

The ecclesiastical crisis of human sexuality: 'Critical solidarity', 'critical distance' or 'critical engagement'

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The issue of human sexuality has many negative implications in African society. These arose in a number of contexts – legal, religious, cultural and societal – and were significantly divisive. This article examines these responses in terms of critical solidarity, critical engagement and critical distance, and attempts to find a way of considering them in the perspective of achieving justice and solidarity. The focus is on one mainline denomination, the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA).

Contribution: This article has implications that link subjects within the theological encyclopaedia of History of Christianity, Church Polity, Systematic Theology and Practical Theology, and other disciplines including Social Sciences such as Political Science.

Keywords: critical solidarity; critical distance; critical engagement; homosexuality; human sexuality; justice; prophetic voice; solidarity; Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa.

Introduction

Within the South African context, there has been a great deal of controversy regarding the supposed impact that homosexuality has on society and what responses it evokes. This article examines the topic in terms of the responses of 'critical solidarity', 'critical distance', 'critical engagement' with a prophetic voice. Much of this has arisen in the context of faith traditions, not least Christianity, and has led to attempts to subvert the intentions of the constitution regarding human rights and human dignity in order to promote their own particular views on the subject. One such church denomination is the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA). This problem has been ably expressed by Judge Albie Sachs (2012):

It is one thing for the Court to acknowledge the important role that religion plays in our public life. It is quite another to use religious doctrine as a source for interpreting the Constitution. It would be out of order to employ the religious sentiments of some as a guide to the constitutional rights of others. Between and within religions there are vastly different and at times highly disputed views on how to respond to the fact that members of their congregations and clergy are themselves homosexual. Judges would be placed in an intolerable situation if they were called upon to construe religious texts on issues which have caused deep schisms within religious bodies. (n.p.)

Bongma (2021:141) picked up the theme of human rights in supporting Justice Sachs and asserted that: 'Penalizing people for who they are is "is profoundly disrespectful of the human personality and violatory of equality"'. All people deserve due respect and the fact that some are different should not be a cause of approbation but of joy rather than stigmatisation through the adoption of negative historic attitudes, which render certain members of the population deficient in some way. The responses of 'critical solidarity', 'critical distance' and 'critical engagement' offer different responses to deal with human sexuality issues and suggests that the response of 'critical engagement' offers a positive way forward in a context where the diverse composition of the nation should be characterised by mutual respect of the nation by affirming mutual respect and benevolent consideration.

In his judgement, Justice Sachs also stated that basic to the case were the moral values of dignity, equality, and freedom, regarding human rights and freedoms. According to Sachs, these values expressed the basic values involved in the discussions on human sexuality (Bongma 2021:141). This judgement exemplifies the problem that arises when one religious group wishes to impose its view of reality on all regardless of religious commitment. It also demonstrates the lack of

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tolerance, hospitality, and dialogue between religious communities even within the Christian faith and even within denominations when matters are referred to civil courts. The issue of human sexuality has the potential to undermine and destroy much of the work that has been done during the past century to heal the wounds of religious separation throughout Africa and globally.

Brian Stanley has described two important matters relating to the global human rights narrative that arose towards the end of the 20th century:

[I]n the political domain it became more closely aligned with the Left in political terms and became more a matter of personal than civil concern. (Stanley 2018:268)

This was due in part to the contexts in which:

[T]he predominant cultures in the Western world ... were more radically subjective in character than their predecessors ... Such subjectivity was most controversially expressed in the area of human sexuality'. (Stanley 2018:268)

This presented a challenge to the churches' historic moral teaching. Churches of American and European origin made a strong impact on the younger churches which they brought to birth although these churches take a stricter approach to the discussion on human sexuality (Stanley 2018:273). This has caused consternation at the global level as all of these churches were inter-related through belonging to worldwide Christian communions. A case in point is the Anglican Communion.

'There is ample historical evidence that homosexual practice, and (less frequently) long term homosexual relationships, have been features of many human societies down the centuries' (Stanley 2018:278; cf. Oladosu-Uthman 2021:93–100). We are reminded that the term 'homosexuality', first used in 1868 by Karoly Maria Kertbeny, is of recent origin. Although the same sex relations existed from an earlier period, 'there was no concept of fixed homosexual orientation or identity' (Stanley 2018:278). Miranda Hassett (2007:243) suggests that 'African Christians' responses to homosexuality are not dictated by northerners, but reflect African contexts and concerns'. In doing this, they are promoting:

[T]heir newfound position of moral authority in terms of images of Southern Christianity that are not of their making. (Hassett 2007)

This applies particularly to churches, which have their origin in Africa.

Stanley (2018:285) suggests that in churches worldwide, their orthodoxy and spiritual character was a basic issue at stake related to the maintenance of taboos regarding homosexuality. The forces of conservatism were far stronger in the global South than in the global North:

[T]he clash between the invocation of human rights and the appeal to unchanging Christian conceptions of divinely revealed truth touched not simply on the ecclesiological issues of church

leadership but, ... on theological anthropology – the Christian understanding of the identity of human beings. (Hassett 2007:243)

The result was that 'the Protestant global community looked even less of a united family than it had done in 1900' (Stanley 2018:365). Disunity is most commonly manifested in injustice, which is a denial of God's will. Neither Sachs nor Bongma refer to justice as fair and just treatment. Brueggemann (1986) offers this definition:

[J]ustice is to sort out what belongs to whom, and return it to them ... So the work of liberation, redemption, salvation, is the work of giving things back. Justice concerns precisely a right reading of social reality, of social power, and of social good. (p. 5, Brueggemann 2011:1)

This has a strong relevance to this study for what does justice require of us regarding issues of human sexuality where homosexuals have been subjected to cruel treatment and have not been treated as faithful Christians within the church. This is a denial of God's justice, which emphasises the equal status of all God's children through unity in diversity (Gl 3:28) in Christ. Yet, this is a matter that has political as well as religious implications.

Critical solidarity, critical engagement and critical distance

The meaning of the term 'critical' is related to critique that is a detailed analysis and interpretation of something. A critique is a thorough positive and negative, rather than a fault-finding act (Griffin n.d.:1).

The terms critical solidarity, critical engagement, and critical distance became popular in the years following the birth of democracy in South Africa in 1994. They refer to relations between the churches, largely, at that time, represented by the South African Council of Churches and the African National Congress (ANC) government. Here, their meaning is transposed into the realm of the debate on human sexuality.

