These communities had experienced mandatory relocation before, although never

³⁰ "South Africa Disturbed over UN Debate," an editorial in *Christian Century*, 63, no. 49 (December 4, 1946): 1461; **also** Roger Murray, "After SWAPO Concessions Will Independence Flounder on Walvis Bay?" in *New African* magazine (April 1978) 39-41: Box 5, Folder A3; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives; **and** Episcopal Churchmen of South Africa for a free South Africa, in *Newsletter* (August 1982): Box 5, Folder A4; Wartburg theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

³¹ Homer A. Jack, "Markus Kooper: Pastor in Exile," in *Christian Century*, 77, no.9 (March 2, 1960): 253-254; **and** Anthony A. D'Amato, "Apartheid: Catalyst in the UN," in *Christian Century*, 83, no. 43 (October 26, 1966): 1303-1305.

this swiftly; they were not given the time, for example, to dismantle their homes—a contextually acceptable practice and convention. Adding insult to injury, the relocated natives found that their compulsory new locations lacked adequate shelters and charged rental fees 12 times higher than their previous location; and this for living even farther from their equally compulsory work locations. A public meeting in Katatura to organize a protest of this policy was raided by police who executed 13 people and wounded some 40 more when using live submachine gun rounds to disperse the crowd.³²

There was no passive resistance component within the natives' early liberation struggle, beyond mere assembly, conspiracy, and international petitioning, because their total lack of legal rights in this context made such methods impractical and ineffective; such an approach would simply have encouraged and aided the genocide that was, arguably, already in progress. Despite SW Africa's strong ethnic connections to the Gandhian heritage of non-violent protest, resistance leaders felt that the native population was already too thoroughly demoralized to master this discipline.³³ Within the region's recent memory and the natives' cultural consciousness, for example,

³² Enquist, *Namibia: Land of Tears, Land of Promise*, 65.

³³ Paul E. Brink, "African Leaders' Commitment to Justice," in *Christian Century*, 94, no. 40 (December 7, 1977): 1143-1146.

there was an incident in which Chief Tshilongo of the Uukuambi withheld his tribe's tax payment from South African authorities and withdrew his people to a remote settlement. The chief and all his people were subsequently annihilated in an aerial saturation bombing so brutal that even the Union citizenry considered it an extreme response at the time.³⁴

The OPO arose in response to these and other atrocities. Between 1957 and 1959 it developed a network among SW Africa's Ovambo communities to petition foreign powers and to communicate South Africa's horrific atrocities to the outside world via clandestine contacts abroad, often in the Angolan and Zambian wilderness; the natives in these lands were both sympathetic and culturally similar—many of the Angolan natives were the Namibians' own Ovambo relations. By 1959 the party disbanded. Several changes in leadership had taken place within the OPO by this time as numerous operatives were discovered and isolated or incarcerated by the Union's police and armed forces personnel.³⁵ Nujoma perceived the OPO's strategy and logistics as effective, but he felt that the organization was too limited in its vision of unity. His next political party would be multi-tribal in an attempt to expand its power base but equally tenacious and far sighted in its approach to resisting South Africa.

³⁴ Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 15.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 57-58.

2. SWAPO

A. Origins of SWAPO

SWAPO, the *South West African People's Organization*, officially began as a political party on April 19, 1960. It was formed by Mr. Sam Nujoma, Mr. Hifikepunye Pohamba, and several other Namibian intellectuals from the remnants of the Ovamboland People's Organization, or OPO.³⁶ SWAPO sought swift independence for Namibia, which was then called South West Africa, from the Union of South Africa. They initially pursued Namibian independence via diplomatic channels and aggressive international self-promotion. When South Africa denied a United Nations' order for withdrawal from the territory in 1966, however, SWAPO began participating in an armed struggle for Namibian independence.³⁷ This choice eventually led the group into an affiliation with the Soviet Union as a resource for arms and training.

SWAPO'S affiliation with the Soviets also eventually led to the group's perceived ties with several smaller Communist countries such as Vietnam and Cuba.³⁸ These associations, although their degree remains disputable,

³⁶ Enquist, *Namibia: Land of Tears, Land of Promise*, 66.

³⁷ South West African People's Organization, "History of SWAPO Party," on SWAPO Party's homepage, accessed April 3, 2011, <http://www.swapoparty.org/history.html>.

³⁸ World Conference Against Apartheid, Racism, and Colonialism in Southern Africa, "Political Program of SWAPO of Namibia," *A distributed mimeograph*

would later complicate Namibia's general relations with the conservative West and with Britain and the United States of America in particular. There was always more to SWAPO's approach, however, than just military action. From the very beginning, it was founded on a principle of a national unity that called Namibians to a more modern self-understanding outside of their divergent tribal identities. The OPO, Nujoma's predecessor party, had failed as a labor union largely because it was just one of what were then numerous tribal political groups acting out of concert with one another. South Africa had been pitting tribal groups against each other since at least as early as 1946.³⁹ But SWAPO was nothing if not progressive even for the 1960s.

Within SWAPO's initial approach to independence there is a sensibility and prudence about issues of civic development, social education, and literacy as well as politics and diplomacy that continued even after the group's entrance into armed conflict with South Africa. During the time prior to the group's military activities, SWAPO's multidimensional approach had been politics, diplomacy, and development; after 1966, however, they merely added military activity as a fourth front without discontinuing any of the

handout; (1978): Box 5, Folder A3; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

³⁹ Editorial. "South Africa Disturbed," 1461.

other three.⁴⁰ SWAPO also sustained this four front approach despite the challenge of maintaining development and education programing in the midst of a 24 year civil war.⁴¹

B. SWAPO'S Camps as a Practical Resistance with Foresight

One example of SWAPO's foresight was its early cultivation of good relationships with Namibia's neighboring states. Allies such as Zambia and Angola provided sanctuary to literally thousands of Namibian refugees during the conflict's most intense periods of fighting. This saved many of Namibia's women and children from persecution and murder at the hands of roving brute squads from the South African Defense Force.⁴² An example of SWAPO's practicality is the group's use of this forced-exile context to pursue literacy education and health training so that when the revolution succeeded

⁴⁰ Susan Nghidinwa, "Namibian Teacher Responsible for Development Projects Involving 2k Namibian Women Refugee's in Zambia," *Transcript of a Speech Given in England* (1974): Box 5, Folder A1; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

⁴¹ Theo Ben Gurirab, "Namibia: For Freedom and Independence," A *Voices For Liberation* Pamphlet Series. New York: Africa Fund associated with American Committee on Africa, (1981): Box 5, Folder A5; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

⁴² Pendukeni Kaulinge, "Namibia: Double Struggle for Women," Interview: *Africa Now* Magazine (August 1983): Box 5, Folder A1; Wartburg theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

