

O B E D I E N C E  
A N D  
S E R V A N T  
L E A D E R S H I P

A P O L L I S , A P P I E S , B U T I , B U Y S

EUGENE BARON &  
NICO ADAM BOTHA



*sb*



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*sb* **SUNBONANI  
SCHOLAR**

*Obedience and Servant Leadership - Apollis, Appies, Buti, Buys*

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*We are deeply grateful,*

**Eugene & Nico**

# PREFACE

26TH APRIL 1994

Long lines of people at the polling stations had their walk to freedom. They didn't walk to the finish, no, they walked towards a new world, a new beginning. Rolihlahla Mandela, "freedom is in your hands".

In those days, I was in Pietermaritzburg, monitoring the elections. I saw the long, long lines. And then, that tall well-dressed white lady hurrying to the front of the queue, and hundreds of eyes looking at her, and no one stopped her. Then suddenly, she slowed down, looking puzzled, turned around and walked slowly towards the end of the queue and took her place. And the *gogo's* in front of her didn't dare to turn around but clearly felt uncomfortable with the eyes of that lady gazing at their back. Those were the days ... *KAIROS!* I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people!

One year before, in May 1993, I was visiting Archbishop Ndomiso Ngada and Bishop Kenosi Mofokeng of the African Indigenous Churches (AICs) in the office on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of a posh Braamfontein office building, which a benevolent businessman made available to them. There I was, with some whites and some blacks, waiting for the elevator. I went in with all of them – the whites. Someone pushed the button and the doors closed, and then I saw that all the blacks stayed behind and looked away from us.

In April 1994, I saw Kenosi again – same elevator. All the blacks went in, one pushed the button, the doors closed, and all looked at me with a big smile – they left me out! – and before I could smile back, they went up. I told Kenosi, "Big, big smile!" Freedom was in the air ... *Kairos!*

## LANSERIA, 15TH APRIL 1994

There was another Kairos moment in the making, which no one had planned.

Early in April, there was still no agreement on the participation of the Inkatha Freedom Party and time was running out. If no agreement would be reached, voting stations (and voters) in KwaZulu-Natal would run the risk of being attacked, with the result that no proper voting could take place in that province. IFP's leader, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, insisted on international mediation on the highest level: Henri Kissinger (US) and Lord Carrington (UK). They were assisted by Prof. Washington Okumu (Kenya). They started their work on the evening of 12<sup>th</sup> April. Two days later, they concluded that no agreement could be reached and on the 15<sup>th</sup>, Kissinger and Lord Carrington flew home. Prof. Okumu stayed behind, deeply distressed about the prospect that the elections in KwaZulu-Natal would be marked by violence and killings. He called Buthelezi on his cell phone and asked for a last-minute meeting. Buthelezi replied that he was on his way to Lanseria airport from where his plane would leave at 17:00 to Ulundi. If Okumu arrived in time, they could talk. Okumu took a taxi and raced to the airport, where he arrived at 16:45 to find out that Buthelezi's plane had already left. Okumu stood on the platform, very upset that the last chance to make an agreement had slipped through his fingers. Then he heard the sound of a small plane flying into Lanseria, which turned out to be Buthelezi's plane, returning due to trouble with the gyrocompass. So, when Buthelezi left the plane, he walked right into the arms of Okumu. A few hours later, they agreed on the basics of a last-minute final proposal to be made. Two days later, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April, an agreement was reached. Millions of Inkatha stickers were now printed, to be attached to millions of ballot papers.

On the 18<sup>th</sup>, I was in Beyers Naudé's office with Wolfram Kistner and Sister Bernard Ncube, when Oom Bey picked up a phone call from friends at the SA Catholic Bishops Conference. They told him the news about the return of that plane, the meeting, the agreement, and I will never forget the deep emotion, the flowing of tears, our total conviction that we had witnessed the healing hand of the Almighty, the thanksgiving prayers ...



*KAIROS!* Years later, I read that – on the ground – the gyrocompass worked perfectly, with no sign of defect ...<sup>1</sup>

## BELHAR, 17TH APRIL

Two weeks earlier in Belhar, the DRMC and DRCA crossed their own Rubicon and turned their back on the concept that the colour of your skin was decisive for the question of being invited to receive the Holy Communion, as had been decided by the *NG Kerk* in 1881. They united under the name Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, expressing in their name that unity with the former *Moederkerk* remained high on their agenda.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> April, Madiba himself walked in, as if he had no other priorities in that hectic month of April. These were the people who, 12 years before, had brought the clarion call to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches that apartheid was a HERESY. These were the people who had written the Belhar Confession, which had deeply impressed and encouraged him on Robben Island. They had put their fingerprint on the agenda of churches inside and outside South Africa. By his presence, he recognised them all. Sam Buti had told him in advance that at this very moment, he should not address the meeting, because – after the *NG Kerk* had been proud to be called the National Party in prayer – this new Church didn't want to be seen as the ANC in prayer. "When you are doing the right things, we'll praise you, if not, we'll criticise you" (Buti, 1994). Mandela fully agreed with what Sam Buti had said.

It was surprising that Mandela went to Belhar on 17<sup>th</sup> April, when the draft agreement Prof. Okumu and Buthelezi had put on the table was the most urgent item to be discussed and agreed to avoid bloodshed in KwaZulu-Natal. That would have been a dramatic setback for the new South Africa. The deal was about the transfer of 2.8 million hectares administered by the KwaZulu homeland to end up in a trust (the Ingonyama Trust) with the

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1 See Michael Cassidy, *A Witness Forever*, with a foreword by Prof. Washington Okumu.

## PREFACE

Zulu King, Goodwill Zwelithini, as its trustee. This was discussed and agreed between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the Government.

On 19<sup>th</sup> April, a “memorandum of agreement for reconciliation and peace” was signed by the ANC, IFP and the Government, which included a constitutional recognition for the Zulu King and a promise for further international mediation after the election. It made no mention of the transfer of the land to the King’s trust.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April, the KwaZulu legislative assembly agreed with the Ingonyama Trust Act and the transfer of the land administered by the homeland to this Trust. It was the last decision they took as a legislative assembly. They would be replaced by newly elected bodies under the new provisional Constitution. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, Parliament agreed to amend the Constitution to recognise the Zulu King. That was their last decision.

## ON 27TH APRIL, THE VOTING STARTED

Neither Mandela, nor any member of the ANC negotiation team, was informed about the sale of the land. With the phasing out of all the homelands, the ownership of the land came under the authority of the national government. The same applied to KwaZulu-Natal, but at the time that all homelands would be dissolved, KwaZulu-Natal had no land anymore because that had been transferred to the trust.<sup>2</sup> The new Cabinet learned about this deal weeks after the election. Mandela was furious and felt utterly betrayed by the two people who were now his vice-presidents!

## UITLANDER

Of course, it is somewhat unusual to invite an *uitlander* to write the preface for a book like this, leaving aside someone who has no degree in theology. However, all settlers were *uitlanders* when they arrived and brought the

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2 See Secret details of the land deal that brought the IFP into the ‘94 poll, *Mail and Guardian*, 7 Aug 2019.

## PREFACE

*Statenvertaling* with them. They were honoured by their offspring. The best translation for *uitlander* is an ancestor, as many of them put their fingerprint on this country and their footprint on its soil.<sup>3</sup>

In retrospect, I see that in my life, three full CVs ran parallel, which were not competing but rather supplementing each other: Work since 1968, Church since 1970 and South Africa since 1978. None of the three were planned – they happened to us. We were starting with the third: *Gereformeerde Gymnasium* (now Christelijk Gymnasium Beyers Naudé) in Leeuwarden. At the final exams in 1960, we had to write an essay and could choose one of ten themes. I decided to write my essay about white begins / black wins. Two years later, Alexandr Solzjenitsyn wrote “One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich”. For my wife Joke and I, that one day was 21 April 1978, but we only realised much later that, on that day, we had boarded a non-stop train that had a clear direction although, at times, no rails.

I was on a business trip for Nedlloyd to South Africa and I had reserved Saturday for myself. A few days before my departure, I received \$25,000 in cash from the *Wêrelddiakonaat* of the *Hervormde Kerk* [World Diaconate of the Reformed Church] for Beyers Naudé, whose bank account was blocked for overseas funding.

At 15:00, I met with him in the garden, because his house was bugged. I received a friendly welcome. Greetings from *Kerk & Wêreld*, the lay training centre of the *Hervormde Kerk* on whose Board I served. He briefed me on the events of Soweto 1976 and the aftermath, on Steve Biko and his views on violence. Tannie Ilse brought us tea with apple pie. When I rose to get an extra chair, she said, “No, I can’t sit with you, Bey can only see one person at a time”. “And the children?” “No! If they come for dinner, I put two plates on the kitchen table.” If the doorbell rings, *Szjjjjjj*... Bey goes to the kitchen with one child ... Banning! A mediaeval punishment for this dedicated couple.

---

3 When President Hendrik Verwoerd had a meeting with the RC Bishops Conference, he took a seat, looked around the table, shook his head and said with dismay: “I see only *uitlanders*”. Then Archbishop Denis Hurley looked around the table and said: “Well, as far as I know, there is only one *uitlander* in this room”.

## PREFACE

They treated every visitor as a most welcome friend, they listened, they fed them with thoughts, they encouraged and they prayed for them. No power-play, no orders were given, no badmouthing!<sup>4</sup> But not wavering one moment for what they believed to be *Gebot der Stunde* [no alternative – at that precise moment what you would have to do here and now]. We didn't have a clue that this two-hour meeting would result in our entire family getting involved in the Christian Fellowship Trust (CFT) – a Trust they had started with the aim to send church ministers and their wives to England, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. They became grandparents to our children, and at Oom Bey's state funeral,<sup>5</sup> Archbishop Tutu ended his sermon with the following words:

Last week in heaven, God the Father was walking around as he always does and saw how Satan was crouching in a corner as if he didn't want to be seen, and God approached him and said: why are you looking so sad ... Do you remember our discussions about Job? When you said: it is not difficult to be a believer if you are stone rich ...? Yes, Satan said, and that you, Satan, said: may I put him to the test and take all his wealth and health from him, are you sure that he will not turn his back on you? And that I said: go ahead, but you may not take his life! Yes, I remember, Satan said again and shivered because he remembered that he had failed ...

And God tapped him on the shoulder and said:

But what do you think of my friend Bey?

And Satan shivered again and again and didn't know what to say ... AMEN.