History of the terms

Solidarity implies a mutual relationship of trust and shared values where one partner in a relationship can reach out to the other in order to meet established needs. It is reminiscent of the covenant (contract) relationship that God established with his people, although in a one-sided manner, with the people of Israel. It was driven by love [*αγάπη*] and characterised by responsibility, trust, faithfulness, justice, and freedom. Historically, God's people were not equal to the commitment as can be seen from Israel's history of disobedience. Solidarity cannot be imposed or coerced; it is a voluntary commitment.

As a value, solidarity is distinguished by freedom and justice. In order to be in solidarity with the totality of humanity requires a clear contract to work with the most insecure and marginalised in our midst. Human unity can never be achieved while human beings suffer deprivation in its many

forms, which results in alienation from the wider fellowship. Our response cannot be coerced in order to demonstrate solidarity (Sirico 2010:n.p.).

This is not a novel idea for it was current from the 1950s in Paul Tillich's (1957) theology:

We speak for a love which respects the claim of the other one to be acknowledged as what he is, and the claim of ourselves to be acknowledged as what we are, above all as persons. Only distorted love, which is a cover for hostility or self-disgust, denies that which love unites. Love makes justice just. The divine love is justifying love accepting and fulfilling him who, according to calculating justice, must be rejected. The justification of him who is unjust is the fulfilment of God's creative justice, and of His reuniting love (Tillich 1954a:15). Faith as the state of being ultimately concerned implies love, namely, the desire and urge toward the reunion of the separated. (n.p)

This emphasises the unity of all God's created children regardless of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and creed. This was denied from the beginning of the church and led Paul to declare unequivocally 'for you are all one person in Christ Jesus' (Gl 3:28).

It should be noticed that this issue arose in the political context:

'Critical solidarity' means that the church supports those government initiatives that promote justice, peace and democracy whilst continuing to protest against unjust policies and protecting the interest of the poor and minority groups. (Villa-Vicencio 1992:27)

This is a rather romantic view of critical solidarity as those who adopted this approach found to their cost, solidarity was appreciated; criticism was not.

Yet:

This mode of engagement was formalised in 1994 at a South African Council of Churches (SACC) conference in Veernaging [sic] where churches described the relationship to the state in a democratic South Africa in this way. (Khumalo 2009:247)

This approach, instigated by the churches and adopted by them, was predicated on an untested false assumption on the part of the church that the government shared its values and methods. Part of the issue was that everyone had placed ultimate trust in the South African democratic experiment and in Nelson Mandela's agenda without testing how far it promoted the coming of the kingdom as opposed to the agenda of the ANC government. Very quickly, history taught that protecting and promoting the interests of the poor and marginalised were not the ANC's top priority, despite the clear intention of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. From the beginning, there was a concern about being a partner with the government rather than its reflective critic.

This led in 2001 to a change of policy by the SACC at its triennial meeting in favour of 'critical engagement'. Resolution 18 stated:

[T]hat the SACC adopt an attitude of critical engagement in its dealings with the state and other organs of civil society and therefore requests the NEC to develop clear policies that will inform the concept of 'critical engagement' and to assist SACC members in defining our relationship with the State ... (Góranzon 2014:n.p.)

The logic behind the shift from 'critical solidarity' to 'critical engagement' was the idea that it is not possible to express solidarity with a state or a powerful body because solidarity is always engagement with poor people or people on the periphery of society. Until that time, President Mbeki related to the church leaders and other religious leaders through the National Religious Leader's Forum (NRLF), formed by the Mandela government. Its aim was to foster nation building and national reconciliation. However, when Jacob Zuma became President he established another body: the National Interfaith Leaders Council (NILC). It was established 'by a compromised process initiated by the government to serve the interests of the ruling political party' (Mahokoto 2020:286), and it was far more inclined to the right politically and also more compliant with the government's wishes. Already in 2010, the President of the SACC, Prof Tinyiko Maluleke, said in his Presidential Address at the SACC Central Committee Meeting: 'Unlike the NRLF which was a forum, we are told that the NILC is going to be a service delivery partner of the ruling party'. The prophetic voice was silenced by this move (Góranzon 2014:1).

Nell defines the prophetic voice as 'one form of preaching, pertaining to social comment and socio-economic and political critique of a society and its body politic' (Nell 2009:565). The question that one asks regarding Nell's definition is whether the prophetic critique is indeed critical (both positively and negatively) of the current administration. Góranzon (2011:52), who refers to the concept 'prophetic' as an act of communication for there must be (or at least a claim that there is) a superior power. Prophetic communication also differentiates itself from ordinary communication by including some sort of criticism or assessment. The prophetic challenge speaks to identified injustice in society (Kgatle 2018:1). This was clear from the publication of *The Kairos Document* in 1986 by the Kairos Theologians (1986:17-27), so there was nothing new or innovative here. However, a close relationship with the government prevented a deeply critical prophetic stance and resulted in 'weak prophetic voice', which colludes with government rather than a voice that challenges government. It is an approach that rather supports the government than speaking truth to the state regarding the struggles of the poor and marginalised (Kgatle 2018:13). One problem is the ambiguous response of a 'weak prophetic voice', which is no prophetic voice at all. It reflects what the Kairos Document referred to as Church Theology with its other worldly spirituality, its lack of social analysis and political strategy (Kairos Theologians 1986:9-16).

Kgatle (2018) pinpointed the problem:

Somewhere in the euphoria of 1994, seduced by the newness and joy of becoming a democracy, the SACC exchanged 'prophetic

distance' for the concept of 'critical solidarity' in which the churches would throw their energies into assisting the new African National Congress (ANC) government in its nation-building task. (p. 13)

This resulted from a lack of understanding and uncritical assessment of politics and political strategy. Bentley comments that, the church later adopted binary position that allowed it to be at the same time both a partner in transformation as well as a dissenter when it considered it necessary (Bentley 2013:4). How far this was possible and even successful is a moot point because the church appeared to be anxious to avoid adopting a stance of 'critical distance', which would indicate that it was in opposition to the democratic government.