Namibia's people would be ready to enter the twentieth century and participate economically with the West. It also meant that future Namibian generations would then be strong and ready to face the challenges of developing their country's infrastructure in the years to come.⁴³

Testimony from the female leaders of these camps reveals life within them as difficult and uncertain. They were not regularly supplied with necessities and the camps' leaders often had to learn to improvise. Educational programming often had to be fluid and adapt to the community's immediate priorities. Susan Nghidinwa, a camp leader in Zambia, spoke of how Namibia would only succeed after liberation with an accompaniment of development; therefore literacy and employment skills were an emphasis in her camps.⁴⁴

Ms. Nghidinwa witnessed first-hand how the Union of South Africa's *Bantu* educational paradigm served an agenda of limitation by refusing her advancement beyond a sixth-grade education. She considered herself lucky to have grown up in the era when the missionary school system was still being tolerated by South Africa. "It was more math and language focused," she explained. And it was reading that really opened Nghidinwa's eyes and enabled her to appreciate and eventually join SWAPO. Reading first made

⁴³ Nghidinwa, "Namibian Teacher Responsible," in Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

her critical of Ovamboland and the Union's other tribal reservation systems. Ms. Nghidinwa believes education provided a vital role in liberating and empowering her to serve and liberate others, especially children. This was a priority for SWAPO because it was this next generation that would, in turn, shape and direct the course of the first free Namibian society for which they struggled.

Another camp leader, Pendukeni Kaulinge, spoke of how the Union's Defense Force began slaughtering civilian-owned cattle along SW Africa's shared northern borders with Angola and Zambia. This was done as a means of depriving their refugee camps of milk for the children. This tactic, however, only led the civilian population subsequently to donate their cattle to the camps before the Defense Force could slaughter the animals. Keeping cattle in the wild, however, presented new challenges. It required the camps to employ sharpshooters to defend the cattle from natural predators. Because of the nature of the camps these shooters had to be chosen from the camp's available adult population. Many Namibian women therefore learned to shoot and became very skilled snipers. Some of these women also went on to train SWAPO's guerilla forces into better shooters; some others, for example Ms. Kaulinge, even went on to join in the fighting.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Kaulinge, "Namibia: Double Struggle," in Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

Ms. Kaulinge also related that the refugees were no longer able to come out of hiding and attend church services because the Defense Force made it a standard practice to mine the grounds around area churches to prohibit such gatherings. She reported that although SWAPO was no longer illegal it remained persecuted in SW Africa. Of particular concern to Kaulinge was the Union's denial of care and family visitation to pregnant female prisoners taken into custody for brief and long term incarceration.

It is clear from her testimony that SWAPO's refugee support and education programming took an interest in the practical welfare of Namibia's people even during their armed conflict with the Union of SA. It is also evident that the Church in Namibia had been ministering to the refugee community on at least a minimal level, which the Union's Defense Force refused either to tolerate or negotiate about. This mining of churchyards serves as a vivid example of how the gospel was compromised and suppressed by the Union during this time. It also suggests both the lengths to which Defense Force troops were willing to go, and the priority of Christian worship as a regular practice among the refugee communities within this context.

C. A Correspondent Theology Under SWAPO'S Ideology

To this day, SWAPO claims no official Christian affiliation. In fact current documents like their website never even name the World Council of Churches, despite the fact that SWAPO received consistent official recognition as well as financial assistance from them starting as early as 1981.⁴⁶ Yet certain aspects of SWAPO's language in their policy documents tend to exhibit a subliminal familiarity with Christian discourse and culture. In President Nujoma's inaugural address, for example, he refers to his leadership role as a "sacred responsibility."⁴⁷ Earlier in this same document he speaks of "laid down lives" and "precious blood" when referencing Namibia's fallen patriots. Mr. Nujoma also speaks about a "powerful force of conviction in the righteousness and justness" of Namibia's cause.

This language of sacred sacrifice and just righteousness rings familiar to Christian ears precisely because it employs an established symbolism that is recognizable. Mr. Nujoma is in fact drawing upon that tradition's symbolism in an attempt to link its credible solemnity to his present momentous event, a free Namibia's first presidential inauguration. Mr.

⁴⁶ "Council of Churches Awards Namibian Rebels \$125,000," in *JET* magazine, 61, no.6 (October 22, 1981): 24.

⁴⁷ Nujoma, "Appendix 1, Inaugural Speech 21 March 1990," in *Where Others Wavered*, 445-447.

Nujoma's rhetorical strategy of association succeeds here because Christian symbolism is an embedded part of his nation's cultural subtext. The presence of such language, however, is not surprising since it was Christian missionary schools that provided for the secondary, if not primary and secondary, education of most of SWAPO's leadership.⁴⁸

This can be said with certainty because the Union of South Africa banned the education of SW African natives beyond the primary sixth level. The Union also insisted that such instruction was given to SW African children only in the Afrikaans language as a means of further limiting the children's future communication potential.⁴⁹ Because of such policies, intellectually hungry SW African adolescents flocked to Christian missionary schools where they were catechized as well as educated in crucial areas such as math and various foreign languages. Anglican missionary schools, for example, were permitted to teach English along with their more academic content because it was viewed as central to their spiritual tradition. Mission schools in SW Africa also learned to offer evening classes, so that day laboring SW African youths could still participate in their programs. It is really no surprise, therefore, that the Christian ethos and elements from its

⁴⁸ Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 31-45.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

discourse eventually became a foundational part of the future free Namibia's cultural matrix.

In a 1976 SWAPO document authored by their Central Committee, for example, there is some discussion of the armed struggle in which they were then engaged as a "just war."⁵⁰ Part of the self-justification given for SWAPO's guerilla activities was that these were one portion of a larger struggle to "bring about conditions under which war" would "be ended forever." Such a statement can be seen as utopian, but it can also be interpreted as eschatological, depending on how much of Namibia's Christian ethos we permit ourselves to read into it. Elsewhere in the document the Central Committee speaks about its "abolition" of the "destructive spirit of individualism" as well as SWAPO's need to begin the "cultivation of a spirit of self-reliance among" the people.

Although the tone within this second document remains Marxist throughout, with many references to the masses and collective consciousness, there also appears to be some Christian symbolism, and a Christian ethical ideology present. These references in turn suggest a theological subtext as present just beneath the articulated ideology of the SWAPO party. This

⁵⁰ South West African People's Organization, "Armed Struggle," in *SWAPO Political Program* booklet (Lusaka, Zambia: SWAPO Department of Publicity and Information, 1976): Box 5, Folder A6; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

subtext does not make SWAPO Christian, but it does make Christianity and Christian concerns culturally relevant to the party. There is a correspondence in thinking here that reveals several parallel and shared concerns between these two groups. A correspondence that anticipates the complementary relationship that would develop between SWAPO and the Church both locally as well as globally before Namibian liberation could be considered fully won.