---

4 [www.gertvanmaanen.nl/Beyers Naude lezing Met de Moed der Hoop 1997](http://www.gertvanmaanen.nl/Beyers_Naude_lezing_Met_de_Moed_der_Hoop_1997)

5 During the break between the family service and the state funeral, I was told by the SACC that I would be one of the pallbearers. Together with James Buys, Wolfram Kistner, Manas Buthelezi, Peter Storey and Olav Tveit.

## WILGESPRUIT

At 17:00, Dale White picks me up at Bey's home. Immediate click. Immediate trust. Ordained Anglican priest and successor of Trevor Huddleston in Sophiatown, and when his flock was evicted from there, he accompanied them to Soweto (St. Paul's).

He was assigned by the Bishop to Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre in 1965 as Director, while keeping him in St. Paul's. Wilgespruit was started in 1948 with six ministers – three black and three white – and the Wilgespruit Farm was bought as a place where apartheid would not set foot.

## MISSION: TRAINING AND EMPOWERMENT OF VICTIMS OF APARTHEID

At home: Tish, Dale's wife, switched on the music because their house was bugged. They showered me with information. At 02:30 in the morning, he drives me back to the Carlton Hotel. In the parking area, he tells me that in the vestry of his church, four widows make candles to be placed on all windowsills in Soweto on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June. Question: What should they do on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June? They are entitled to social security for three months. If they have not found employment, they will be treated as loafers and be deported to one of the homelands. Brainstorm: Dutch Churches to order 100,000 candles to be sold for 5 guilders each, and shipping September 1978 to be in time for Christmas. I wrote a sales contract while in Durban, and Dale convened a meeting with project leaders on 30<sup>th</sup> April, amongst Rector David Nkwe (St. Paul's), Mary Mxadana (later Mandela's PA) and Griffith Zabala. They believed that they could deliver. Next day, African Bank was fine with the contract but not prepared to pre-finance as long as the contract was not signed by the Dutch churches. Then, we went to the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and John Rees was prepared to prefinance up to R80,000.

However, the Dutch Churches were furious: "Who authorised you to do this, you lawyer!! To commit us for R500,000!!" I confessed that I had no authority, but that at 03:00 in the morning, I couldn't consult anyone.

## PREFACE

However, I had the firm belief that they would agree if they would look at the merits of this case and the minimal risk. “Come on”, they said, “R500,000 is not a minimal risk!!!” I explained that, no, their maximal exposure was not 500,000 but only the amount the SACC would actually have furnished. If they did not sign the contract now, there won’t be candles, and they would only have to reimburse the SACC, but at this stage that would probably be less than R40,000. There was a deafening silence.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, time was of the essence, because they had to scale up in May by ordering moulds and wax in bulk and train more people to meet the deadline in September. One would not be able to decide on this contract before the summer, but then the candles arrive in February. What I did was against the rules, but it was not a sin. On Sundays, we were invited to sing “*God roept ons broeders tot de daad, Zijn werk wacht treedt dan aan*” [God calls us brothers to action, His work is waiting, so let us start]. People who remembered that on Monday were no sinners.

On Christmas Eve in the *Westerkerk* in Amsterdam, we switched on the television and there was Rev. Nico ter Linden. I said to Joke, “Look there, at the door, all people walk in with a Soweto Candle!! Look!!! And no one is paying”. Towards the end, Nico said: “You have all received a Soweto candle and can read the text in the flyer: In Soweto, with close to 1.5 million people, the houses have no electricity. They have paraffin lamps and candles, not as a romantic item, but as a basic need! *Maar zie, zij die wonen in een land van diepe duisternis brengen ons aanstekelijk licht* [Behold! *The who dwell in a land of deep darkness bring us an infectious light*”].

The candles are signed and cost 5 guilders. But the value of them bringing their light to us, is much higher. Please put your money in the offertory bag when you leave”.

We got the tape and sent it to the group in Soweto – by now 40 women! They were elated to see their candles in this Amsterdam Christmas service.

## PREFACE

In January, close to 500,000 guilders<sup>6</sup> was transferred to the Ukhukanya Trust they had started, and the trust started to give the first grant to the Orphanage, instead of writing letters to overseas donors. Forty women did it. As from 1980, their candles were sold through third world shops in the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland, albeit at a less inflated price.

The ball didn't stop there. A portion of the money was used to enable grassroots leaders to buy warm clothes because they would go to the Coady Institute in Canada. Coady had an excellent programme on cooperatives in the third world and would admit people who had no matric but played a vital role in their community. When they arrived, our daughter, Marieke, climbed on their laps and they taught her basic Zulu. In the evenings, we showed them "Woza Albert" and "Witness to Apartheid", etc. Six months later, they returned from Canada as people with self-confidence.

Dale White and I were driving all the way to the North in the mid-eighties during the State of Emergency. Those were moments that you could share, or listen, or think ... I asked him, "Are you never afraid, with all these killings and people who disappear?" Dale said, "No, it is many years ago that I decided not to be scared because in that case they would have won before it is their time. And look, I am sitting next to you. All these years we have gained!" And I responded, "But what about your daughters, they are 12 and 14. What about them, if next year they drive you off the road to get rid of you?" "Well", Dale paused and then said softly, "in that case, we would have gained another year, wouldn't we?"

Dale died on 29 October 2007. When I arrived on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, Tish told me, "You have to hurry to the Soweto morgue, we waited for you because you are his brother, you have to wash him". And I said, "Tish, on 31 October, our first grandson was born. His name is Julius Johannes Dale".

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6 In the eighties the exchange rate between the rand and Dutch guilder was 1:1.5, therefore it could be roughly be R750 000.

## CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP TRUST

ICCO, the Protestant Development Agency, was very pleased with the results of the candle project and asked me to join their Board in 1980.<sup>7</sup> In 1981, the ICCO Director, Jone Bos, asked Joke if she could replace the CFT secretary for Holland who had retired. The CFT was the vehicle of Beyers and Ilse Naudé to send ministers and their wives overseas (England, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland). They would identify the themes they would like to focus on and whom they would like to meet. Joke compiled the program and added contacts like the Kairos staff, Mpho Ntoane, Oshadi Pakhati, other exiles, SA students in Kampen, etc. Bey and Ilse had experienced that – through all these contacts and their questions – they would be encouraged to redefine their own ministry back home. The total number of grantees was 217<sup>8</sup> – during ‘our’ years (1982-1993), 64 (DRMC 36; DRCA 10; DRC 5; R Catholic 4; Baptist 3; Anglican 2; Methodist 1).

The first CFT grantees who arrived in February 1982 in our home for three weeks were Sarel Christians and Thelma Sacco.<sup>9</sup> They were followed by Tommy and Enna Fredericks, James and Angela Buys, Nico and Dawn Botha, Leonardo and Lisette Appies, Andries and Martie Odendaal, Russel and Lizzy Botman, Eddy and Lizzie Leeuw, Paddy Kearny and Carmel Rickard, Phebe Botman, Ivor and Karin Jenkins, Jan and Nellie Thyse, Peter Kerchoff, Thembekile and Nompucuko Mandleloda, Averell and Francesca Rust, Goodman and Ngenzeni Khuzwayo (these are not all names, but those who remained visible). On the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1978, we had not the faintest idea that it would lead to people with such a commitment walking into our house in such numbers.

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7 I agreed, subject to the consent of the staff, because I was well aware that the NGO world is not a natural ally of the business world, and *vice versa*. Then I heard that there was strong opposition from the South Africa desk, because Gert had broken the international boycott on import from South Africa and had not even consulted the churches, who would have told him so ... That was an extra reason to meet with the staff. The majority gave me the green light, although the South Africa desk was not pleased.

8 See Deborah Ewing, *The Secret Thread* (Unisa Press, 2018), which is based on interviews by Deborah Ewing and Alison Harvey with a large number of grantees. See also page 5/6 of the James Buys Memorial Lecture.

9 By that time, our children (aged 11, 9 and 6) were used to having guests, because between Aug. 1978 and Feb. 1982, Wilgespruit had already brought 27 guests to our home.



## PART TWO

This book's focus is on four church leaders – Nick Apollis, Leonardo Appies, Sam Buti and James Buys – who dedicated their lives to God's own people, as identified by Christ in his Sermon on the Mount: the poor, the meek, the vulnerable, the hungry, the thirsty for righteousness and their allies: the merciful, the peacemakers. They had a dream and a mission in common and a high sensitivity for what the Holy Spirit expected them to do (or not to do) in this country full of pain and challenges and hurdles. They were not the only ones. There were many more of them, but they happened to be on the joint *moderatuur* at a certain moment in time, and they were in charge of the unification of the DRMC and DRCA and the birth of the URCSA.

## WHAT THEY INHERITED

These four church leaders had in common that their place under the sun was the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa. These names had been given to them by the Dutch Reformed Church, which decided in 1881 that it was better to give them their own church, with its own church councils, with elders, ministers, Holy Communion, etc. The DRC did not turn their back on them: they provided them with white missionaries, they paid for their salaries and church buildings and other costs, as they had done before. Also, the daily operations of the local congregations would not change. What changed in 1881 was the legal status and the governance picture. In particular, the role of the 'daughter churches', which would get their own church order and own Synod, Regional Synods, relations with and responsibilities for the congregations, etc. The DRC designed one Dutch Reformed *Kerkverband* in which all four churches had their place, that is, three seats and one Chair, because of their shared history, doctrine and the need to build and staff new structures as daughter churches. The choice to create three daughter churches, however, was not based on doctrine or theological differences, but the colour of their skin: white for the mother church, black for the black, coloured for the coloured, Indian for the Indians. To make the colour a relevant criterium for the organisation of the Church was not based on the Scriptures. In fact, it was not based on anything except colour. That was the setting and the DRC designed it.

It looked as if the daughter churches were promoted to a higher level, with their own synods and their own church order, etc. But the church order had been written by the DRC and decisions by the daughter churches could be vetoed by the DRC.

What was the problem the *NG Kerk* wanted to address by introducing this new structure? It was the potential presence of black, coloured and Indian people in their church services, and in particular during Holy Communion. In the Reformed tradition, ministers are expected to speak and preach about the sins of their flock. It was therefore not appropriate that workers would be present when their masters were corrected by the ministers. That would undermine the masters' authority. In 1857, the Dutch Reformed Cape Synod decided that the coloured congregants would have separate services. After 1881, they had their own church, and one could see by the colour of their skin where they would be welcome (or not welcome).