However, the prophetic challenge should not be adopted just because of democracy but be uniform throughout history and particularly in the absence of democratic government (Kgatle 2018:5). Both a prophetic and political stance emerge from the emphasis. Throughout his ministry, Jesus emphasised the proclamation of the kingdom of God and in his identification with the struggles on behalf of the dispossessed, which were diametrically opposed to the rule of the Roman Empire and the colluding Temple authorities in Jerusalem. That conflict, challenged human regimes regarding the extent of their authority, and continues (Boesak 2014:1056).

There is no religion that condones injustice, discrimination, and organised corruption. Nyiawung (2010:8) highlighted the problems of maladministration, moral degeneration, corruption, a lack of trust, nepotism and favouritism, and disunity in government. Any society that works against God's purposes and acts with evil motives is harmful. Even prophecy that acts against injustice cannot avoid colluding in evil. This demands a deliberate commitment to the promotion of justice and philanthropy, which emanates from identifying with those things that contribute to fulfilling needs and rights of others (Harold 2018:1). Contemporary prophets require to identify and disclose the opportunism and a lack of conscience that poison our common life.

Critical solidarity can only be on behalf of an unsupported or abused minority. It is strange that the church that craved for such a relationship with the state could not offer this type of support on the issue of human sexuality when the state drew up a new constitution for the nation allowing for full and equal rights for people of all human orientations. In this regard, Žižek (2009:119) poses relevant questions: Why are so many problems today perceived as problems of intolerance, rather than as problems of inequality, exploitation, or injustice? Why is the proposed remedy tolerance, rather than transformation? These questions are important in relation to the current relationship of church and nation.

The South African legal context

The South African Constitution in its interim form was first drafted as the country made its transition from apartheid to

democracy. Then, following the 1994 elections, a new constitution was prepared in consultation with the public and its elected representatives. The constitution is the supreme law of the land and is globally considered to be a progressive constitution with a Bill of Rights: 'it has been described as a masterpiece of post conflict constitutional engineering in the post-cold war era' (Abebe 2018:1).

The founding provisions of the constitution state in chapter 1 (South African Government [2018]):

- 1(a) Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.
- 1(b) Non-racialism and non-sexism.

In Section 3 on citizenship, it is stated that there is a common South African citizenship, and that all South Africans, at one and the same time have the same rights, privileges and benefits because of citizenship as well as the same responsibilities and duties (South African Government 1996 [2018]:3).

The Bill of Rights constitutes Chapter 2 of the constitution. In Section 9, which is devoted to equality, it guarantees, *inter alia*, that:

- (3) The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth (South African Government [2018]:5-6).

Furthermore, the *Civil Union Act* of 2006 (South African Government 2006), put flesh on issues related to civil unions. With regard to marriage officers, it became mandatory for churches to apply for status for their ministers to celebrate such unions. Few have taken up the opportunity. But the Act also goes beyond this by not allowing ministers to be coerced in this matter (South African Government 2006).

All of these provisions define the anticipated South African society that was envisioned. Such a constitution marked a definite move away from the forms of constitution adopted in other African nations, particularly with regard to human sexuality, simply by highlighting in an acknowledgment that human sexuality is an area of life in which there was discrimination. There was a distinct and clear intention to create a just and inclusive society. This was not the approach the churches adopted, in particular the UPCSA.

The Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

Presently, the issue of human sexuality is prominently under worldwide scrutiny. The outcomes of this may seriously fracture the global church community. Occasionally, the African and Western static binary has even been employed in order to further problematise the situation because of its unique positioning. Within this broad context, South Africans experience the coming together of a variety of forms of

interlinking marginalisations relating to the binaries of black and white, male and female, coloniser and colonised, which have in part, been defined by religious considerations (Palm 2019:3). Among the number of South African mainline denominations experiencing problems with issues of human sexuality is the UPCSA.

Relevant to our theme, the UPCSA defines itself as a: 'diverse community of Reformed Christians led by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, prayerfully seeking the will of God for our lives together and the world' (UPCSA 2019:2). Its vision is: 'To be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ'. Its mission is to 'proclaim our Triune God in South Africa through: ... visibly proclaiming the Kingdom of God through unity, justice, peace and love' (UPCSA 2019:2). Among its mission priorities are:

3. Health, well-being and securing justice
4. Engaging in reconciliation and unity (UPCSA 2019:2).

And among its values the following are discerned: love, integrity, servanthood (UPCSA 2019:2). These constitute the benchmarks for the life, work and witness of the UPCSA.

In addition, the *Confession of Faith* of the UPCSA (2007:2.4) states explicitly:

1.3 Human society is capable of degrees of justice, and human beings of great altruism, heroism and self-sacrifice. Yet both societies and individuals are capable also of appalling brutality and degradation.

20.3 Everyone has a God given dignity and a right to be treated with respect and protected from violence and abuse, no matter their gender, age, race, social status sexual orientation, ...

26.2 Justice is at the heart of peace (UPCSA 2019:2.4).

This is supported by the *Declaration of Faith for the Church in Southern Africa* (UPCSA 2007:2.35):

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son, ...
 who became human ...
 to reconcile both the individual and the world to God,
 to break down every separating barrier ...
 and to unite all God's people into one body. ...
 He summons both the individual and society
 both the Church and the State.
 to seek justice and freedom for all
 and reconciliation and unity between all (UPCSA 2007:2.35).

These living documents provide the basis for the broad discussion of theological matters within the UPCSA including human sexuality. The *Confession of Faith* indicates an approach of critical solidarity with those who are alienated because of their sexual orientation and acknowledges the injustices that result from sin. Sadly, the reality does not reflect the vision of the UPCSA.

In 1998, just prior to the union that established the UPCSA, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in

Southern Africa (PCSA) received a highly sensitive report from its *ad hoc* Committee on Human Sexuality (CHS) (PCSA 1999:177–183). Its major concern was with homosexuality (PCSA 1999:183). While supporting the provision of care for the homosexual by providing six pastoral guidelines, there was no alteration to the decision that homosexuality was a sin. This represented a negative critique under the guise of solidarity. This matter was referred to the first General Assembly of the UPCSA. The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (RPCSA) had never had occasion to consider the matter. The 2000 General Assembly referred all documentation related to all sessions (UPCSA 2000:290).