3. LOCAL CHURCH INVOLVEMENT AND APPEAL

A. Suppression of Christian Worship in SW Africa

SWAPO and the SW African native churches shared more than just similar concerns and complementary belief systems. As the native clergy within the more liberal denominations began to advocate further for their parishioners, they also quickly became targets for the Union's persecution. As early as 1960, Christian media in USA became aware of South Africa's intimidation and physical abuse of native clergy when the UN was informed of the case of Pastor Markus Kooper and his family by Michael Scott, a well-known Anglican minister.⁵¹ Rev. Scott was a long-time friend of Nujoma and an advocate for native liberation going back as early as 1947. He also had numerous contacts abroad, including UN officials, and he travelled routinely between the Union and SW Africa on church business.⁵² In many ways Scott was the perfect agent for accompaniment and he became a longtime friend of SWAPO during the struggle.

Pastor Kooper and the rest of his congregation had been ordered to move from their ancestral lands as part of a forced native relocation initiative. The Union wanted to claim their land for its own eventual development and resettlement by white South Africans; this was, as noted

⁵¹ Jack, "Markus Kooper: Pastor in Exile," 253-254.

⁵² Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 34.

earlier, an all too common practice at that time. Kooper and his congregation had been instructed to gather their possessions and relocate to a primarily barren property. In protest, Kooper and his family decided to remain in their community, and some parishioners also remained in the chapel's sanctuary because they had learned it was to be demolished. These parishioners were witness to events that were later shared with Rev. Scott via resistance agents.

Pastor Kooper and his family were set upon by a squad of paramilitary South African policemen in riot gear. The police brought several unmarked transport vehicles of the kind commonly used to move livestock and several officers began forcibly moving the Kooper family's possessions into one of the filthy trucks. A second group of officers attempted to remove Pastor Kooper's parishioners from the church, so that it, too, could be emptied and its occupants relocated. Kooper moved to intercede for these chapel occupants and he was taken into custody. Kooper's handicapped wife and their five young children were then forcibly loaded into a transport with the pastor; witnesses confirmed that some of the family's possessions were left out in the street.

The chapel occupants were then loaded into a vehicle and dropped off at their prescribed new location. Pastor Kooper and his family, however, were not heard from for several weeks. His congregation later learned that he and

his family had been relocated somewhere else by the police as a punitive measure. The Kooper family's new location was even more desolate than the one which they had initially remained behind to protest. In a letter to his congregation, eventually delivered by Rev. Scott to the UN, Pastor Kooper reported on the death of the family's livestock and how they had been reduced to eating tree gum in recent weeks. At the time of Scott's meeting with the UN in March of 1960, South Africa had refused international requests that Kooper be reunited with his congregation; it is unknown what finally became of this family.

Pastor Kooper's example is not a common one. This episode, although seen as particularly abusive from our perspective, was considered as somewhat preferential treatment within that context. The fact that Kooper and his family were not significantly injured, for example, and that they were eventually even heard from again testifies to the relative safety afforded to clergy in contrast to other less socially connected SW African natives. On the other hand, Kooper's case was only known to the West because his congregation sought the UN's assistance in pressuring the Union to reunite them with their Pastor. Namibia's was the only southern African liberation front where the church remained a key operator in the revolutionary struggle; in other southern African countries either the church was more

aggressively persecuted into silence or the revolutionary factions inevitably turned against their clergy supporters prior to the struggle's success.⁵³

The Union's suppression of Christian worship in SW Africa began as early as 1963, when their ban on any and all native gatherings of more than 3 people made traditional worship essentially illegal.⁵⁴ In many ways this policy drove clergy into a relationship of affinity with the rebels because these churchmen were also risking arrest and breaking the law when they presided over an assembly of more than three natives. Most were never arrested for this but the threat created an initial solidarity between these groups. South Africa also maintained an intense international privacy over routine practices in SW Africa as a means of avoiding foreign criticism. No Red Cross programming, for example, was permitted in SW Africa until 1978 because Red Cross workers regularly travelled abroad and they might easily have testified against the Union about human rights violations and internal atrocities committed under their administration of SW Africa.⁵⁵ Consequently, in 1978, the modern Christian media began reporting on the

⁵³ Brink, "African Leaders' Commitment," 1143-1146.

⁵⁴ World Conference Against Apartheid, "Political Program of SWAPO" in Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Namibian's daily reality under apartheid as that of a "modernized slave state."⁵⁶

As bad as the Union's suppression of worship was in 1960, however, the situation had deteriorated even further by the mid-1970s. Many of SW Africa's native churches began to work in concert with one another during this time. As a product of this new cooperative relationship these churches would eventually also band together to communicate the desperate threat to Christ's gospel that the Union's occupation of SW Africa had become under apartheid.⁵⁷ This would end up being a major turning point for the global Church's involvement in Namibia's struggle, which we will examine later in this chapter. This new ecumenical collaboration developed as conditions for the native people of SW Africa continued to decline.

By 1983, SWAPO established camps in the wilds of Angola and Zambia to provide refuge for the native children and the elderly because life in SW Africa under apartheid had become drastic and severe; war crimes such as rape and indiscriminant killing by South Africa's Defense Force goons

⁵⁶ Green, "Christianity and Political Economy," 3-17.

⁵⁷ Dena M. Stinson, "Prisoners of Hope: The Struggle for Namibian Independence, The Church, and The Gospel" (MDIV Thesis, Wartburg Theological Seminary, 2010), 28-32; **or** http://www.wartburgseminary.edu/template_Centers.asp?id=92.

became more common.⁵⁸ The Union was now routinely installing explosive minefields in the SW African natives' churchyards as a means of further discouraging public assembly and eliminating any large private meeting locations for those in the resistance. Clearly, SW Africa's native churches no longer functioned as active houses of prayer; rather they had become dangerous features in a military landscape. The Union was willing to use the churches as bait for capturing targets of opportunity among SWAPO's guerillas.

This contrast serves as a vivid example of how Christ's Church is not just the building. Yet it also argues for how a fixed worship space becomes significant for the functionality of its Christian community's own vigor and activity. Proclamation of the gospel cannot happen in a place where two or more cannot gather nor can it happen where worshipers are unable to feel safe enough to concentrate on hearing God's Promise. SW Africa in the late 1980s offered its Namibian Christians very little in the way of genuine sanctuary.