## CLARION CALL BROEDERKRING

Against that background, the clarion call from the *Broederkring* in 1974 was long overdue. The members of the *Broederkring* were full-fledged ministers, graduated in the Western Cape, ordained and serving their congregations. They were ministers – no, missionaries – who had been 'sent' to bring the gospel to 'those people' who were living at 'the other side'. From my first visit to South Africa in 1978, I remember that I bought a City Plan and couldn't find Soweto on the map. It wasn't on the map – a huge area with more than one million people, not on the map?? No! The reason: People like me didn't need a map, because we were not supposed to go there. And if I needed to go there, I should ask Dale to take me there – the other side. And when I smelled the polluted air hanging over Soweto, Dale explained that they had paraffin lamps, because there was no electricity in their homes. They didn't need that, you know, because at night they should sleep and not read. Two major initiatives paved the way for the *Broederkring* to be formed.

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The first one was the Christian Fellowship Trust, started in 1964 by Beyers and Ilse Naudé, with the financial support of Sir Derrick Bailey. He had brainstormed with Beyers about the question, “What should happen to bring about change in South Africa?” They agreed that change from within would stand a better chance than pressure from outside. The best way to bring about change from within would be through the church, in particular, the *NG Kerk* which played a very specific role as the spiritual mentor of the National Party. However, changing the church would take time, because that would require changing the hearts and minds (and beliefs) of ministers. “But,” Beyers said, “it can be done!” However, the very best instrument would not be to invite ministers to meetings in Johannesburg, but rather to send them abroad to meet with colleagues and congregations in England, Holland, Germany and Switzerland. He told Sir Derrick that, in 1953, he had been on such a trip as chair of the youth organisation of the *NG Kerk* to Europe and the USA. He had been bombarded by questions about apartheid and the role of the church. He had done his utmost to defend the position of his church, with all rehearsed answers. But when he returned to South Africa, he was in great doubt whether he had done the right thing by telling *bona fide* church people that they were wrong. As from 1964 until 1995, 217 grantees were sent overseas – most of the ministers with their wives. We hosted the last 62 in our home, of which 36 DRMC and 10 DRCA, and we witnessed how many of them returned to South Africa with a different mindset.

Part of Beyers’ dream was that they would form a network to keep each other on track. That was the *Broederkring/Belijdende Kring*, which took the lead to bite the bullet in 1974.

The second initiative was started in 1970 by the *Theological Hogeschool Kampen*, the historical stronghold of Reformed theology. They started a special program to enable non-white South African ministers to get their master’s degrees and – if they wanted to go on – their PhD at Kampen. They had already served as ministers in South Africa and came with their families. Under that program, which was co-founded by some 15 support groups in the Netherlands, 23 ministers received their master’s degrees, of which six went on to get their PhD between 1976 and 1987, including Allan Boesak, Daan Cloete, Mpho Ntoane, Takatso Mofokeng, Weli Mazamisa

and Shun Govender. These numbers and these names fill us with deep joy. The time they spent in Kampen, they did not only use to study but also to redefine their roles as ministers, once they would be back in South Africa. They returned as different people, committed, dedicated, and they made a difference – not so much because of their exposure to the Dutch, but their daily interaction with and encouragement of each other, away from the daily exposure to apartheid.

But in the meantime, they did more. Their presence in Kampen changed the character of this theological stronghold from a conservative bulwark into one of the most dedicated anti-apartheid higher education institutions in the Netherlands. At the same time, the Reformed Synod they belonged to was still debating whether or not to support the PCR program. They did not only put their fingerprints on this institution but also many of their professors, their fellow students and the members of the support groups and, back home, joined the *Belijdende Kring* in the preparation of that Clarion Call.

That call was both missionary and visionary. It was missionary to declare openly that their mission was to unite and was not limited to DRMC and DRCA but included all the Reformed churches in one Reformed Church, which would not be subdivided along colour lines. As long as they were not united, they would call themselves uniting as a permanent reminder that there was unfinished business and it was on our agenda, and it was our duty to work at that, and to pave the road towards unity. It was visionary, because even if they didn't know the next step, they had that step, or rather that Star on the horizon which showed them the direction.

They made it clear as from the start that the wish to unite in spite of all the negative signals from the DRC was not a move on a chessboard, but an open invitation based on faith: "What does the Lord require of us?" (Micah 6:8), and an honest confession of guilt. Especially in this case, in this deeply wounded country loaded with pain and grief. To set the tune, they decided to change their name to *Belijdende Kring*, which reflects the faith, the life and the hope of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. They also realised that faith and confession only have meaning if they are the result of inner conviction, not of confrontation or a last-minute compromise. You had the

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advantage that, in the late-eighties, South Africa was a front-runner in the field of conflict resolution. The Rustenburg Declaration – agreed to and signed by more than 80 churches (including the DRC, but afterwards heavily criticised internally) – was an example of that.

The other impressive example was James Buys in his submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997, when many expected him to lash out against the DRC. He didn't. He confessed that his DRMC church had failed to do the right thing at the right moment in the right manner. At the end of that hearing, of all religious bodies which had registered, Archbishop Desmond Tutu said that Buys had by far given the best presentation, in content, spirit and tone. The DRC had submitted documents but had not registered, probably because whatever they would say might be rejected by a vocal part of their own membership. What were the prospects that the DRC would listen to that clarion call of 1974? No prospect at all. As long as PW Botha was at the helm, the DRC wouldn't confess any guilt. A wise old man from the inner circle of the DRC said, "What sense does it make to twist their arm if you know that the answer will be no?"

However, in 1974, the DRC was too deeply entrenched in the policy to strengthen apartheid to confess anything. The Soweto uprising and killing (1976), the death of Steve Biko, and the banning of Beyers (both in 1977) resulted in a deeper entrenchment, leading ultimately to the bombing of Khotso House on 31 August 1988 by a Vlakplaas squad and 18 months later, Mandela walked out of Victor Verster as a free man.

### WARC – OTTAWA (1982)

From 17-21 August 1982, the WARC was meeting in Ottawa. The agenda was well prepared. South Africa, apartheid, and so forth, was not on the agenda. There were eight representatives from the three DRC 'daughter' churches. Allan Boesak, at that time Moderator of the DRMC, and his team arrived a few days earlier to inform the President, Prof. James McCord, and the Executive Committee about the issues the SA group wanted to table. Spellbound, they listened to his presentation about the war which was going

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on in South Africa between the white minority, which wanted to preserve their supremacy over a huge majority of non-whites at all costs. Why should that be on the WARC's agenda? Because it was white ministers who preached that God was on their side? He reminded them about the *Deutsche Christen* who had taken control over the *Evangelische Kirche* in Nazi-Germany and, in their fanaticism to please the Führer, blessed him in his policy to exterminate the Jews. He reminded them that it was Bonhoeffer who started the *Bekennende Kirche, Barmen, Status Confessionis, Gebot der Stunde*, etc.

He asked them to put a *Status Confessionis* on apartheid high on the agenda and to suspend the membership of the DRC, and mentioned that these eight delegates would not take communion together with the DRC delegation, because they were not allowed to take communion with them at home. Therefore, the concept of one mother church and three daughter churches had little meaning. The Executive Committee agreed and invited Boesak to do the Bible study in the plenary sessions on all five days, and please, to put what he had told them on paper to be distributed to all participants.

Within these five days:

- The WARC had identified apartheid as **a sin**;
- which decision had been given **Status Confessionis**;
- The membership of DRC was suspended;
- **Allan Boesak** was elected as **WARC President** for seven years;
- The people who were working at the unity between the four Reformed churches were recognised as key players in the ecumenical family;
- The WARC had become their best ally;
- The WARC itself had become revitalised around apartheid;
- The delegations of the WARC Member churches came home deeply impressed, and enjoying that they had been able to move bricks and remove walls.

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Back home, it was decided to follow in the footsteps of the *Bekennende Kirche* and to draft a new confession for today's context, to be named the Belhar Confession, which should be added to the four confessions mentioned in the church order, each of which reflected the context of their times. A small committee was formed to compile a first draft, which was circulated before the end of the year. The final text was approved by the DRMC Synod in 1986, and by the DRCA Synod at the time of the merger in 1994.

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In celebrating a quarter of a century of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) (1994-2019), quite a few well-organised activities and events took place. These activities reflected a mix of serious academic seminars and liturgical celebrations of which the ones in the Cape, both in Belhar and at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), warrant special mention. In his sermon based on John 17 at the closing liturgical celebration at UWC, Prof. Daan Cloete raised several pertinent issues pertaining to unity and justice as a challenge to the leadership of URCSA. Consideration should perhaps be given to a “think tank” broader than the moderature to workshop such issues and to issue a new strategic plan for URCSA’s continued quest for greater internal unity, as well as advancing the unity in the DRC family of churches. A further issue is to work on creative strategies for URCSA’s identification and solidarity with the needy, the poor, the marginalised, the widow, the orphan and the stranger in our society.

Despite all the significant events taking place throughout the year (2019), there has been a major deficit. Attempts at serious historiography are few and far in between. This book is an attempt at starting such a study process. However, to put it modestly, to contribute to the writing of the history of the URCSA, it has been resolved to start right at the beginning: the founding synod of URCSA with a specific focus on the constituting moderature. In calling into service the pastoral or praxis cycle the contributions of the first moderature of URCSA: Rev. Nick Apollis (Moderator), Rev. Leonardo Appies (Scriba Synodi), Rev. Sam Buti (Assessor), and Rev. JD Buys (Actuarius), of the 1994 General Synod elections are presented in this book. The authors were interested in answering the question: “In what way did the moderature members of URCSA assist in the transformation of church and society?”



### 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The authors of the book made use of the praxis cycle. The praxis cycle operates like a theological, research methodology and an organising tool in the study. As a theological method, it resembles the contextual method of *see-judge-act* or the *action-reflection* method. As a research method, data gathering is informed by how the four members of the constituting moderature of URCSA answered the following questions:

- “Who am I”? Data relating to the kind of choices they made and the values they espoused was unearthed. In congruence with the aim of the two Jesuits, Holland and Henriot (1983), with whom the praxis cycle originated, data showing a clear commitment to the poor and the oppressed was sought.
- Secondly, data revealing the manner in which they tried to understand what was going on in society and why it was going on was explored. The question here was on how they were reading the signs of the times or what their discernment was relating to the socio-political and socio-economic realities in the country. A further issue was how they were reading the ecclesial situation in the country at large and in the DRC family of churches, in particular.
- Third, in light of their involvement relating to issues on different levels in the church and society and based on their analyses of the situation, the authors were also interested in their reading of the Bible. Was their theological reflection informed by their agency and context analysis, i.e. as Reformed theologians were they able to negotiate the Sola Scriptura notion in a manner that was not contradictory to the hermeneutic where the context and text of the Bible would be brought into continuous discourse with the context of people? To what extent, if at all, have they allowed themselves to be influenced by diverse modes of liberation theology – be it South African Black Theology, Latin American Liberation Theology or the Prophetic Theology of the Kairos Document (1985)?
- Fourth, were there any distinct strategies they developed or adopted in trying to transform the situation in church and society? Were they

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acting individually, or were they part of a movement or a group involved in ongoing struggles for justice?