In 2001, the Priorities and Resources Committee recommended that the CHS 'consider moral and pastoral issues related to human sexuality as they apply to the policy of the UPCSA and our faith' (UPCSA 2001:48). This was not done. However, the Assembly acted on a notice of motion by instructing the CHS to prepare a response to homosexual practice, the marriage of homosexuals, and the adoption of children by such couples. This was to be discussed at the General Assembly in 2003 (UPCSA 2002:482). This action arose in the context of a recent decision of the constitutional court regarding the adoption of children by same-sex couples and in light of the pending judgement regarding same-sex marriages.

This provided an opportunity to formulate an united stance in the matter. No report was submitted in 2003. This may have been a delaying tactic with the aim of evading taking responsibility for dealing with the matter because of the perceived conservative nature of the majority of church members indicating the difficulty of coming to an approach of critical solidarity.

Subsequent to this, a notice of motion was accepted regarding the CHR that was instructed to present Assembly in 2004 with a report for:

1. the Assembly to establish an official standpoint on ministers and office-bearers within our denomination who are self-acknowledged practising homosexuals
2. the Assembly to rule (in the light of the acceptance of ministries laid down in the Church Unity Commission Agreement) whether an appointment to one of our churches of a minister from one of the other denominations in the CUC who is a self-acknowledged practising homosexual would be acceptable to the UPCSA (2003:97, 107).

At this juncture the matter of human sexuality was exercising the minds of all of the mainline denominations (Afrikaans and English-speaking) (UPCSA 2004:221; see also Palm 2019). In 2004, the CHS presented a report based on a more inclusive approach to the General Assembly (indicating a commitment to critical solidarity), which included a decision to investigate the source(s) of homosexuality, responses of homosexual people, develop a theology of homosexuality, pastoral dimensions related to the matter and concluded:

While many Christians in all denominations, not least the UPCSA, crave for absolute solutions to these complex issues, the

Committee believes that in this issue we must avoid the temptation to 'fast forward to the end of the movie' for the sake of our impatience or our need for less ambivalence and more security. (UPCSA 2004:221)

The committee promoted the adoption of an "encircling approach," a safe space for those who wish to explore, the relationship between Christianity and homosexuality without the imposition of a foregone conclusion' (UPCSA 2004:221). This would result in critical solidarity. However, this would require the participation of 'people on every side of the experience and debate' (UPCSA 2004:222). Attempts were made to support engagement that would lead to concluding the issue at the 2006 General Assembly (UPCSA 2004:221, 451–452). This process indicated a more inclusive approach that included homosexuals themselves while offering pastoral care and working towards a just resolution of the matter. However, one serious deficit in the process was the absence of any committee members who did not espouse the 'liberal' theological position. Inevitably, this would lead to a skewed vision regarding human sexuality resulting from the exclusive composition of the committee. It became a constant refrain from the conservative evangelicals that they had been excluded from the process although, at times, they did appear to exclude themselves from discussions. Furthermore, committees were appointed by the General Assembly and there were opportunities to alter the composition of committees.

In addition, the report exposed the elephant in the room, which militated against the resolution of the problem – the authority of scripture and biblical hermeneutics. This was complicated by the UPCSAs tradition concerning freedom of conscience, which can be interpreted in a number of ways. Despite this, the UPCSAs *Confession of Faith* (UPCSA 2007:10.5) places a restriction here: 'Conscience itself must be transformed by being made captive to that Word [of God]; for Christ, not conscience, is the ultimate judge of what is right or wrong'.

The Presbytery of Thekwini proposed a 'constructive and affirming statement of unity' (UPCSA 2005:27). However, they were operating from a conservative stance that involved a deviation from the UPCSAs *Confession of Faith*.

Simultaneously, a report from the CHS to the Executive Commission was referred to presbyteries for discussion and response (UPCSA 2005:75–88). This comprehensive multifactorial report (PCSA Ex Com 2005:77f; UPCSAs 2005:241, 253) was referred to presbyteries for discussion and report. It concluded:

[W]e can all be more loving, more compassionate and more understanding both to gay and lesbian people we meet and deal with in our congregations and to those in our church who have different views to our own in the matter. Whatever your own view may be, there is one thing we all ought to regard as non-negotiable as we struggle with this issue, it is the unity of the body of Christ. (UPCSA 2005:86)

Here, the emphasis is on critical solidarity, resulting from 'critical engagement'. The UPCSAs concurred with various principles enunciated in the CHS report aiming at inclusivity

including 'the Word of God in Scripture recognising different interpretations', and the need for 'consistency in the way sexual ethics are applied to sexual relationships' (UPCSAs 2005:86).

All of this was brought together with the Assembly decisions into a *Statement on Homosexuality*, which proposed a more just approach based on the law of love and a reaffirmation of 'traditional' Christian values. This approach resulted from representations and bargaining throughout the General Assembly, in the hope of averting a deep and damaging disruption in the UPCSAs and with the intention of achieving critical solidarity throughout the denomination. The conservative evangelical camp (represented most vociferously by the Fellowship of Confessing Presbyterians [FCP]) aimed at producing a universally imposed negative attitude to homosexuals.

However, the outcome was predictable because it appears that most of the delegates to General Assembly had decided against the decision with regard to homosexuals prior to the meeting.

There appeared to be an unsubstantiated idea that homosexuality presented a danger to the married state. The challenge to 'exercise pastoral compassion and sensitivity in their dealings with all who approach the Church for assistance with marriage' (UPCSAs 2005:86) was a euphemism for denying same sex marriage. Yet, it is difficult to predict the outcome of pastoral intervention if it was engaged in with integrity.

In 2008, the focus of the CHS report was an attempt to achieve a form of consensus based on the areas of agreement rather than the points of conflict through dialogue, scripture study, and insights from psychology and medicine (UPCSAs 2008:355). This arose out of a consideration of several options: a prophetic approach, avoidance and a 'stepped' option. The committee supported the 'stepped' alternative through 'critical engagement' as the others implied the idea of negative critical distance. In acknowledgment of the decision, the CHS report stated: 'The issues surrounding homosexuality are varied and complex and require journey and dialogue with those affected' (UPCSAs 2008:355). Here was the beginning of an inclusive process grounded in justice for gay Christians. Until this time they had never been consulted relating their experiences and views.