B. Lutheran and the Church's Function

⁵⁸ Kaulinge, "Namibia: Double Struggle," in Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

In 1954 during a World Council of Churches assembly in Evanston, Illinois, the Nobel prize-winning novelist Alan Paton publically refuted Dr. Marais, a renowned Dutch Reformed theologian from South Africa, for his previous remarks defending apartheid as a Christian practice. This event in and of itself was not surprising. Marais had a history of defending racism as both moral and Christian from his very specific and privileged perspective within his home context. Paton likewise had become sort of the champion for the cause of equal rights for native South Africans by this time. What was surprising, however, was the form of Paton's rebuttal.⁵⁹ Instead of appealing to the morals and ethical traditions of classic Christianity, he chose to proclaim his own definition of the role and function of Christ's Church in God's world. "The Church," Paton said, "must exemplify visibly within itself the unity of all its members before Christ."⁶⁰ This is a good definition and by its reckoning any church that is not visibly engaged in demonstrating how its membership are all equally loved as one in the promise of Christ is no church at all, let alone *the* Church. It is recorded that Marais gave no response to Paton and that he abruptly left the proceedings.

Paton's formula places all the Church's parishioners "before Christ," as Christians both in a sense of ultimate judgment and in a sense of mutual

⁵⁹ Editorial. "Christian Conscience," 582-583.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

significance under God's welcoming love. Within this definition all humanity matters only because of Christ's ultimate love for this sinful world. There is an emphasis on Christ's sovereignty here in which nothing earthly matters except for our unity and salvation in Christ's corporate body. For Paton, this communion of saints is Christ's one "Holy Catholic Church." This definition also vividly captures the theology behind our Christian understanding of humanity as created in the image of God. Here, because we live in unity with Christ, what we do to one another is a matter of ultimate concern. How we treat each other matters because we've become portions of this same corporate Christian body. So as members of Christ's earthly community we are certainly not called to do violence to each other. Rather, God's Spirit calls us love our neighbors as ourselves for Christ's sake as our Savior and Lord.

Within Paton's definition we can also see the twentieth-century complement to Luther's own initial Reformation paradigm of the Church's guiding purpose and overall earthly function to preserve the people and proclaim Christ's promise for all to all. For Luther, the Church was also about asserting humanity's "true unity" under, as well as before, Christ as "one holy, Christian church."⁶¹ The Augsburg reformers defined this church as "the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached

⁶¹ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds, "Article VII, Augsburg Confession," in *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress P, 2000), 42.

and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”⁶² According to this Augsburg definition, it is evident that God’s church in SW Africa under apartheid was in jeopardy and the availability of Christ’s gospel promise was at stake, at least for Namibia’s natives. Simply put, by these criteria “no assembly” effectively means ‘no church,’ and assembly had been made illegal for SW Africans as early as 1963.

Throughout his writings, Luther takes up St Paul’s theme of the gospel being “seen and heard” in community as an essential element of worship and hence also a component of the church.⁶³ Justification by grace through faith happens *only* because the Spirit manifests Christ’s promise within the sinner’s experience as *the* proclaimed truth of God’s ultimate transformative power and effect. Justification for Luther, much like faith for Paul, comes solely from what is seen and heard.⁶⁴ The gospel is primarily seen, heard, and experienced, for Luther, during worship within the communion of saints. Without even the smallest worship community, therefore, the sinner remains theoretically cut off from Christ because there can be no regular administration of the sacraments or proclamation of the gospel. To suppress worship is, therefore, a very spiritually dangerous practice for everyone

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Bernhard Lohse, “The Church,” in *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress P, 1999), 278-281.

⁶⁴ Romans 10:17 & 15:21; **also** Philippians 4:9; **also** Colossians 1:6; **also** Galatians 3: 2 & 3.5; **and** Ephesians 1:13.

involved. Those suppressing worship stand in peril of committing what some believe to be the solely unpardonable sin of blaspheming against God's Spirit because they are interfering with God's salvation of their neighbors.⁶⁵

It is from this perspective that the World Council of Churches, once alerted to the SW African situation, by 1973 would declare apartheid "an issue of the Church's integrity and genuine witness of Christ to the world."⁶⁶ Work on the SW African situation led to many interesting collaborations abroad during this time, too. Western media coverage of the conflict during the late 1970s often reads like a modern paraphrase of Luther's own writing. They emphasize the importance of the church continuing in its classic role as *the* objective social critic while constantly reforming itself to maintain its credibility within the modern context.⁶⁷ Some writers encouraged the Church's open support of liberation organizations while others argued for the *more ethical* approach of the Church financially rewarding those nations now harboring the conflict's refugees. By this time at least, the global Christian

⁶⁵ Mark 3:22-30; **and** Matthew 12:31-32.

⁶⁶ World Council of Churches, "Program to Combat Racism, 1970-1973: A Background Paper Presented to the Central Committee, August 1973," in *Ecumenical [Chronicle?] Review*, 25 no. 4 (October 1973): 513-519.

⁶⁷ George W. Shepherd, "Does the Carter Administration Have a Strategy for Southern Africa," in *Christian Century*, 94, no.28 (September 14, 1977): 782-786.

community became actively engaged and Namibia could experience some sense of support in this worldwide solidarity.

C. Southern African Appeal to the Larger Church

Before the global Church's focused involvement, however, SW Africa's native Christians had to fend for themselves and they did so quite admirably considering what they were up against. Local church advocacy on behalf of SW Africa's native population began as early as 1946 when the Anglican church dared to publically urge South Africa to "open negotiations with dissatisfied laborers in the mines" as a means of avoiding the eminent social unrest which the church felt was a symptom of the "miserable lot" of native laborers within the contract camps at this time.⁶⁸ This liberal church advocacy on behalf of their native parishioners continued well into the 1970s when it bloomed into an uncharacteristically ecumenical activism within the SW African context.⁶⁹ Elsewhere in southern African at this time native churches failed to reach a consensus that allowed for such ecumenical advocacy. Other southern African resistance movements also failed to achieve

⁶⁸ Episcopal Churchmen, in *Newsletter*, in Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

⁶⁹ Green, "Christianity and Political Economy," 3-17.

the kind of relationship SWAPO enjoyed with SW Africa's church leadership. Scholarship suggests SWAPO's conscious movement away from tribal identification towards a national framework more compatible with the west made the difference.