- Fifth, and finally, what kind of spirituality were they reflecting? Is it attainable to trace something of their spirituality by working out whether such spirituality informed their insertion or agency, reading of the signs of times, reading of the Bible and the action taken to change around situations?

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The authors made use of two phases in the data collection process. First, the authors conducted archival research. They were interested in the grass-roots knowledge and conversations either about these moderation members or some of their responses, interactions and reports on their engagements and addresses, in light of the reports in the official church newspaper of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC), namely *Die Ligdraer*. But also, the minutes of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) that allowed the authors to construct their missional role in the South African church and society.

Secondly, the authors made use of open-ended interview questions. The authors were constructing the five questions in relation to the praxis cycle and distributed open-ended questions to the acquaintances, colleagues and family members of the four constituting moderation (1994) members of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). The authors collected the feedback from the participants as well as arranging subsequent Zoom interviews with the participants to seek elaboration and clarity in order to unearth the transformative actions of the four moderation members within church and society.

The authors used purposive sampling in selecting only those congregations in which these members served, and consulted members of the congregations that were close associates of the four moderation members. These were family members and colleagues in the ministry that journeyed with them, but it also

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included ministers of the Word within the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), as well as the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC).

The authors had, through their engagements, established a good understanding of the transformative nature, characteristics, role(s) and actions of the four moderation members and, after the collection of the data, further immersed themselves into the data collected to explore the various ideas that came to the fore. Through the analysis, the authors made notes and came to see the pertinent issues that are relevant to the four subsidiary research questions that are posed (see theological method), and in what way they relate to the four members' missional role in church and society.

The researchers were interested in the connections, similar ideas, actions, and hermeneutics in the data and coded it. The researchers connected these codes with those that are similar in order to group these codes into categories. From these categories, the authors were able to understand how these fit into the broader themes of the study and to discuss the data in relation to the four research questions that the researchers set out to explore and understand the transformative role of these constituting moderation members in church and society. Finally, after the coding and categorisation of the data, the authors used the emerging themes to answer the overall research question: "In what way did the moderation member of URCSA assist in the transformation of church and society?"

## 4. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

In the *first chapter*, the authors focus on the lack of consistency on the notion of obedience during the constituting synod of URCSA in April 1994, as on the issue of unity, justice and reconciliation. Therefore, the authors argue that what was evident in the lives and ministry of these members was their willingness to be obedient and pursue unity, justice and reconciliation.

In chapters *two to six*, the authors focus on one of the moderation members of the constituting moderation (1994) in each of the four chapters and in the following order: Rev. Nick Apollis (Moderator), Rev. Leonardo Appies (Scriba Synodii), Rev. Dr. Sam Buti (Assessor)

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and Rev. JD Buys (Actuarius).<sup>10</sup> The content of these chapters focuses on each member's missional role, through discussing their agency, their context analysis, their theological interpretive lens(es) of church and society, as well as the particular strategies that they employed to enact transformation. The authors focused on the primary sources – addresses, sermons, papers delivered from these members – to understand their contributions made to the church and society. The authors also focused on secondary sources, written and presented by their colleagues, congregants and acquaintances, that provided perspectives on their missional role in church and society. Through the two-pronged data collection process (primary and secondary), the authors were able to construct the missional character of these members.

The authors' focus in the seventh chapter is a bird's-eye view of the four moderation members' contributions and personalities and how their actions, addresses and analyses of the context contributed to their obedience to facilitate transformation. Nonetheless, the 1994 founding synod was the start of a new journey within URCSA. The church was in its 'baby shoes' and was already at the brink of a schism but was able to keep the 'ship' afloat. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the congruence of their actions, behaviour, choices made, but also the management of their differences and how their unique contributions would assist the positive outcome and, eventually, beyond its 25-year celebration in 2019.

## 5. ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTION

This book makes a contribution in two fields or disciplines within theology. It makes a missiological contribution, which lies in the aspect that with this book it has been shown that the four moderation members' spirituality was grounded in the everyday realities, and their rootedness in the political, economic struggle of the majority of the people in South Africa. They were able to transform the church through imagining the church beyond its racial divisions (URCSA), and their active role in encouraging members of two black churches to promote greater unification (with DRC) and facilitate

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10 The order of the moderation members is not in terms of the hierarchical order, but in terms of the alphabetical order.

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the restructuring of their denomination but also the South African society. The book shows how these members brought the members in the church as well as society to a different understanding of church in society. It further shows that a 'broken' and wounded church can become God's agent for reconciliation, unity and justice in the world.

The book also makes a contribution to the discipline of South African Reformed church history. There are several previous academic contributions that come to mind. An important book in this regard is the project between scholars of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and the Uniting Reformed Church (URCSA) who documented various perspectives of the Reformed churches' history between the period 1960-1990 in the publication *Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Struggle for Justice* (2013), edited by the late Mary-Anne Plaatjies-van Huffel and Robert R Vosloo. This excellent work captures the memories and the history for the said period. However, excellent as it might be, these moderate members whom the authors undertook to study do not feature prominently in terms of their actions, sacrifices, and intentional contributions to serve the church and society at large. Moreover, this book will also document beyond the demarcated scope (1990) of the edited volume, and build on the future of the reformed history specifically related to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).

## CHAPTER 1

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# SETTING THE SCENE: THE CONSTITUTING OF URCSA (1994)

### 1.1. SETTING THE SCENE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The historical significance of the election of Appies, Apollis, Buti and Buys as the constituting moderature of URCSA cannot be fully grasped if not located in the context of the epoch making political events around the time of their emergence. There was an interesting dialectic operating which impacted both positively and negatively on their election. Or perhaps it is more correct to draw attention to some ironies rather than to speak in positive or negative terms. This was two weeks before the first-ever democratic elections in South Africa. Whether there had been a deliberate attempt at delivering the unification between the *NG Kerk in Afrika* (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, DRCA) and the *NG Sendingkerk* (Dutch Reformed Mission Church, DRMC) before the general elections was never clear. It happened though, but was fraught with ambivalence and irony. First, a major deficit was that two of the members of the Dutch Reformed Churches, namely the white and Indian sections, were still outside the fold. They were not excluded, but rather as a result of their own refusal to unite were not part of the 1994 unification.

Second, the fact that the unification on 14 April 1994 almost coincided with the elections projected the four elected members of the URCSA moderature into the limelight. Churches in the country and abroad had to take note of this, as did politicians. Mandela's visit to the constituting synod of URCSA on Sunday, 17 April 1994, further put the spotlight squarely on the four. The visit of the president-to-be, just two weeks down the line, has thrown up a few ironies. Boesak, who had by then made up his mind, or should one say, who had by then been persuaded by Mandela to stand in the elections, accompanied the latter to the synod. Boesak's presence at the Holy Communion on that Sunday constituted a moment of joy and a distinct moment of sadness. The celebratory part was that, in our midst, there was the embodiment of the long struggle for unity and justice in church and society. It must have been a truly proud moment for synod and for him. And yet, there was also a sadness to see the anointed one – the one destined to become the first Moderator of the newly established URCSA – accompanying Mandela as an 'accidental' politician, as he would self-identify a decade and a half later (Boesak, 2009). Boesak is much too radically non-racial to have intentionally bought into the idea of winning over the Cape Coloureds for the ANC. The notion would have contradicted the very unification between the two churches. Not explicitly, perhaps, but implicitly, one cannot escape the reality that the concept of "Coloured vote" was constructed then. Some years later, at a Heritage Day celebration in Pretoria, Boesak made the statement that, before 1994, he knew who he was, but the ANC has turned him into a Coloured once again (Boesak, 2009).

How great the constituting synod was became eclipsed and overtaken, if not overrun, by the Mandela-revolution and the arrival of democracy. The reality was that delegates to the constituting synod who were overjoyed by the unification had to turn their attention to a much bigger event not even fourteen days down the line on their return home.

The emergence of Appies, Apollis, Buti and Buys as the first moderature or executives of the newly constituted Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in April 1994 should be located in the *matrix* shown in this chapter. The term *matrix* is used with different connotations.

A distinct meaning is that matrix refers to the cultural, political or social environment in which something develops. If the suggestion is to place the rise of the four personalities passing the revue in the study in the political context of 1994, then clearly the developments around the emergence of the ANC as the ruling party and Mandela as president can hardly be overlooked. At the time, there were strong suggestions to the effect that the decision to the unification between the DRCA and the DRMC shortly before the elections was to rescue the symbolic sense of the move. It was almost like trying to beat the ANC to the line. A more cynical interpretation, of course, is the suggestion that the new church had to be positioned by the time of the elections as the “ANC in prayer”.