The CHS also commented that Civil Unions Bill (Act 17 of 2006, South African Government 2006) is applicable to both heterosexual and homosexual couples and that ministers who are marriage officers may not automatically marry homosexual couples. This is a denominational matter and permission is limited by denominations as it is operated on an opt in basis for the Act 'retains the right of individuals to refuse to do so on the grounds of conscience, religion or belief' (UPCSAs 2008:356). However, 'no

ministers may perform civil unions of the UPCSA at present' (UPCSA 2008:356), and consequently marriages. The CHS claimed that:

[L]aws and social norms within South Africa have to some extent been reshaped, most notably the Civil Unions Act of 2007. This has started a new dialogue on the issue both within Churches and between the Churches and wider society that continues today. (UPCSA 2016:389)

A further major report was tabled at the 2016 General Assembly with a compelling focus on justice. It arose from a minority submission (referred to as MS2004 [Committee on Human Sexuality, UPCSA 2004] in the report) of the Presbytery of the Western Cape to the South African Law Reform Commission in 2004 (UPCSA 2016:389–399). A particular matter that it considered was the injustice meted out to homosexuals. It reported on Archbishop Desmond Tutu's assertion that churches have expressed bias against homosexuals resulting in substantial psychological damage and this is supported by Dr Frits Gaum (Gaum & Gaum 2010:29): 'Gay people are still the object of twisted jokes, jeering looks and talk behind their backs. That must wound' – 'and the hurt goes very deep' (Gaum & Gaum 2010:29).

Tutu highlighted the deep injustice in 1996 when he challenged the discrimination and hurt imposed on homosexuals by Christians who have been incorporated into the body of Christ through a common baptism. Tutu lamented:

[T]he Church has joined the world in committing what I consider to be the ultimate blasphemy making the children of God doubt that they are children of God. Lesbians and gays have been made to reject God and, in their rejection of the Church, they have been made to question why God created them as they were.

I have found this official position of the Church illogical, irrational and frankly, un-Christlike, totally untenable. ... What the church regards as morally reprehensible is homosexual activity, specifically genital activity. (Tutu 1997:ix)

The prejudiced treatment of homosexuals within the church is disgraceful for it creates distance between them and the Christian community instead of solidarity with it through alienating and isolating them contrary to the fellowship, which the Holy Spirit creates and sustains among all Christians.

David Russell emphasised the churches' irresponsibility for the callous treatment of homosexuals (Russell 2004:30). MS 2004 stated that historically, human rights, especially with regard to homosexuals has:

[F]allen appallingly short of Jesus' fundamental command to love people of every kind ... The tragically much higher incidence of suicide among homosexuals has been blamed on continuing social hostility, and the attitude of the Church and Christians has often been at the root of this: the rejection and hostility in western society as a whole is largely rooted in the Christian tradition. Many homosexuals have as a result turned their backs on the Church. In many cities, like Cape Town [and Pretoria], homosexual Christians have felt it necessary to start their own churches. (UPCSA 2016:389)

While this is understandable, it is also a contradiction of the Christian gospel and the prayer of Christ to the Father referring to those whom God has entrusted to his care (Jn 17:11–12).

Furthermore, it is impossible to reckon the harm done to families, which have gay children; where parents who trust the wisdom of the church have disowned their offspring, and those who have withdrawn from their congregations in support of their children, or who have suffered the negative 'critical distance' of intra-family strife. These are situations where injustice is rife and felt deeply by families and (by further negative critical distance) their loved ones. There are instances of a recognition of the insensitivity meted out to those in need of pastoral support that is evident in some denominations that have begun to re-evaluate their attitudes with regard to certain biblical verses 'in the light of God's Word of love and grace that became incarnate in Jesus Christ' (UPCSA 2016:390). This has been led to a significant degree by academic research in South Africa (eds. Germond & De Gruchy 1997; eds. Judge, Manion & De Waal 2008; Russell 2004) and beyond.

Furthermore, the CHS report reported on the serious potential for division within the UPCSA. The Moderator of General Assembly stated three points, which were fundamental to the issue:

- All people are made in the image of God, and Christ died for all of us
- We need to listen to the voices of the marginalised and excluded in our existing fellowship as well as to Scripture before making any decisions
- The Church needs to be open to the Spirit's transforming power in thinking about this issue (UPCSA 2016:390).

The 2016 report had a major focus on biblical hermeneutics (UPCSA 2016:382–398). It took into account those who had been omitted from previous discussions including the vulnerable and those who were deeply hurt within the church and had led to greater sensitivity regarding understandings of scripture and the need for an 'ethic of homosexual relationships' (UPCSA 2016:397).

This indicates the approach of 'critical solidarity' as it promotes the view that abuse is unacceptable either without or within homosexual relationships. The outcome of this report was that the General Assembly instructed all Presbyteries and Sessions to study the report and give responses by the close of 2017 (UPCSA 2016:425).

In response, the Presbytery of eGoli presented an overture to the 2016 General Assembly (UPCSA 2016:545–547). It reiterated a commitment made by the Assembly in 2006 to ongoing investigation and reflection regarding this conflictual matter because any outcome regarding homosexuality was integral to the whole debate on human sexuality and a consistent approach to the manner in which sexual ethics are applied to all sexual relationships was required. It further

noticed that since these issues had last been discussed, a great deal has happened concerning Human Sexuality and Civil Unions.

The Presbytery of eGoli raised the issue of the same-gender unions in the Zambian and Zimbabwean contexts where homosexuality was outlawed, as an attempt to prevent their acceptance in South Africa, which had no such laws. However, this was irrelevant because neither country had prohibited legal same-gender relationships. If such laws did exist, how would that impact South Africa that did have such laws? There was a need for consistency here:

The Presbytery of eGoli overtures the General Assembly of the UPCSA to take into consideration that the issue of same-gender relationships and civil unions are issues that have the potential to divide the Church, given that this matter is much more complex than the simple matter of whether or not it accepts same sex unions. It devolves into theological understanding, the Constitution of the country in which we reside. It would be irresponsible to expect the General Assembly of the UPCSA to make a ruling that will alienate one party or another.

All these issues should be addressed again in a manner that assist the making of the decisions that are long overdue, and which create the space for all parties on both sides of the continuum in this debate, to freely practise their convictions while maintaining mutual respect for one another, within the Church. (UPCSA 2016:547)

This was a matter of human (Christian) responsibility and 'critical engagement'. After an acrimonious debate in which solidarity was sacrificed in favour of negative critical discriminatory distance, the convener of the CHR resigned from his office. He was ridiculed by some members of the General Assembly who decided to forbid ministers from blessing the same gender civil unions and officiating at civil unions, as well as apologising to the convener with a request that he continue in office (UPCSA 2016:573).