In the early 1960s SW Africa's two native Lutheran churches began working in faithful ecumenical partnership with each other. Together the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church (ELOC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South West Africa (ELCSWA) established a shared theological seminary in Otjimbingwe near Windhoek by 1963. Students at the Paulinum Seminary were exposed to contextual Scripture interpretation and liberation as well as confessional theology, so it was no surprise that by 1971 the community had produced a well-crafted contextual reading of Romans 13 that explicitly challenged apartheid. Nor was it a surprise when the group chose to publish this reading as part of its brief *open letter* to John Vorster, the current Prime Minister of South Africa, by way of the rest of the world.⁷⁰

What, after all, could be a more Lutheran way of engaging the issue than an open letter in the public forum of international politics and Christianity? An avalanche of international Christian support followed close on the heels of this publication which we shall examine in the next chapter. The *letter* itself listed seven major criticisms of South Africa's administration

⁷⁰ Stinson, "Prisoners of Hope," 28-32; **or** http://www.wartburgseminary.edu/template_Centers.asp?id=92.

of Namibia. It cited apartheid as a violation of Namibian freedom and safety. The *letter* also challenged the pass laws system as a violation of the Namibians' right to free movement within their own society. It charged the Union with denying the Namibians their right to freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The *letter* also named the Union's refusal to grant voting rights to Namibians as a violation of their right to representation and self-determination. It accused the prescribed labor system of systematically breaking up families. In closing, the *letter* charged apartheid with violating the fundamental unity of the Namibian people.⁷¹ In the wake of such charges South Africa strove to deny the validity of these claims. The proverbial cat was now well out of the bag, however, thanks to the global ecumenical community's distribution of the *letter* and their persistent attention to the charges leveled by Namibia's Lutheran community.

⁷¹ Enquist, *Namibia: Land of Tears, Land of Promise*, 92-93.

4. GLOBAL CHURCH RESPONSE AND ACCOMPANIMENT

A. The World Church in Support

Western scholarship has tended to perceive the International community's response to the Paulinum Seminary's *open letter* of 1971 as swift and decisive, yet such an interpretation is partially mistaken.⁷² This is because the seminary's *open letter* of 1971 is often confused with a similar document called the *appeal to Lutheran Christians*, drafted in 1975 at an ecumenical gathering of southern Africa's native Lutheran church leadership at a remote church in Swakopmund on the Namibian coast.⁷³ The seminary's *open letter* was indeed, however, the catalyst that started a change in the behavior of SW Africa's native youth during this time called the "new activism." The *appeal to Lutheran Christians* was drafted as an international native Christian leaderships' affirmative response to this new attitude within the larger region of southern Africa's indigenous youth.

The *appeal* differs from the *letter* in two significant ways. Firstly, it is more broadly theological and systematic in its reasoning. The *appeal* does not argue a contextual Christian interpretation of a specific portion of Scripture.

⁷² Historians have often mistakenly referred to the *appeal* as a "letter" of appeal, thus mixing both documents' titles and establishing some genuine confusion around this issue. Several have only written about one of these two documents as *the* landmark instance of global church involvement in the struggle, which also serves to cloud the issue.

⁷³ Enquist, *Namibia: Land of Tears, Land of Promise*, 100-104.

Rather it asserts a pervasive Christian dimension to all of human reality as God's unified creation and it claims this dimension in the absolute affirmation that theology matters.⁷⁴ Second, the *appeal* is a piece of internal communication. This is to say that rather than the *appeal's* text taking the form of a cry for help from outside its authors' own community, as the *letter* had done, the *appeal* takes the form of an authoritative address within a single unified community. The *appeal* is effectively one member addressing a larger portion of Christ's church, specifically its Lutheran population. Thus, it is communication within that body between its fellow members. The *appeal* is not a response to the Paulinum *letter*. It is a natural progression from the argument first posed in the *letter*.

Elements of the global Church had also previously addressed the Union's oppression of SW Africa's native population prior to the 1970s, albeit intermittently at best.⁷⁵ During the late 1960s, the World Council of Churches decided, in lieu of this history of the global church's sporadic response, to focus their educational efforts and financial support in a worldwide three-year campaign against racism which ran from 1970 -1973.⁷⁶ In his memoir, Nujoma maintains that during the 1970s the WCC "played a

⁷⁴ Ibid. 147-151.

⁷⁵ Editorial, "Christian Conscience," 582-583.

⁷⁶ World Council of Churches, "Program to Combat Racism," 513-519.

very effective role, too, even in influencing churches here in Namibia.”⁷⁷ Documentation from a mid-1970s International Christian Peace Conference, held in Germany, reports that the WCC had “achieved great support” for the struggle, but that the “divinity of the Namibian people was still being denied in SW Africa on a daily basis.”⁷⁸ Two major elements of the WCC campaign’s “great support” included an increase in reporting of apartheid atrocities by the western media and the development of a new global advocacy strategy.⁷⁹ This new advocacy campaign, called “*ownership demands responsibility*,” focused on exposing economic connections between established first world companies and their hidden South African investments.⁸⁰ As a result of this new advocacy method, four oil companies had completely discontinued operations in SW Africa by the decade’s close.

⁷⁷ Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 248.

⁷⁸ Colin O’Brien Winter, “Racial Discrimination as an Obstacle on the Way of Development in South Africa and Namibia,” in *Communio Viatorum*, 19, no. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 1976): 1-9.

⁷⁹ Cornish R. Rogers, “A Visit with African Liberation Front Leaders,” in *Christian Century*, 88, no.38 (September 22, 1971): 1099-1100; **also** Episcopal Churchmen, in *Newsletter*, in Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives; **and** Roger Moody, “Showdown on Namibian Independence,” in *Christian Century*, 92, no.20 (May 28, 1975): 551-554.

⁸⁰ Timothy L. Smith, “Church Agencies Step Up Campaign for Corporate Responsibility,” in *Christian Century*, 91, no.13 (April 3, 1974): 369-371.

Despite the success of the WCC's campaign, however, much of the first-world's attention shifted away from African concerns in the late 1970s because of more local economic difficulties.⁸¹ During this same time, however, several pan-African political groups were able to reclaim some of the public's interest by issuing their own political epistles and hosting press conferences.⁸² The WCC also maintained its commitment to SW African liberation by continuing to provide financial assistance to SWAPO for its refugee settlements. The Council was still an active international advocate for SWAPO's struggle in the late 1980s, when it held hearings in Washington, DC, to hasten the UN's physical implementation of the liberation plan which the Security Council had finally drafted.⁸³ The hearings occurred in 1988 and it still took two more years for South Africa to surrender the country.

⁸¹ Shepherd, "Does the Carter Administration," 782-786; **and** Brewster, "African Impatience for Change," 382-384.

⁸²Organization for African Unity (OAU), "Racist South Africa: Cosmetic Racial Reforms," in an OAU Press Release (August 9 1983): Box 5, Folder A4; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives; **and** South West African People's Organization, entitled "Untitled," in a *Press Release* (January 14, 1983): Box 5, Folder A3; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

⁸³ Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 376.