## 1.2. SCENE-SETTING DEVELOPMENTS IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

### *1.2.1. The last synod of the DRMC in Worcester and the 1982 and 1986 synods*

A growing consciousness that apartheid in church and society was sinful had been witnessed in the DRMC since 1974, when the last Worcester synod took place. Boesak, who emerged as the embodiment of such consciousness, happened to be present at the Worcester synod at a time that he was studying in the Netherlands. The one issue that came up for serious scrutiny was the Mixed Marriages Act of the apartheid regime. An understanding emerged that such legislation could not withstand the test of Scripture. It did not come as a surprise at all when, at the first post-1976 synod of the DRMC in Belhar, Cape Town, the Church moved decisively against apartheid and any form of theological and moral justification of the system. A very clear decision on church unity was taken. It is history now that the next two synods in 1982 and 1986 would be great in terms of the adoption of the Confession of Belhar in concept form and as a full-blown confession. It is in 1982 that the DRMC synod, informed by resolutions of the Ottawa, Canada Assembly of the *World Alliance of Reformed Churches* (WARC), declared the theological and moral justification of apartheid a heresy and idolatry, and decreed a *Status Confessiones*. The DRMC was trying to say that the



justification of apartheid from the Bible was such a serious matter that to differ on it would jeopardise the very Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is necessary, perhaps, to take a step back to 1974. The year did not only see the last synod of the DRMC in the town of Worcester. Also, around the same time, September-October 1974 saw the inception of the *Broederkring* bringing together mainly ministers from the DRCA and the DRMC. Elsewhere in the study, something is said about the change in name from *Broederkring* to *Belydende Kring*. In June 1976 came the uprisings of school children in Soweto as they were protesting against the imposing of the Afrikaans language on them. Everybody knew that this was merely a strategic pretext for rebellion against the very system of apartheid. For the apartheid regime, a shocking reality must have been the realisation that, particularly in the Western Cape, Coloured school children and university students responded in solidarity with the Soweto children. Elsewhere in the study, reference is made to a pamphlet produced by students at the University of the Western Cape as an expression of solidarity with Soweto. These were some of the most apparent signs that the divisions, fragmentations and separation caused by apartheid would not work. Three years later, at Hammanskraal, the *Belydende Kring* issued a declaration which centralised justice by projecting an image of God as the God who struggles for his own justice. Very strong arguments have been developed in seeing the declaration of the *Belydende Kring* as a forerunner to the Confession of Belhar (Kritzinger 1979; Van Rooi 2011). If anyone had thought that the 1970s were quite hectic in South Africa, the 1980s would be more turbulent. The decade from 1980-89 saw some student uprisings which made Soweto 1976 virtually look like a Sunday school picnic. These were mainly in the early-1980s. Then came the United Democratic Front in August 1983 with its famous slogan “Apartheid Divides, UDF Unites”. Opposition to the system of apartheid was mounting and so was State repression with thousands of activists being detained without trial. The situation was so serious that, in 1985, the apartheid regime instituted a State of Emergency which saw the mounting of repressive measures. Additionally, 1985 also saw the first version of the Kairos Document with its scathing prophetic criticism of apartheid. The document offered a razor sharp analysis on the crisis of apartheid in a double sense: as the crises caused by apartheid

and, consequently, the crisis of the system itself. An adapted and updated version of the KD appeared in 1986. The 1980s, in particular, saw the desperation of the apartheid regime and its virulence, if the cross-border raids were anything to go by. Raids into Lesotho in late 1982 and 1985 were particularly devastating, with close to 50 people killed. The 1980s also saw the campaign of economic sanctions against the apartheid regime paying off and not everybody buying into the constructive engagement approach of the United States of America, for example. Retrospectively, it may be fair to suggest that the following developments in the late-1980s and early-1990s contributed significantly to the creation of a climate where a negotiated settlement would be feasible. First, the release of several high-profile political prisoners came about. There had always been the argument that negotiations of any kind would not be productive without the legitimate leaders of the people, and that the return of exiles and the release of political prisoners was paramount. Second, the ongoing attempts at engaging the ANC by Afrikaner academics and intellectuals helped to lower the threshold between the liberation movement and the white community. Third, the 2 February 1990 speech by President De Klerk in Parliament, in which the unbanning of the liberation movements was announced and, in particular, the release from prison of Mandela contributed further to the opening up of the situation in the country and preparing the way for a settlement. Having said all of this, an important disclaimer is that the option for a negotiated settlement was controversial, to put it mildly, in a situation where people were hoping for a national convention where modalities for the transition from apartheid to democracy would be worked out.<sup>11</sup>

The rather fragmentary and cursory survey of developments in the country in the two decades between the last Worcester synod of the DRMC in 1974 and the inception of the URCSA in 1994 is aimed at the following. The rise of Appies, Apollis, Buti and Buys to the leadership of the Church cannot be fully understood on the basis of an inner-ecclesial perspective only. The matrix of the prevailing cultural, political and economic realities is to be taken into

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11 See also, later in the contribution of James (chapter five) and his own draft paper on how he suggests the transition and negotiation should take place in 1990.

consideration in understanding the emergence of the four. To be accurate, it is the profile of intense involvement in the struggle against apartheid by three of the four, namely Appies, Buti and Buys, that might have convinced delegates to the April 1994 constituting synod of URCSA of the pedigree and suitability of their leadership. Apollis was trusted perhaps more for his understanding of church matters and his prowess in Church polity. All four were strong proponents of the Confession of Belhar and passionate about the issues of unity, reconciliation and justice. As Reformed ministers, the Word of God was central to their ministry and their leadership in URCSA.

### 1.3. BETWEEN THE TIMES

#### *1.3.1. The role of the Joint DRCA and DRMC Moderamen: Challenges and opportunities*

One of the major strategic moves in the quest for unification between the two churches was for the two moderatures to operate jointly – not only in the process between the two, but also in their talks with the DRC. The strategy paid off in terms of more rapid progress towards unification in the late-1980s, early-1990s. The existence of a Joint moderation emanated from a decision of the convent of 4 October 1990. Several previous attempts at constituting the Joint moderation failed, but this time around, it succeeded for the first time when it met at Belhar in Cape Town on 2 November 1990. This had been another strategic and symbolic move to meet at the very locus where the Confession of Belhar was adopted as part of the body of confessions of the DRMC. The meeting in Belhar was aimed at salvaging the sharp difference of opinion shown in documents between the DRCA and the DRMC. In a kind of prophetic discernment relating to the suggestive nature of the moment, the Joint moderation was resolute in spelling out the principle on which the unification was based, as well as the urgency of fixing a date for the constituting synod of the new church. In confirming the decision of the convent, the Joint moderation stated that the unification of the two churches was aimed at undoing the separation of many years caused by the weakness of the flesh and the sinfulness of the human heart. The separation was based on considerations of race and skin colour which have overridden the clear message of Scripture pertaining to the visible

unity of the church. Congregations were encouraged in the interim to practice a non-racial *koinonia* with one another in worship, evangelisation, diaconal services and in the youth, women and men's ministries. In clearly understanding and sensing that the "hour of witness has arrived" in a changing South Africa, the dates of 17-21 July 1991 were fixed for the First General Synod of the URCSA. In this context, a strong proponent of church unity, Nico Smith, stepped forward and offered to find the money as well as undertaking the logistical arrangements of a venue for the synod and boarding and lodging for delegates. The synod was supposed to take place at the Hatfield Christian Centre in Pretoria. It is history now that developments unfortunately did not unfold the way they were envisaged, and the constituting synod did not happen in Pretoria.

The run up to the 1994 constituting synod of URCSA was not easy. It was characterised by tension between the DRCA which was hoping for a speedy unification, and the DRMC which was wary of serious technical and church orderly blunders that might have grave consequences. The hard-won trust between the two churches was constantly under pressure with accusations and innuendos aggravating the situation. Two striking examples come to the fore. First, a rumour was circulating that Buti accused the Moderator and Scribe of the DRMC, Apollis and Botha, of betrayal based on their performance at the General Synod of the DRCA. Buti's own response was that he did use the word betrayal, but in a different context. He never meant to question the integrity of Apollis and Botha and regretted that such an impression arose. A second example is a statement of Smith in the weekly newspaper, *Vrye Weekblad*, that there was a lack of commitment to church unity on the part of the DRMC which, in his understanding, was attributable to political tendencies. Instead of succumbing to pressure from the DRMC to withdraw the viewpoint, Smith reiterated it at a consultation of the *World Alliance of Reformed Churches* on 2 March 1993 in Johannesburg. There had also been fairly serious tension in the moderation of the DRMC which is shown here.<sup>12</sup>

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12 See also Baron's (2020) paper entitled, "Die Ligdraer as a Grassroots Engagement on URCSA's Church Unification and Reconciliation between 1990-1997", *Missionalia*, 41(1):81-100.

Once again, the main concern from the side of the DRMC seemed to have been the handling and finishing of the unity agenda by the General Synod of the DRCA. The DRMC decided to do two things, i.e. monitoring developments relating to how the DRCA was handling the matter at that point in time and seeking a legal opinion. As far as the second issue is concerned, a consultation took place on 8 May 1991 with the firm De Klerk and Van Gend, aimed at clarifying the legal implications of the unification between the DRCA and the DRMC. De Klerk and Van Gend facilitated the legal opinion of Advocate Treurnicht, who proposed a dissolution clause for church unity. However, the moderature could not reach any consensus on the basis of Treurnicht's legal opinion and resolved to seek two further legal opinions. An important strategic move was to do this with the knowledge of the DRCA moderature. Additional legal opinions were sought from Professors Van Huysteen and Lubbe from the University of the Western Cape and Stellenbosch, respectively. These were tabled at a meeting of the DRMC moderature on 15 June 1991. Very serious differences of opinion arose between members of the moderature, the main issue being the continuation or postponement of the unification envisaged for July 1991. A deadlock ensued with the Moderator and Scribe deciding to communicate with congregations in their personal capacity by issuing a declaration on their judgment of affairs. Clearly, this could not have been correct in terms of the Church Order and Stipulations, but perhaps points in an infallible manner to the inconsistencies and contradictions characterising a very tense moment in the church. On the one hand, the very two members of the moderature who were intent on legal opinions and on doing things right, and rightly so, broke ranks and acted in their personal capacity rather than to wait until matters would be resolved in the moderature. All indications are that the rift within the moderature was so serious that, on 28 June 1991, they had a consultation with clinical psychologists in an attempt to arrive at a better understanding between members of the moderature. The one achievement was to have the unification planned for July 1991 postponed in consultation with the moderature of the DRCA. This was pending a declaratory court hearing and/or an extraordinary or special synod of the DRMC. Instead of the unification, a conference was set up following immediately after the General Synodical meeting of the DRCA to which members of the DRMC General Synodical Commission were to be invited.

Members of the DRMC Synodical Commission in attendance at the conference requested the moderature to arrange an extraordinary meeting of the Synodical Commission with a view to a request for an extraordinary synodical meeting. The extraordinary synod would be aimed at putting the necessary articles in place in the Church Order or to change such to pave the way for unification. The extraordinary Synodical Commission meeting took place from 24-25 October 1991 and the request for an extraordinary synodical meeting was granted for October 1992. Stipulation 38.5 of the Church Order of the DRMC required, however, that the church be tested on the issue of an extraordinary synod. When votes were counted by the moderature on 17 February 1992, it was found that the votes were split on a 50-50 basis, i.e. 94 in favour of an extraordinary synod and 94 against, with 54 abstentions and 22 spoilt votes. At that point in time, a two-thirds majority vote of 183 was required. A serious dispute arose between members of the moderature, resulting in the resignation of Buys from his position as Actuaris (NGSK, 1992c:3). At the meeting of the moderature on 27 February 1992, Buys motivated his resignation and since no consensus could be reached on a second voting, he stuck to the resignation. His example was followed by Botman, but the rest of the moderature decided not to accept the resignations. The Moderator and Scribe were given until 11 March 1992 to consider the option of a second voting in the church. The confusion which characterised the period under discussion here is further illustrated by what transpired at the voting in the church, which was not desirable, but instead of sticking to his resignation, Botman withdrew it after submitting a statement. A new Actuaris in the person of Doyer was nominated and the nomination was ratified by the General Synodical Commission. The tense and strained relationships in the moderature were on the agenda of the meeting of 4 August 1992. The conversation resulted in a joint statement by the Moderator and the Assessor in the official mouthpiece of the DRMC, *Die Ligdraer*.