The debate had been characterised by homophobic statements under the pretence of honest concern and evading the issue: 'We do not mind gays in the church, but ...' However, there was a deeper issue of understanding at play here. Many in the UPCSA assume that decisions of General Assembly have the same status as provisions of church law. This is not the case. Decisions of the Assembly may be temporary measures that may in the course of time be assumed into church law depending on how far they reflect the ongoing developing mind of the church and reflect accepted and acceptable practice. They may also fall into disuse through the lack of relevance over a period of time. In this case, it appears that these decisions of General Assembly will face further challenge in the near future.

One could describe this as 'It is my way or the highway' with no opportunity for honest, open discussion such as is common in the UPCSA as a broad church denomination. What is of concern is the predetermined biased approach towards others within the same denomination, particularly in the realm of human sexuality as was observed from a

group referred to as the FCP, a recently established closed group, which has taken upon itself the responsibility to 'guard' the faith of the UPCSA as if it possessed the authority to decide for the denomination what its standards of faith are and what constitutes its truth. As can be seen, it is exclusive and divisive and therefore, not capable of establishing the unity of Christ within the UPCSA. The aforesaid comments represent the general hermeneutic of the FCP. The theological commitment of this group is conservative evangelical, which is an approach to faith that promotes belief in the strict, verbal inerrancy of scripture. It has a history that is recent (19th century) although it is written back into 16th century Reformed theology as if it was a principle of the Reformers.

The centuries old commitment to liberty of opinion and freedom of choice were sacrificed as a result of a literalist approach to scripture where the living Word of God was reduced to mere words (UPCSA 2007:6:4, note 2). This disgraceful incident further alienated the two groups from one another when ministers who were prepared to solemnise marriages between gay people were prevented from doing so. This was the nadir of Christian solidarity in the UPCSA, and the zenith of negative discriminatory 'critical distance'. There appeared to be a real fear of 'critical engagement'.

'Critical solidarity' can only be achieved through critical engagement. It is a form of conflict resolution. Stand-offs can never be resolved by refusing to engage on the matters that separate. This view is represented by the approach of the conservatives who eschew listening, understanding, dialogue, and resolution. In comparison, 'critical engagement' is the approach of those who are prepared to engage and dialogue in a spirit of hospitality as can be seen from a report prepared by a Presbyterian, Dr Selina Palm, at Stellenbosch University.

Is there possibility for progress?

Palm's study, *From exclusion to embrace: Re-imagining LGBTIQ presence in local church congregations* (2019), reflects a minority church position where some 'prophetic' stances have been adopted with some degree of faithfulness and success. The study revealed that there are centres of hospitality where possibilities of critical solidarity are explored and developed through 'critical engagement'. One of the congregations involved in the study comes from the UPCSA. In her report, Palm uses the terms 'exclusion' and 'embrace' as synonyms for distance and solidarity, respectively. Palm's title is reminiscent of Miroslav Volf's (1996) work, *Exclusion and embrace: A theological exploration of identity, otherness, and reconciliation*. Notice the focus on *reconciliation* in the title.

The key findings of Palm's report are instructive regarding the possibilities of critical solidarity. They are listed on 10 points, which aim at engagement, inclusion, formation of community communication and transformation (Palm 2019:iv). All of these findings reflect a 'critical solidarity' approach emphasising inclusivity rather than exclusivity.

It was clear that local congregations 'are uniquely positioned in relation to shaping community attitudes regarding sexuality, relationships and understandings of family and parenting' (Palm 2019:1). Then, they can become an example to their congregations as centres of healing and inclusion (Palm 2019:1). Drawing on the experience of struggle theology in the 1980s apartheid context, West suggests a need for a 'Kairos-like process of "people's theology" to shape a new prophetic theology' relating to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, intersex, queer (LGBTIQ) issues in the South African context (West 2016:4). West, like Palm aims at a 'bottom up' approach.

A degree of frustration has become evident in progressive congregations as a result of the restrictive decisions senior church leaders in many churches to take meaningful steps forward on this issue (UPCSA 2016:3). They are instrumental in promoting 'a formal conservative backlash at denominational levels' (Gunda 2017a; West 2016) based on a narrative that describes homosexuality as a sin against God where LGBTIQ people are described as demonic, and where they are told 'you do not belong here' – in families, communities, churches, and in religious rituals such as weddings and funerals (Gevisser 2016). Theologies of retribution, rejection and punishment result in LGBTIQ people being told by their ministers that expressing their gay identity was punishment for having made poor choices in their earlier lives, or as an attack on them or their families by evil powers (Palm 2019:13). The painful fact is that: 'the greatest obstacle to the full acceptance of LGBTIQ (sic) people in southern Africa is religiously sanctioned homophobia', which maintains an 'us and them' dichotomy. Yet, it has become clear that grass roots attitudes can only be altered by the interventions of respected leaders in local congregations and communities who are willing and prepared to risk speaking out and engaging with fellow believers over a period of time (Gunda 2017b:29).

A more sinister approach considers homosexuality to be a disease that they need to be purged of. Church discipline is used as a tool for LGBTIQ people where they would be encouraged and are expected to pray for restoration, and would repent using a model focused on 'the Bible says ...' in order to confirm a sense of self-righteousness and of doing something 'positive' in the church leadership, which has the power to influence congregational response to the issue (Palm 2019:13).

The issue of biblical hermeneutics goes beyond how the 'ordinary readers' can freely interpret scripture:

This is also a matter of ecclesial power, especially by pastors, to impose an interpretation onto the whole congregation and to negate the creation of a space where congregants were encouraged to think critically for themselves. (Palm 2019:14)

The issues related to hermeneutics are even more insidious. Palm (2019) elucidates the negative theological inferences, which are promoted:

[T]hrough the approach of many churches to say, 'we love you BUT ...' reiterating a theology where they feel God says 'I love you but you are rubbish' by 'accepting' or tolerating LGBTIQ orientation but not its embodied practice, by embracing only the single celibate individual but not the whole person in the midst of their concrete loving relationships. The use of the Bible ... played a strong role in churches holding theologies of exclusion particularly the use of the seven 'terror' texts, despite their theological deconstruction. (p. 13)

Palm notes that the five churches in the study lived out theologies of embrace that led to a stance of radical inclusion as a positive theological expression where the emphasis lies on integrating the rich diversity of God's creation with humanity. Her report stresses the value of formulating 'an overarching interpretive lens of human dignity to underpin a synergistic relationship between the gospel, church and human rights, also seen as an important strategy by South African theologians today' (Palm 2019:14).