B. Wartburg's Namibia Concerns Committee

Meanwhile in the American Midwest during the 1970s theological education was becoming increasingly global in its response to liberation theology's focus on issues of oppression in the developing world.⁸⁴ Wartburg Theological Seminary, in Dubuque, Iowa, experienced a major shift in its faculty during this time and was able to embrace this new global direction early on under the guidance of its, then new, President William Weiblen. During his time at Wartburg an increased emphasis was placed on hosting students from the global south as a shared asset and mission within the seminary community. It was during this same period that the Shejavali family came to campus from SW Africa. The Shejavali family identified themselves as Namibian, a term that SW Africans claimed for themselves during their struggle for liberation. Through fellowship, this family's story came to significantly impact the seminary community, moving many of its faculty, staff and students to pursue mission on behalf of Namibia. This group was able to pursue a successful and sustained advocacy focus on into the late 1980s;⁸⁵ it began as a grassroots effort called the Namibia Concerns

⁸⁴ William H. Weiblen, "Entering the Ecumenical Age 1960-1970," in *Life Together at Wartburg Theological Seminary 1854-2004*, Sesquicentennial Edition (Dubuque, IA: Saemann Foundation, 2006), 49.

⁸⁵ Stinson, "Prisoners of Hope," 32-38; **or**
http://www.wartburgseminary.edu/template_Centers.asp?id=92.

Committee, but it eventually grew into a national non-profit support organization called the National Namibia Concerns (NNC). The NNC was then headquartered in Denver, Colorado, but it disbanded in 1990 when Namibia finally became free.

Wartburg Theological Seminary currently maintains a Namibia Archive, within its library's permanent collection, of documents gathered and published by both of these organizations as well as the collected advocacy correspondence of its chief officers, Solveig Kjeseth and Ilah Weiblen. These women were great advocates in mission on behalf of the Namibian people and their records continue to inform the social justice research at Wartburg Theological Seminary, which began formally in 2009. This study would not have been possible without the records they gathered which are now preserved in the Namibia Archive. The seminary also "currently maintains an especially supportive relationship with its two sister seminaries, one in Namibia and the other in Papua New Guinea" on into the 21st century.⁸⁶

C. Endurance, Then Independence, and Celebration

⁸⁶ Henry S. Wilson, "Globalization for Global Community: A Challenge to Ministerial Formation," in *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 30, no.3 (June 2003): 173-179.

During these same 1980s SWAPO endured the difficulties of waging an armed struggle, while maintaining a refugee community sheltered in numerous international locations.⁸⁷ It is to the credit of their leadership that they waited patiently, though not silently, for the UN to fulfill the promise of its earliest resolution in fully removing the Union of South Africa from Namibia's borders by 1989. Nujoma's memoirs recall this period as both an exciting and expectant time, when attention had to be paid to community details and social healing. To this end, SWAPO pursued a strong policy of reconciliation in the wake of apartheid as a means of addressing that practice's social fragmentation. Memorial services on Namibia's Independence Day, in 1990, therefore, included military honors for both SWAPO's own fallen soldiers and South Africa's dead as well.

In 2010, when Namibia celebrated the 20th anniversary of its final independence from the Union, the then former president Nujoma's remarks still evidenced the community's need to continue to address such reconciliation.⁸⁸ It is astonishing how generous and gracious a posture Namibia has officially taken both to natives who refused to support them

⁸⁷ United Nations Department of Public Information: Press Section, "Special Committee against Apartheid: 525th meeting," in a UN Press Release: GA/AP 1473 (August 9, 1983): Box 5, Folder A6; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

⁸⁸ Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 438-443; **and** Personal Interview with Duane Priebe, December 13, 2010.

during the struggle and to those white SW Africans who chose to remain and live into this new reality of Namibian freedom. The Kjeseths currently run a Bed and Breakfast in Fish Hoek, so Wartburg Theological Seminary's communal identity also lives on in their presence on Namibia's west coast.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ <http://www.wheretostay.co.za/sunnycovemanor/>.

5. CONCLUSIONS

A. Presence in Patience and Reconciliation

Patience was a major theme within the story of Namibia's liberation. During the forty-six years Namibia was under Union occupation, that government's harassment remained both covert and overt in character. It is clear from the documented history that South Africa continued to thwart the Namibians' liberation via such harassment right up until the eleventh hour.⁹⁰ SWAPO began pursuing diplomatic support since its inception in 1960. Only after it became clear that there would be no multinational intervention on Namibia's behalf did SWAPO's leadership elect to engage in an armed struggle for their independence from South Africa.⁹¹ When SWAPO began their armed resistance in 1966, the Namibians had already endured the abusive policies of the South African government for twenty years.

In the midst of this military struggle SWAPO always maintained its diplomatic activity and worked to sustain a substantial presence on the

⁹⁰ Nujoma, "Appendix 3: Resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, pertaining to SW Africa/Namibia," in *Where Others Wavered*, 365-413.

⁹¹South West African People's Organization, "History of SWAPO Party," on SWAPO Party's homepage, accessed April 3, 2011, <http://www.swapoparty.org/history.html>.

international scene.⁹² From 1976 to 1990, the Namibians patiently endured their captivity while striving to maintain the United Nations' attention. The UN resolution numbers related to their struggle testify to the Namibians' extraordinary patience.⁹³ Those numbers run from 385 to 652 and they cover a span of fourteen years, only two of which were a period of cease-fire, a frustrating period of time during which the Union abuses and harassment continued and the world's response came only in the form of paper recognition. The unusual fortitude of the Namibian people along with their patience during this time were extraordinary gifts of God's Spirit.

Forgiveness as a practiced moral discipline was the Spirit's other gift to the Namibian people. It too was certainly one of that nation's virtues. The Namibian leadership's ability to avoid learning a mistrust of whites from their daily oppressive experiences remains a remarkable feature of this history. SWAPO worked in concert with white leadership from SW Africa's liberal churches throughout their freedom struggle.⁹⁴ They had to trust these clergy because they were the resistance group's only available allies early in

⁹² Editorial, "South Africa Disturbed," 1461; **also** Mail Africa Bureau, "Nujoma Prepared to Meet Vorster," in *Windhoek Advertiser* newspaper. (February 8, 1977): Box 5, Folder A4; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives; **and** Organization for African Unity (OAU), "Racist South Africa," in Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

⁹³ Nujoma, "Appendix 3: Resolutions," *Where Others Wavered*, 452-465.