### ***1.3.2. The penultimate synod of the DRMC: 20 September – 4 October 1990***

The penultimate synod of the DRMC took place in the wake of extreme violence in the country. This was a decade and a half after the Soweto uprisings, almost a decade since the students revolt of the early-1980s, seven years after the emergence of the UDF, six years after the inception

of the Tri-cameral parliament and five years after the State of Emergency. It was abundantly clear that whatever measures and steps the apartheid regime took would not warrant lasting peace and stability. The issue of peace is raised here consciously as 1990 was proclaimed as the year of peace for the DRMC, as decided at the previous synod. Two very profound papers on peace by Cloete and Holzapfel (*Handelinge van die Vyf-en-Twintigste Sinode van die NGSK*, 1990:854-865) were read at the spiritual conference, which traditionally became part of synod on 26 September 1990.



Figure 1: Last DRMC synod meeting in Belhar, Cape Town



Figure 2: First URCSA moderation during General Synod in 1994

### 1.3.3. *Preparation for the Constituting URCSA synod of 1994*

In brief, there were two main issues informing the preparation for the constituting synod. The one had to do with the logistical arrangements to be undertaken by the Joint Judicial Commission as far as the constitution, venue, procedures and costing of the constituting synod were concerned. Of a more serious nature was the mobilisation for an absolute assurance from the DRMC that, at the synod of 4 April 1994, the unification clause would be accepted, thereby removing the last stumbling block towards unity. Two previous attempts at unifying the two churches structurally had failed, explaining why Buti was wary of a third failure which, in his interpretation, would be fatal. The response from the DRMC was repetitively that as far as it was humanly possible, their synod of 4 April 1994 would adopt the unification clause. Smith submitted a proposal to the effect that it should be established beyond doubt that the DRMC would adopt the unification clause and that no further obstacles would arise. His proposal went on to say that the DRMC should be enabled to take their decision without pressure from outside. In trying to achieve this, the synod of the DRMC and the constituting synod were to be disconnected from one another with the constituting synod taking place as soon as practically possible after that of the DRMC. Preparations for the constituting synod were to proceed, but the date was to be fixed later (cf. NGSK, 1994:A2/21).

At the time, speculation was rife on why the DRCA seemed to be in a hurry and the DRMC resorted to delaying tactics. Let us look at the last issue first. Retrospectively, it has to be acknowledged that what appeared to be attempts at delaying the unification were, in the end, a blessing in disguise. This is where the leadership of Apollis stood out in insisting that very serious legal repercussions could only be avoided if the unification clause were factored in in the Church Order and Stipulations of the DRMC. The speculation on why the DRCA was in a hurry to get the unification done, like access to material resources, was not taking cognisance of the material condition in both churches. Yes, here and there, based on the weirdness of the apartheid system, members of the DRMC at the time might have benefitted from the *per capita* expenditure in education which was slightly better than for members of the DRCA. Yet, as churches located in the townships that were created as post-colonies under apartheid, the DRMC was as poor as



the DRCA and equally dependent on subsidies and other forms of support from the DRC. An aggravating circumstance for the DRMC, like for the DRCA, was that a sizeable number of congregants in rural areas were farm labourers or domestic workers in urban areas. In South Africa, we are yet to deal with the reality of farm labour and the situation of domestic workers being remnants of slavery. With the celebration of the silver jubilee of URCSA (i.e. twenty-five years down the line and a quarter of a century into democracy), the church was still a poor church by and large. Whether that in itself turns URCSA into a church of the poor is a question to be dealt with elsewhere. Let us return for a moment to the perception that the DRCA was applying pressure for being unduly in a hurry. A number of factors are to be taken into consideration, but reference to the following two must suffice. First, this was far beyond the centenary celebrations of the DRMC, which happened in 1981 under very controversial circumstances, with big parts of the church like the youth and some ministers boycotting the events. Already, this was twenty years after the inception of the *Belydende Kring* and almost an equal number of years after the very clear decision of the 1975 Worcester synod of the DRCA. The decision for the DRCA to go into the unification without the DRC must have been painful on the basis of the resolution of the Worcester synod which stated clearly that the DRCA would not go for unity without the DRC. There must have been a deep sense of solidarity in wanting to assist the DRC in passing the acid test of coming together with the black Dutch Reformed Churches in a non-racial, non-sexist, united Reformed Church as the ultimate sign of its break with apartheid and racism. The simple point to be made is to say that the unification was long overdue. We are now in 2020, already thirteen years beyond the 150-year mark since the treacherous decision of the DRC synod of 1857 to serve congregants separately with the Holy Communion on the basis of skin colour. Second, and more importantly perhaps, the late Buti and Smith are to be lauded posthumously for their prophetic discernment and the role they played under trying circumstances to pull off the unification. As shown already, they created some controversy here and there, but ultimately they saw the unification through. Retrospectively, it could be said that, by the grace of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the unification was delivered through the creative tension between the steadfast position of leaders like Apollis who insisted on getting the

technical and legal side of matters right and the prophetic sense of leaders like Buti and Smith that the DRCA and the DRMC could not renege on the unification.

#### 1.4. THE 1994 SYNOD OF THE DRMC



Figure 3: DRMC Moderature

Against the background of two aborted attempts, it was understandable that everything would hinge on whether the April 1994 synod of the DRMC would succeed in getting the unification clause adopted. Bringing forward the synod from September-October 1994 to April was in itself a major achievement.

Before proceeding to a more specific look at the resolutions of the April 1994 synod of the DRMC that paved the way for unification with the DRCA, during April still, attention is drawn now to a striking feature of the very last synod of the DRMC. Instead of postponing the critical or prophetic engagement with issues in society to the constitution of the new church, which was pretty close, the trend of issuing statements on burning matters continued. This is a trajectory that could be traced back to the 1970s through the 1980s. During this time, the DRMC is on record

as having issued statements on a diversity of matters, such as poverty, the plight of farm labourers, education, unity and justice, to name a few. Interestingly, the Commission dealing with issues of the day relating to the existing social, political and economic realities recommended to synod that the two questions of the just war and civil disobedience were outdated. Particularly, the recommendation on phasing out an investigation into civil obedience was slightly premature, but understandable only weeks before the major democratic breakthrough with the first ever democratic elections in the country. The issues of Economic Ethics and cremation were to be transferred to the successor of the Commission in the new church.

An illustration of the trend in the DRMC to speak prophetically into social realities is the statement issued on the education crisis at the time. At synod, a commission consisting of Van Wyk as convenor, Faure, Theys and notably Appies, who became the first Scribe of the newly established church, was tasked with formulating a motion relating to the education crisis. In the report of the moderature, it is mentioned that the prospective meeting of the moderatures of the Dutch Reformed family of churches with the then State President to discuss the education crisis did not take place on 21 September 1993 for logistical reasons (*Skema van Werksaambede*, 1994, A2/8). The temporary commission drafted a proposal that addressed the following matters: that education was not a privilege but a right, and that government was responsible to provide the best of facilities and support for education to happen under optimal conditions; that in 1994 there was a crisis in education which was related to the skewed *per capita* expenditure informed by race; that attention should be given particularly to communities disadvantaged by apartheid for them to enjoy a just education; that congregations were called upon to support the struggle for a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic education system (*Acta Synodi*, 1994:28). Twenty-six years down the line, in the age of COVID-19, new crises in new shapes and forms are thrown up by the education system.

## 1.5. THE APRIL 1994 INAUGURAL SYNOD OF THE URCSA



**Figure 4: The celebration of the URCSA founding Synod in Belhar, Cape Town**

More than a quarter of a century down the line, one can only marvel at how the two churches were able to pull it off in a very tight situation. The tight situation here refers to the brief period between 18 May 1993 and April 1994. It was only at a meeting on 12 October 1993, i.e. only six months before the unification synod, that the three strategic joint commissions of the two churches took very definite steps in securing the establishment of the new church. The process leading up to this had been much longer and dates back to 1987. The greatest significance of the meeting was to fix a venue and a date for the inaugural synod, settling on 14-17 April 1994 at Belhar in Cape Town.



**Figure 5: Deliberations between DRCA and DRMC representatives on unification**



**Figure 6: During the first URCSA Synod**

## **1.6. CONFIRMING THE CONSTITUTING OF URCSA**

The statement of principle on which the unification would take place contains four elements. First, the basic belief and confession that both the DRCA and the DRMC were part of the one, holy and Catholic Christian Church gathered by the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – through the

Spirit and the Word to form one body of Christ on earth. Important to note also that the unity of the church is a gift from God and an imperative to be pursued and sought after. Perhaps even more important is the belief that the unity has to be visible as the only way in which the world might recognise Jesus as the Messiah. Second, that the unification was aimed at overcoming years of separation and that, for that reason, no hindrance should be allowed to stand in the way of the unification. Third, in the form of a prayer, the petition was for the unification of the two churches to be only the first step in the full unification of the whole family of Dutch Reformed Churches in and outside of South Africa. The prayer was also for the act in faithfulness to be a witness for the two churches and all believers that it is impossible for the body of Christ to be divided based on Ephesians 4:4-6. The fourth element which forms part of the statement of principle is the classical hymn, *The Church's one foundation*, sung in three different languages as a sign of the new non-racial, non-sexist uniting church. All elements were perhaps aimed at offsetting any notion that the unification was a political move towards putting in place the ANC in prayer. Of course, in the context of the early-1990s in South Africa, any suspicion to that effect would have been understandable (Unpublished statement, 14 April 1994).



Figure 7: Congratulatory messages to the first moderature of URCSA

## 1.7. THE GUIDING STARS OF UNITY, RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE

As much as the statement of principle contains, in the first element shown here, the classical theological starting point for churches in the Reformed tradition, namely the Triune God as the source of the coming into being of the Christian Church, the need for firming up the theological rationale for the unification was felt and responded to. In a document titled *Beginselverklaring van die Afrvaardigings van die NGKA en NGSK* [Principle Declaration of the Delegations of the DRCA and the DRMC], the three key words from the Confession of Belhar of unity, reconciliation and justice were called into service.