Interpreting texts for solidarity

The use and abuse of the Bible is directly related to theological stances adopted by Christians related to the authority of scripture. Ballard comments that the issue is really concerned with:

[H]ow the authority of the Bible is to be expressed. The tendency is to have some kind of instrumentalist view of the Bible ... There is ... a kind of gradation from an explicit proclamation of the Gospel to acts of human solidarity but these are all part of the stuff of the universe of which Christ is both Lord and Saviour and in whom all things cohere. (Col 1:15–20). (Ballard 2011:163; Palm 2019:1)

One particular aspect in the process of change is the need 'to deconstruct and reconstruct sacred texts by reading contextually' (Palm 2019). Congregational leaders have a key role here as they use and abuse scripture to vindicate their homophobic and exclusive behaviour:

... where individuals and faith leaders see sacred text as the highest form of religious authority, arguments for reshaping LGBTIQ inclusion that draw on Scripture will carry value and weight. (Palm 2019:16)

A recent study on engaging faith leaders on dangerous traditional practices by Le Roux and Bartelink (2017) demonstrated how the use of sacred texts as a key approach to working with faith leaders could assist in terminating destructive practices.

On the positive side, Palm (2019) refers to one minister who:

[N]oted that each story in the Scriptures is about turning the accepted social power dynamics of domination upside down which then makes it a very powerful tool of transformation. He suggests we must discover the Scriptures through lenses of power and all Scriptures that seem to endorse power over others must be deconstructed. (p. 16)

One approach that may yield a more positive outlook is:

Contextual preaching, preaching [*sic* – teaching] and taking the context of the scripture seriously ... Reformed theology is good

for that, to understand what is underneath ... When the woman in front of Jesus is caught in the act of adultery, it is easy to call her an adulteress, but you need to see the context of her oppression. It is not getting everyone in the room and saying you will listen to LGBTIQ theology, it is saying if we can rethink how you interpret Scripture. (Palm 2019:16)

However, preaching, as with the rest of the teaching ministry lies in the hands of the congregational leaders who promote and encourage exclusive distancing responses.

What is needed here is the development of a people's theology. Palm's study advocates a process of engaging with biblical texts in order to challenge biblical constructions that appear negatively to denigrate and alienate in addition to positively produce expositions that offer alternative approaches to dialogue and innovation (Palm 2019:16). Where ministers enable congregations to engage with their religious texts in love in order to reach places of new understanding together, they demonstrate a commitment to participatory engagement by providing safe spaces distinguished by acceptance.

Silence is no longer an option for it is a not very subtle form of collusion with power; it is a form of evasion which perpetuates the stigma attached to LGBTIQ persons who insist that ministers challenge discrimination. Going public becomes an act of public witness so long as it does not endanger them. Furthermore:

The importance of ministers calling people out who are homophobic and resisting pressure to do things in secret was highlighted as perpetuating a damaging church pattern through a history of hiding. (Palm 2019:23)

South African churches are uniquely placed as they have a opportunity to be at the forefront of an African-centred liberating campaign against oppressions, including sexual orientation, as a result not only its progressive constitution but also its long history of prophetic church struggles against apartheid as a socio-political grass-roots protest. This goes beyond individuals denying that they are homophobic to call local churches to take action against structures that alienate and isolate in a process reflecting the diversity of creation, solidarity across numerous cultures, and a church characterised by unity in diversity that does not disguise reality behind a 'we love everyone' banner (Palm 2019). This provides and opportunity for advocacy within congregations and wider structures in the hope that discussions may take place leading to the possible:

[D]ismantling secular assumptions that force people to choose between their faith and their sexuality can be important and to offer safe faith spaces to those in congregations where they feel unsafe. (p. 26).

Suggested approaches to advocacy include: challenging a culture of secrecy within church culture or policy, the double standards, which say 'yes to orientation, no to practice' and encouraging other denominations to make a commitment rather than playing one side off against the other. Advocacy

involves supporting those who have to endure alienation as the result of denominational decisions, strengthening across denominational links to promote the 'freedom of conscience' of individuals, appointing and supporting LGBTIQ people in church leadership roles (especially in paid positions), going beyond calling for inclusion (talking) and acceptance by building up patterns of full belonging (acting) and promoting the recognition of LGBTIQ experiences as a valid source of theological reflection (Palm 2019:25):

South Africa has a long, complex story of historical church engagement both in social oppression and in fighting for social justice [in the service of 'critical solidarity']. This offers intersectional opportunities for churches to situate their LGBTIQ activism within a wider container of social justice and to reclaim this prophetic tradition by drawing on and nurturing new forms of a unique South African 'kairos' theology for change ... Ministers note the undeveloped potential of the church here in terms of supporting parents more widely with one noting, 'someone can sit in church and be fine about us saying "everyone is welcome" but then speak very differently to their children'. (p. 29)

Despite this promising research, it should not be assumed that this process will be easy or successful. It will require great faithfulness and endurance to counter much opposition and rejection.

With regard to matters of interpretation, even Jesus interpreted his own Jewish scriptures as is demonstrated in his attitude towards the Law, that is Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus: 'You have heard that our forefathers were told ... But what I tell you is this ...' (15 times in Mt 5-6). Jesus acknowledges the historic law of his people, but he does not hesitate to go beyond it for the sake of relationships that engender a deeper sense of community and for the sake of promoting his mission. This has its source in:

... Judaism where there is a history of interpretation – *midrash* – which seeks to uncover the deeper meaning of Scripture and its import for living in the present. From this Rabbinic tradition there emerged the *Mishnah* (the oral teaching) and the *Talmud*, which combines the *Mishnah* with further discussions on the *Mishnah*, called the *Gamara*. For Scripture to keep its relevance in later and often radically different circumstances there has to be a process of reflection. (Ballard 2011:166)

This indicates that from early times prior to the finalisation of the biblical canon, interpretation has been part of the formation of scripture and what we promote as scripture is itself already a product of the hermeneutical process.