⁹⁴ Ibid 31-69.

the conflict. SWAPO's leadership remained vocally displeased yet still in dialogue with the West during a period of great disappointment when the Reagan administration took over in the United States of America and seemingly set back the UN agenda for Namibian emancipation indefinitely.⁹⁵ Yet they were able to see past such disappointments and openly embrace the support and advocacy offered them by other Americans such as Wartburg Theological Seminary's own Namibian Concerns Committee.⁹⁶

When Namibia's liberation finally came to pass, SWAPO was very deliberate in its offer of reconciliation to those white SW Africans willing to remain in Namibia.⁹⁷ Such reconciliation is almost inconceivable, yet the documents bear witness to its reality. The deep optimism behind SWAPO's resolve to forgive past grievances serves as a testimony to the Spirit's continued presence among these people even after their liberation had been won. Namibia's sustained belief in the power of human forgiveness towards the recovery of a healthy society is nothing short of awesome.

⁹⁵ United Nations Department of Public Information: Press Section, "Special Committee against," in Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

⁹⁶ Weiblen, *Life Together*, 49.

⁹⁷ Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 441.

B. Refuge and Sanctuary

It remains a truth universally accepted that during the age of colonialism Western nations frequently drew up new territorial boundaries to suit their own needs and purposes. Benezet Bujo, a scholar specializing in Zaire, records: "Right across Africa frontiers were drawn without any reference to the ethnic distribution of the people or to customary law. The [African] people were simply ignored."⁹⁸ The Europeans ignored pre-existent ethnic topographies and native cultural identities when establishing their new geography. As alluded to earlier in this study, SW Africa's native Ovambo people, for example, were divided in 1890 between Portugal and Germany in what would later become Angola and present day Namibia.⁹⁹

For some the division of this northern tribe might seem to have been a random or even just a contextually typical administrative occurrence. In looking at the whole saga of Namibia's struggle and liberation, however, this event becomes something more than just fortuitous. It was, after all, only by way of the Angolan natives' remembered connections to their SW African relatives that SWAPO came to find a sanctuary for its people in the wilds to

⁹⁸ Benezet Bujo, "The Colonial Period and Foreign Missionaries," in *African Theology In Its Social Context* (MaryKnoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 40.

⁹⁹ Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, 28.

the north during this most violent part of their struggle.¹⁰⁰ Both groups still spoke Ovambo and many had kept careful track of their shared ancestry despite the separation.¹⁰¹ These circumstances argue God's plan and sustaining support of SW Africa's people in the midst of their suffering.

Also, because of this shared ancestry, sanctuary was initially given to SWAPO's refugees by the Angolans. Even when the South African military began ignoring its northern border and waging war in retaliation on Angola's people, sanctuary for the Namibians fleeing from oppression continued. Airstrikes by the Union on defenseless Angolan civilian villages during the end of the struggle were a fairly common occurrence.¹⁰² Surprisingly, the Angolans remained faithful to their tribal kinship despite the further persecution it caused them from South African forces. The Spirit's presence can also be seen in the camp life of the Namibians during this part of their struggle. The resilience of these people to abide and adapt to new situations, such as maintaining donated cattle within the jungle so that the children

¹⁰⁰ Justin Ellis, "Belonging Nowhere," An interview of Pashkeni Shoombe in *Namibian Refugee Project* flyer: Box 5, Folder A1; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

¹⁰¹ Nambala, *History of the Church in Namibia*, 28.

¹⁰² Voice of Namibia Radio, "Another Puppet Show Plan for Namibia," Transcript of a July 20, 1983 broadcast from Harare, Zimbabwe: Box 5, Folder A3; Wartburg Theological Seminary Namibia Archives.

would have milk, was just one extraordinary example of faith active in love and the Spirit at work in the world.

C. Presence in the Native Churches' Prophetic Voice

It was not just through Namibia's physical neighbors that God was at work during their liberation struggle. Christ's Gospel remained active and it was vibrantly proclaimed by the native churches' leadership as well.¹⁰³ The bravery and faithfulness of the clergy and parishioners was nothing short of amazing. The ecumenical accomplishments of the native churches in Namibia illustrate God's sustaining love for the Namibian people and God's eventual deliverance of SW Africa from the heresy of apartheid into a community of intentional reconciliation. Namibia's journey to freedom occurred slowly and certainly great suffering was endured by its native people during this passage. Throughout their journey, however, God's Spirit also seemed to walk with and support the Namibian people, although often in very quiet ways.

In SW Africa even before apartheid, for example, congregations were typically kept racially separate from one another. Under apartheid this also remained true, but as the native churches grew in size their need for trained leadership grew as well. The supply of clergy trained outside of SW Africa

¹⁰³ Stinson, "Prisoners of Hope," 38; **or** http://www.wartburgseminary.edu/template_Centers.asp?id=92.

was not enough to meet the needs of native churches. So the school that would eventually become the Paulinum Seminary began theologically educating and training native lay ministers in 1937, and ordaining native Lutheran pastors as early as 1949.¹⁰⁴ Paulinum campus had been built originally as a national instructors' college by German colonists in 1866. The school had somehow escaped destruction throughout all of SW Africa's earlier turbulent and war-torn history. In fact, at the time of the native churches' *open letter* of world appeal, the school's lead-shot tower was still a prominent landmark behind their main administrative building. The seminary was then fortuitously present to serve its greater purpose within Namibian history as the educational source of Namibia's prophetic cry from the wilderness to the world in their *open letter* to South Africa's Prime Minister. Yet many quiet little progressions needed to happen throughout the native churches' history in order for this situation to coalesce, including the indigenization of SW Africa's church administration and the in-country theological education of its native clergy.¹⁰⁵

Certainly the history of Namibia's Paulinum School as a native-run Lutheran theological seminary shared by two denominations is curious to

¹⁰⁴ United Lutheran Theological Seminary Paulinum in Windhoek, Namibia, "About Us," on Paulinum Seminary's homepage, accessed April 25, 2011, <http://www.paulinum.edu.na/aboutus.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Stinson, "Prisoners of Hope," 28-29; **or** http://www.wartburgseminary.edu/template_Centers.asp?id=92.

consider as well. As ministerial candidates of Evangelical Lutheran Ovambokavango Church (ELOC) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in SW Africa (ELCSWA) came together at Paulinum to study God's word, they also found themselves moved to contextualize Christ's gospel, so that it remained relevant to them in the midst of their struggle and their suffering under South African oppression. The fact that these young Namibian theologians were pedagogically primed and ready in 1971 to refute the Dutch Reformed Church's traditional reading of Romans 13 as theologically supportive of apartheid seems curiously fortuitous. In addition, both churches' bishops were also visiting the seminary at this time.¹⁰⁶ Because of these two advantageous events, the community's *open letter* was written and distributed by sources with some recognition in the international community.