### 1.7.1. On Unity

In the declaration or confession on unity, the Biblical teaching on the unity of the church and the Reformed conviction on the visible unity find expression. The visible unity was to find shape in one single Dutch Reformed Church. The implications of these were spelt out clearly to mean that the institutions separated on the basis of race and skin colour would have to unite as one institution, organised according to Reformed Church polity and denomination. Considerations of race, language and culture were not to play any role in the newly constituted church, nor jeopardise the unity of the church. The two uniting churches also confessed their complicity in allowing the lack of visible unity to continue within the family of Dutch Reformed churches (*Agenda en Skema*, 1994:10).

### 1.7.2. On Reconciliation

The statement on reconciliation contains five elements. The style of the church's performance should be reconciliation, peace and love. Second, a genuine lived reconciliation between Christians in the country would open up new prospects and possibilities of life. In a polarised society, it can assist in inculcating love, trust and service between people who have been alienated from one another. Third, despite all natural differences between people, the Word and Spirit of God can transform them and reconcile them with one another. In the statement, the reality that such reconciliation had been rendered very difficult, if not humanly impossible by the forced

separation of apartheid and separate development, is lamented. Fourth, the delegates to the constituting synod in 1994 were deep under the impression that reconciliation could never be the concealment of differences of opinion, nor the justification for what is wrong. The statement is emphatic on the argument that a cheap reconciliation, which is essentially only a matter of good attitudes towards one another and a patient and tolerant bearing of injustice without dismantling such injustice, cannot be an authentic Christian reconciliation. Fifth, the process of genuine reconciliation was accepted to be a painful journey and would entail the dismantling of thought patterns, ecclesial and societal structures as a very pertinent demand of the gospel (*Agenda en Skema van Werksaamhede*, 1994:10-11).

Whereas in the Confession of Belhar such explicit language is avoided to the extent where terms like apartheid, separate development and racism would not feature, the statement of principle made clear that Belhar could only be properly located if the particular context is taken into consideration (Plaatjies Van Huffel, 2013). It should be regarded as an impoverishment that after the constituting synod of 1994 the statement of principle found very little reflection in the ongoing conversations on Belhar.

A reinterpretation or re-appropriation of reconciliation will have to strike a balance between the following two aspects. On the one hand, a statement or confession that emerged in the very particular context of apartheid in church and society that was aimed at breaking down the walls of partition cannot simply be appropriated to the post-apartheid situation. Yet, there are elements in the statement on reconciliation which are continuous and might even be more relevant than in 1994. It has been shown beyond doubt that not even the well-intended attempts of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* could warrant a deep and lasting reconciliation. Part of the problem seemed to have been a disconnection between reconciliation and justice, resulting in a truncated form of truth.

### ***1.7.3. On Justice***

Like the statement on reconciliation, the one on justice also contains five elements. As could be expected, the first element reaffirms God's self-revelation as the One who sets out to bring justice and genuine peace



amongst people. In a world full of injustice and enmity, he is in a special way the God of the needy, the poor and the oppressed and he calls his church to follow him in this. Second, apartheid as a socio-political system that perpetrates injustice and violates the human dignity of people is sin. Furthermore, that all attempts at justifying the system of apartheid openly or subtly on Biblical grounds be regarded as heresy that renders the Christian religion incredulous. Third, the delegations of the DRCA and the DRMC stated as their common conviction that the God-given dignity of people was to be respected. For the sake of justice, the observance of human rights was to be pursued. Fourth, in the context of the pre-election of 1994, deep concern about the ongoing violence was expressed with particular reference also to structural injustice and violence. The exclusion of the majority of citizens from normal, orderly political participation is lamented in the statement. Twenty-six years into democracy, the pertinent question still remains on how participatory our democracy really is. Fifth, delegates were prayerfully hoping for genuine peace grounded in justice to arrive speedily, and everybody was called upon to pray and work towards peace with justice (*Agenda en Skema*, 1994:11-12).

One of the well-known slogans emanating from the struggle against apartheid was “*if you want peace, work for justice*”. The South African context of 2020 is different from 1994 in a multiplicity of respects, yet the gross inequalities exposed by COVID-19 makes clear that either the slogan has never been heeded, or the very complex nature of the South African reality has been underestimated. Perhaps a new broad-based round of praying and working for reconciliation, and peace with justice is called for. Could here be a more fitting way of honouring the legacy of the four obedient servant leaders passing the revue in this study?

## 1.8. THE GREAT OMISSION: OBEDIENCE

In a context which saw great division, fragmentation, alienation, hatred and enmity, the focus on unity is more than understandable. A deficit which remains, however, is that the opportunity to settle the anthropological and theological understandings of the unity of humankind was missed. Equally, the accentuation of reconciliation was a response to the pseudo-gospel of apartheid which was based on the assumption that the different

races were fundamentally not to be reconciled with one another and should consequently be kept apart in separate group areas and homelands. All of this constituted a system of gross injustice and makes the emphasis on justice in the mode of God's preferential option for the needy, poor, downtrodden, widow, orphan and the stranger equally understandable. There has been a serious omission, however, in the declaration of principle, namely obedience. It is notable how the metaphor of God standing on the side of those mentioned and calling the church to stand where he stands gained great currency (see Kritzinger 2019). In the process, the metaphor of following has almost fallen into obscurity. A very clear call to radical discipleship, or perhaps not so clear, is contained in the last bit of article 4 and in article 5 of the Confession of Belhar. In article 4, there is a significant phrase following the standing metaphor which reads as follows: "... that in *following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others*" (own italics). This is followed in article 5 by "... in *obedience* to Jesus Christ ... Jesus is Lord". The argument here is for the equal status of obedience with unity, reconciliation and justice. Or is it perhaps even an argument for the predominance of discipleship? The fact that obedience has always, in the interpretation of the Confession, played second fiddle to the other three is somewhat surprising for at least the following reason. A number of very prominent adherents to and proponents of Belhar, including two of the original drafters, have always been followers of the thoughts of Bonhoeffer (1966) on radical and costly discipleship. One could even suggest that the striving towards unity, reconciliation and justice can only happen in a sustainable fashion if it is premised on obedience. To take the argument one step further – and one can only speculate on this – a placement of the call to follow Jesus right after article 1, i.e. immediately after the confession of belief in the Triune God, might have created a different atmosphere around the Confession. Put differently, one wonders whether the confession of faith on unity, reconciliation and justice would not have interpreted less as doctrinal statements and more as acts of faithfulness.

And this is precisely part of the core of how the contributions of the four are being understood in the book. Beyond the sharp theological understanding

they might have had of unity, reconciliation and justice, there was obedience. There is ample evidence in the book that there had indeed been sharpness of analysis and profundity of theological interpretation. Nothing could be and should be taken away from that. However, all of this would have come to naught had there not been the willingness to obedience. All four had to make sacrifices in differing ways in the attempt at demonstrating a credible staurocentric servant leadership.



**Figure 8: URCSA moderation with legal counsel in appeal case against DRCA group in Bloemfontein**

### **1.9. A FIRST MAJOR CHALLENGE AMIDST THE EUPHORIA**

A challenge not often spoken about was that of adapting to the immediate post-April 1994 situation in terms of returning to church business as usual, whereas in the pre-1994 context, all four leaders, to varying degrees, had to formulate open political stances in the absence of the banned, exiled and imprisoned political leadership. Buti, having been mayor of Alexandra in the 1980s, was the most prominent in this respect and Apollis the least prominent. The latter was, however, very clear in his stance against apartheid. Be that as it may, the matter simply was that they now had to operate in the shadow of the political leaders when, in fact, the establishment of the

new church and their emergence as the first executives were in themselves major historical events. To stay with the shadow metaphor for a moment, the suggestion that ministers and pastors could now return to business as usual is perhaps a misconception. The question was rather whether the church in general and the likes of the URCSA constituting moderation would continue to play a watchdog role from the shadows of the new political dispensation by fulfilling their prophetic ministry of holding the democratic government to account. In his blog, Kuys (3 May 2019) cites Buti as having said at the communion table with the surprise visit of Mandela to synod that “As long as you seek justice and human dignity, we will support you. But if you don’t, we will oppose you”.<sup>13</sup>

The first real challenge for the newly elected moderation, however, as also alluded to by Kuys in his blog, was not external but internal. A significant number of ministers and congregants from the DRCA indicated shortly after the constitution of the new church that they were not interested in joining. These were mainly ministers and congregants from the Free State and Phororo (Northern Cape) regional synods of the DRCA. The intention is not to elaborate on what ensued as far as rifts between people, violence and court battles are concerned, but merely to show that from the onset, the newly-elected four had their work cut out. It must have been a serious challenge, having to keep the euphoria and celebratory mood going for some time, working towards genuine internal unity, continuing conversations with the DRC and RCA, as well as advancing relationships with Reformed Churches worldwide and the global ecumenical movement. Beyond all of this, the challenge was to bring into the social, cultural, political and economic context the tenets of unity, reconciliation and justice.

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13 Cf. <https://ddjkuys61695853.wordpress.com/>



## CHAPTER 2

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# NICK APOLLIS: THE PURSUIT OF RECONSTRUCTION AND RECONCILIATION

## 2.1. INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, the period between 1990 and 1994 was critical in South African politics. It was a transitional period, and a moment of intense negotiations, robust discussions to chart a new path and a process of reconciliation and justice. This was the same period in which leadership within the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) family was desperately needed after years of segregation and division along racial lines. The DRC family of churches was deeply fragmented and conscious of its mission (to be God's agents in the world) and the credibility thereof

in the world. The credibility of the church was dependent on processes of justice, reconciliation and unity. Therefore, the two churches, namely the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA), embarked on a journey to restore the credibility of the church. On this journey, Nicholas (Nick) Abraham Apollis (1933-2009) was instrumental in providing the necessary leadership. He was the Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) who engaged with the other 'sister' churches in the DRC family through negotiations, but also came to be the first Moderator of the new church – the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) – which came into existence from intense negotiations, church order challenges and amendments. Through his leadership, the extended period of painful separation between the DRCA and the DRMC was brought to a close through the establishment of URCSA.