Rigid conservative thinkers require simple straightforward solutions for all situations because they do not trust individual integrity. They fear the human influence that may be exercised in the complex situations they face. They require the Bible to produce precise answers and solutions to all the issues they confront rather than work through their issues employing universal biblical values – love, justice, freedom, and peace. They find their security in exclusive rather than inclusive hermeneutics, for they abhor risk-taking. Here, divine grace may pre-empt human law in order to develop a

more human and humanitarian approach that reflects Jesus' pastoral methodology as 'radical humanism' (Küng 1974:31). Fundamentalists find it difficult to accept that:

... the Bible does not exist independently but embedded, in a peculiar and particular way, within and through the community of faith ... the implication of the notion of the Bible as Scripture as a serious factor in looking at the use of the bible in pastoral practice has not been, in any systematic way, taken up. (Ballard 2011:158)

The purpose of the Bible is to be a resource of the preaching of God's loving justice for the world to encourage God's people to reach out as agents of his mission of reconciliation. The Bible has a source community as well as source communities of transition and destination. It is the relevance of its particularity in its community that enables it to be of general relevance for contextualisation and cannot be separated from hermeneutics. It is in the particular practical contextual domain that the gospel becomes relevant and provides guiding principles, not instructions, for practice.

The normativity of scripture and a flexibility in its interpretation are complementary. For example, theology has to work in application in order for it to be Practical Theology. Otherwise, scripture may lose its authority, which does not depend on quoting 'appropriate' texts but in the way they are used in pastoral care situations by caregivers, who: 'saw the Bible primarily as a resource from which they drew their values, perspective and insights in to the human condition, and that this remained in the background and was not necessarily made explicit' (Ballard 2011:163).

An issue is that often the ancient words may obscure the living Word and may be used incautiously as well as being used out of context. This can be the result of not allowing the larger picture to emerge as fundamentalism is constrained by limiting hermeneutics. Those who exercise the many forms of ministry are frequently inculturating the scriptural Word in the tasks of ministry, making the Word an authentic resource bringing all these tasks and their outcomes together into an integrated holistic approach. Dynamism is central to this model of interpretation for it has never been static; rather it is conditioned by time, space, and context. The discernment of Christian truth is continuous and progressive focussed on the approaching kingdom and faithful to Christ.

Conclusion: Law or grace?

One thing that becomes clear is that church law does not provide any substantial or equitable solution to the issue of human sexuality. This is a field that is dominated by feelings and attitudes rather than facts and knowledge. It has been observed how the mission statement, the *Confession of Faith* and the *Declaration of Faith for the Church in Southern Africa* in the church order are based on critical solidarity with their desire to promote the unity of the church; yet, their provisions are largely ignored. This may surprise us as conservatives seek clear cut solutions even at the cost of the

denial of justice, which inhibits the restoration of human dignity. However, despite the biblical basis of these significant UPCS documents, they dismiss what they do not agree with and force solutions in the church legal system, which contradict the *Confession of Faith*. Furthermore, it is clear that the practice of the UPCS does not conform to its definition, vision, mission, mission priorities, and values.

Hence, the imposition of existing church law hardly provides a solution to the issues under consideration. The questions are: why those who wish to celebrate gay marriages are prevented from doing so, or if it not possible to allow this legally? Why can ministers who have no issues of conscience not celebrate a liturgical marriage and have the couples marry legally in a parallel civil ceremony as a poor alternative? Those who wish to depart from the broad-church nature of the UPCS and deny the 'freedom of conscience principle, whose consciences allow them to celebrate such marriages, must ask themselves what they hope to achieve by their intransigence? To impose legal measures may only serve to lead to a deterioration of already tense relationships within what are described as broad-church denominations and may also lead to ongoing attempts to force one view on others who do not share that opinion. It is easy to conclude that principles are more important than persons. Jesus' saying comes to mind in this regard: 'The Sabbath was made for [hu]man, not [hu]man for the Sabbath: so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath' (Mk 2:27). Legal measures may not resolve the issue; they may simply exacerbate it as its decisions are based on a win-lose scenario. The law promotes an exclusive approach because of this separatist model. This is strange in a denomination that now bases its decision-making processes on a consensus model. It is not clear why the church should declare an unequivocal position in this matter and impose one view which is, in essence, a personal matter? There are opposing opinions in the UPCS regarding, for example, baptism, which is an issue relating to the 'substance of the faith' unlike the issue of human sexuality. In addition, the entire nature and purpose of the church is to be an inclusive embracing community.

A number of issues arise within the UPCS in this regard. There is little evidence of caring throughout the debate from the conservative camp. Where there are signs of compromise, they are belied by a 'Yes, but ...' perspective. On the negative side, there is no commitment to engagement and no mention of or commitment to securing justice for those who are discriminated against. The manner in which the relational aspect is denigrated is contrary to scripture. This is a matter for deep concern. Conservative evangelicals reject all interpretations, even from scripture that are not consistent with their own interpretation regardless of the number of reports that have taken account of all the issues raised. On the other hand, the evidence of the 'liberal' CHS demonstrates a development in its thinking and a willingness to engage in an open space manner that is inclusive.

Mutual care, concern and respect constitute solidarity in the gospel that can enable progress on matters of theological interpretation. The gospel itself is not theology, but is a source of theology. It provides a method of systematising our belief and helps us towards a deeper understanding of the Good News of Jesus Christ. The world looks at our conflicts that are evidence of a divided rather than a unified community, with disbelief. This should give us serious cause to act in a manner, which will result in promoting the gospel sourced in God's love and our love for others – *agape* – a process out of and from the self in the service of others, which resonates with Tillich's definition of love as the 'drive towards the unity of the separated' (Tillich 1954b). Hence, the need for the maintenance of the Reformed principle of *semper reformanda* (Duncan 2018).

Unless there is a total conversion or transformation throughout the UPCSA, there is no possibility of achieving or living up to its honourable values. It will be stuck in the negative 'critical distance' characteristic of those who conform to the 'pattern of this present world' rather than be 'transformed by the renewal of your minds' (Rm 12:2). Yet, there is still the possibility of achieving the 'glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rm 8:21), which is the outcome and product of 'critical solidarity' resulting from serious 'critical engagement'.

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