Surely God was present with those students at Paulinum seminary calling and moving that community to fashion their prophetic epistle, so that the international community might be more fully engaged in southern Africa's struggle. It is no surprise either that such deep and insightful theology should arise from this ecumenically shared school in SW Africa's spiritually challenging context. Arguably, it was the theological tension present within that community itself which first allowed those students to discern God's message within Romans 13. As we saw in chapter one,

¹⁰⁶ Enquist, *Namibia: Land of Tears, Land of Promise*, 91-94.

Thangaraj maintains that *crossing boundaries* nearly always has theological implications because “we come to discover the distinct features of our own culture and our own identity. The differences awaken in us a strong sense of self.”¹⁰⁷ Paulinum’s students speak from just such a strengthened sense of selfhood within their *open letter* arguing in favor of God’s abundant presence within their moment of scriptural interpretation, self-advocacy, and prophecy.

D. Freedom’s Spirit and Wartburg’s Accompaniment

Sam Nujoma, Namibia’s first president, in remembering the nation’s initial Independence Day of 1990 writes that “[i]t was in the spirit of SWAPO’s policy of national reconciliation that we also remembered those of our countrymen and women who had died in defense of South African rule, or while opposed to it, but alienated from the liberation movement.”¹⁰⁸ This is a beautifully gracious and generous sentiment for a community’s leader to have, especially less than a year after South Africa’s attempt to assassinate him on the tarmac at the Windhoek airport before he could begin to assume command of the country’s first free-election proceedings.¹⁰⁹ The reader will

¹⁰⁷ Thangaraj, “Let God be God,” 93.

¹⁰⁸ Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, 441.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid* 413-415.

note that here, again, Mr. Nujoma employs “spirit” language to clarify an administrative policy point. He does this because he has to and he has to because it’s a policy about *reconciliation*. Again, this Christian interpreter would suggest that there is a theological subtext present throughout this sentiment. One might even go so far as to suggest that the roots of Mr. Nujoma’s missionary-school education begin to show themselves again under the veneer of his political ideology.

The southern African theologian John Kurewa, in his book on contemporary African proclamation, writes that “the gospel must preach the good news of love. God’s love to humankind is central to the Christian faith, and love should remain central in the message of every preacher.”¹¹⁰ One could argue in light of Kurewa’s premise that SWAPO’s policy of reconciliation testifies to a similar belief in the sacredness of human life and the redemptive quality of all humanity. Both Kurewa’s assertion and SWAPO’s progressive ideology suggest a universal kinship of humanity as fellow creatures and the love of the neighbor as the prescribed purpose of any civil society. It is because of this subtext that SWAPO was able to successfully pursue such an audacious reconciliation with its former opponents and critics in what would become the new national community of

¹¹⁰ John Wesley Zwomunondiita Kurewa, “Biblical Proclamation in Our Cultural Context,” in *Biblical Proclamation for Africa Today* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon P, 2003), 78.

Namibia. There was some solidarity of good faith coupled with the empathy for isolation present within SWAPO's ethos during their initial independence that promoted such radical forgiveness to be applied. From a Christian perspective the freedom to pursue such an agenda could only occur in the attendant faith which follows fast on the heels of Christ's Spirit.

Wartburg Theological Seminary has possessed a similar theology of solidarity and empathy for the cultural *other* going back to its origins in the missionary considerations of Wilhelm Loehe.¹¹¹ The seminary was originally founded by Loehe out of sympathy for the German Lutherans immigrating to North America where there was a shortage of confessional pastors. Soon after its establishment, Loehe sought to expand its operation to include a Native American emphasis. Though this Native American mission was never successfully achieved, it was attempted out of deep Christian empathy for those considered outside the gospel during that time.¹¹² Small wonder, then, that in 1971, when the Shejavali family came to the seminary from Namibia on an LWF scholarship, they too were welcomed warmly. Their story of Namibia's suffering moved the community into loving political action via the

¹¹¹ David C. Ratke, "Activity in North America" in *Confession and Mission, Word and Sacrament: The Ecclesial Theology of Wilhelm Lohe* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia PH, 2001), 24-26.

¹¹² Erich H. Heintzen, "First Years and First Failure," in *Love Leaves Home: Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod* (St Louis, MO: Concordia PH, 1973), 50-53.

broad advocacy sought by the seminary's Namibian Concerns Committee.¹¹³ Led by the Weiblen and the Kjeseth families, this grassroots organization provided a voice to the Namibian people throughout North America by publishing a newsletter about their struggles.

This ethos could still be seen, in recent years, during the seminary's offering of an international graduate program in theology, development, and evangelism to help promote a holistic Christian approach abroad and prepare global church leadership for sustainable missions in the 'developing' world.¹¹⁴ Its vital significance to the Wartburg community was evident in the sorrow with which the program was suspended during the seminary's recent financial retrenchment. The Wartburg community's continued commitment to global solidarity and empathy with the 'developing' world is more obscurely apparent in that the international graduate program was ultimately *suspended* rather than cancelled; suspended programs can be swiftly reactivated and their implementation renewed more quickly than those which have been cancelled because these require more legislation to reestablish them. It remains my prayer—at the time of this study's close—

¹¹³ Stinson, "Prisoners of Hope," 32-37; **or** http://www.wartburgseminary.edu/template_Centers.asp?id=92.

¹¹⁴ Wartburg Theological Seminary, "M.A. in Theology, Development and Evangelism (TDE) *emphasis on Public Health and HIV/AIDS," Future Students section of Wartburg's homepage, accessed April 17, 2011, http://www.wartburgseminary.edu/template_FutureStudents.asp?id=146.

both for the future of the global church and Wartburg's connection to it, that this program is re-implemented again soon. It was a rich cultural opportunity in *boundary-crossing* theology for American students to live in community and to study closely with international Christians. The program was also an educational blessing that Wartburg seminary, and the ELCA through Wartburg, were able to offer up in praise of God to the 'developing' world as a whole. May Christ's Spirit continue to move the whole Christian community in patience and empathy with all our fellow citizens of God's world.

The *freedom of a Christian* that Luther, so famously, wrote about occurs both in and by the Spirit, but its action is also partially practical and earthly in its effect. Just as the Namibians benefited historically from the Church's inspired material support and accompaniment, so, too, do the other 'underdeveloped' communities of God's world require our gifts in knowledge and training for their own future freedom in Christ Jesus. The Spirit moves where it will, but we are also meant to be moved by it and through the Spirit's movement to enact God's love for the sake of our neighbors in word and deed. Namibia's liberation story remains a powerful narrative of just such Christian conduct and enduring triumph. Yet, because the story of God's love at work in the world doesn't simply end there, then the example it sets continues to direct our attention toward those truly eternal things of ultimate concern like human freedom and community as Christian imperatives.

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