## 2.2. SNIPPETS FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULTHOOD<sup>14</sup>

Nicholas (Nick) Abraham Apollis was the eighth of thirteen children born to Michiel Johannes Apollis and Anna Johanna Isabella Apollis (née Koopman), married on 30 April 1918. He was born in 1933 in Tulbagh, completing his primary schooling at Tulbagh *NG Sendingskool* and completed his matric at *Emil Weder Hoërskool* in Genadendal. He was part of a family of eight boys and five girls. His father died at an early age, and he and his other siblings were raised by their mother. After he completed his matric, he studied for his Higher Education Certificate in Oudtshoorn in his pursuit to become a teacher. He practised as a teacher at different schools in the Western Cape (Ceres, Retreat, Porterville). However, at the age of twenty-five, he decided to study theology at the Seminary in Wellington to become an ordained minister in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC). He was licenced as a DRMC minister in 1960 (Kriel, 1978:115). Before accepting a call to a congregation, he was a '*rondreisende*' [travelling] CSV secretary in the Cape before he became a minister of the Word. The CSV had camps where students from various

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14 This information was gathered from his daughter, Rene Leonard, and his sister Dorothea Schippers.

teachers' colleges came together and had Christian camps. He was already in a leadership position then.<sup>15</sup>

On 30 September 1960, he married Alida Elizabeth Fester (1953-1996), a teacher from Maitland. He met her while she was a teacher in Paarl. Unfortunately, she passed away after a sickbed on Friday 25 October 1996 (Boshoff, 1996). They had four daughters and one son.<sup>16</sup> He later married Ms Marita Stanfiet from Worcester, whom he also outlived.

As part of a family of thirteen children, Apollis and his other siblings felt the chains of poverty. In most cases, they had to financially assist each other while they were studying. When Apollis decided to study theology, there was no money to fund his studies. While studying at the seminary, Apollis would even offer to work at the local town of Tulbagh's municipality on a temporary basis during his holidays. However, he was also sponsored by one of the white farmers in the region, who knew his father quite well and therefore sponsored his theological studies in Wellington. His last living sibling, Dorothea Schippers (2020), remembers fondly that while their father had already passed on, their mother was an industrious woman who was working as a chef at a nearby hostel for white people, and purchased a very elegant dress to wear at her son's licensing service, to be confirmed as a proponent (minister to be called) of the DRMC. However, this was not afforded to her as she died before the event took place. He did not have the opportunity to have his parents at his licencing as his father had also passed on already in 1954.

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15 One of his colleagues and minister in the presbytery would remember one of his sermons when he visited a school in Upington, "*Hy was nie dadelik na 'n gemeente beroep nie maar het begin deur te werk as die reisende sekretaris van die destydse CSV. Hierdie werk het hy met toewyding gedoen. Ek onthou 'n boodskap wat hy tydens my Hoërskool jare (1961) aan die leerders van die Hoërskool Carlton van Heerden op Upington gebring het. Die boodskap het oor Mordegai gegaan en die onheilige optrede van Hamman. Ek het dit na byna 60 jaar nog nie vergeet nie*" [He was not immediately called to a congregation but started by working as a traveling secretary of the CSV of old. He did this work with commitment. I recall a sermon which he gave to the learners of Carlton van Heerden High School during my high school years (1961). The message was about Mordecai and the unholy behaviour of Haman. After nearly 60 years, I still have not forgotten it] (Straus, 2020).

16 The four daughters are Madeleine Adele (Powrie), Ilze Helga (Swigelaar), Rene Tertia (Leonard), Anchen Carlson (November), and their son, Nichol-John Hunter, married to Avrille Elizabeth Visser. The eleven grandchildren, Jade, Neeka, Emma, Alexandra, Rachel and Lili-Maia, Yigael, Marlo, Nean-Leigh, Daniell, Matthew and Jarrod.



Apollis' family was one of the families who were exposed to the significant tremor and earthquake in Tulbagh in 1969 and suffered its devastating effects.<sup>17</sup> His family had to move into temporary accommodation and tents that were erected to serve as shelters for them and other families that were affected. Not long thereafter, while he was serving the congregation in Steinkopf, his family in Tulbagh would also be exposed to the 'forced removals' (Group Areas Act) as part of the apartheid government's policy, and they were removed from their family home in what they called *Help mekaar*, where they grew up as children, and were relocated to what they referred to as *Nuwe Dorp*, while their plot was then occupied by whites.<sup>18</sup> These and other incidents during the times of apartheid would beg the question, "what would his response be after the dawn of democracy in 1994?" However, his sister also remembers that he was very conscious of the political, racial arrangements in the country during apartheid. When some would refer to *Die baas se nooi* [The Master's wife], he would request them to use other terms, such as *tannie* if they want to show respect without allowing racial supremacy to take root in society. Therefore, it seems that he was conscious of the master-servant relationships that existed at the time. Dorothea Schippers (2020) tells that although he belonged to one of the political liberation movements at the time, she remembers vividly how he would, after the dawn of democracy (post-1994), share a space with FW De Klerk, who was also criticised by Apollis for his complicity in apartheid's machinery during his tenure. However, when Dorothea Schippers would inquire as to why he could be so calm while in close proximity with De Klerk, he would say, "*Ons moet maar vergewe en vergeet ...*" [We should forgive and forget ...]. This disposition would be spotted in almost all of his engagements, speeches, and addresses when it concerned his brothers and sisters from other race groups.

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17 During this time, Apollis would already be called to a congregation in Steinkopf.

18 In 2020, IOL online newspaper makes the connection with pandemics in South Africa and excuses for the government, "Pandemics and their reach into South Africa gave the racist colonial authorities the 'excuse' they had been looking for to implement South Africa's first forced removals and create segregated living areas ..." (cf. <https://www.iol.co.za/weekend-argus/news/pandemics-and-sas-forced-removals-68908b53-da80-430b-abd4-19db8ae7a1f4>) In the case of Tulbagh, it seems that the apartheid government used the earthquake to implement the policy of forced removals.



Figure 9: Nick Apollis during first years of ministry

### 2.3. MINISTERIAL JOURNEY IN THE DRMC AND URCSA

His first congregation was the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) of Steinkopf. He was ordained in 1962 in the congregation, but then received numerous calls for ministry which he accepted to the congregations of Ebenhaezer (Olifantsrivier), Mosselbay and then inducted in DRMC Worcester-East on 15 November 1980 (DRMC, 1980). He was responsible for some of the structures built at these congregations, for instance, the church building in Steinkopf and the inauguration that took place 21-23 April 1967, and the parsonage at the Mosselbay congregation. In the Worcester-East congregation, he retired before the General Synod meeting in Bloemfontein in April 1997. His demission at Worcester-East congregation took place on 2 April 1997. He was involved in various ministries in the DRMC and was part of the first executive council of the Christian Alcoholic Brigade (CAB) (DRMC, 1980:1), and was also the chairperson of the Cape Curatorium of the DRMC (DRMC, 1987a:50).<sup>19</sup>

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19 On 8 February 1987, Dr Adonis was ordained as *hoogleraar* at the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Rev. Nick Apollis was then the chairperson of the Curatorium of the DRMC and was doing the ordination.

He was the first brown minister in the congregation of Steinkopf and served the congregation from 1962-1967. He was received by the congregation on 11 May 1962 and he was ordained on Sunday 13 May 1962. Before his arrival, there was the sentiment among congregation members that due to the increase of membership they would need to ‘enlarge their territory’ – the need to acquire a building that would provide enough space for all its members. Nevertheless, in the tenure of Rev. Smith, a white minister of the DRC (but *sendeling* in the DRMC), this would not materialise because the elderly members were sentimental about their small historic building which would not be practical enough because of the increase in membership. However, Apollis, through his leadership, would take up this seed that was planted by the former minister and bring it to fruition. He was able to steer the project through good cooperation among members that bought into his vision. Instead of carrying the vision on his own, the members in the congregation partnered with him through sacrificing their time, energy and finances to God!<sup>20</sup> Therefore, he did incredibly well to complete a building project during his five years of ministry in the congregation. As chairperson of the church council, they decided in 1962 to build the church and commenced with the construction on 16 August 1966 and, in eight months, were able to complete the building. On 10 December 1966, Apollis was unveiling the stone, and the inauguration took place 21-24 April 1967. The congregation itself hails him in the celebration booklet (1969) as a passionate and zealous minister, who was able to encourage the congregation to raise funds and bring about their first church building from their own investments, which is still standing until this day. Though the fundraising commenced with other ministers (C de W le Grange, etc.), the building project was taken up and completed through the ground-breaking work of Nick Apollis. The congregation described their thankfulness in being able to build a new church which

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20 The congregation’s Scribe (B. Engelbrecht) reports to *Die Ligdraer* on 1 June 1967, “*Die kerkgebou is vir ons ’n monument van heelhartige samewerking van ’n gemeente wat die behoefte aan ’n doeltreffender en ruimer gebou vir die Here besef het. Wat kan nie gedoen word as kinders van die Here ook hulle geld, kragte en tyd tot beskikking van die Here stel nie!*” (Engelbrecht, 1967:179).

was through their own doing (“*ei fondse*”<sup>21</sup>).<sup>22</sup> More of this needed to be said in that through the building project under Nick Apollis, the dignity of those that were ‘illiterate’ and ‘poor’ and people of very low social class at the time was restored.<sup>23</sup> With such members and church council members that could not read or write, a new church building was erected! This might be insignificant for many that were affluent, but for these people who had to be innovative and creative in finding resources, this would be a gracious occasion to be able to contribute significantly to the work of the Kingdom of God (De Klerk, 2016:46).

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- 21 The congregation was proud that, in the context of their own menial work, in what is known as the ‘coloured’ reserves at the time, they were able to do it through their own fundraising. They state, “*Ons innige dank aan een en almal buite die grense van die gemeente wat finansieel bygedra het, en aan almal wat vir ons gebed het*” (NGSK Steinkopf, 1967:59). However, though it is not made explicit, it seems as if the DRC was also contributing, or at least being acknowledged by the Scribe for their contribution, “*Vir die alles bring ons God alle eer toe, en ons hartlike dank aan almal hier en elders wat bygedra het vir die saak. In besonder dank aan ons moedergemeente en blankes wat nie net stoffik bygedra het nie, maar raad en leiding tydig en ontydig aan die gemeente gegee het*” (Engelbrecht, 1967:180).
- 22 In *Die Ligdraer* of 1 February 1967, they state, “*Die prediker kon sy ernstige boodskap nie gou genoeg afsluit vir die nuuskierige geboor wat met blydschap uitgesien het na die geskiedkundige oomblik in hul lewe, as die boeksteen van die nuwe kerkgebou, die tweede gebou in 150 jaar, gelê gaan word nie. Vir baie van ons was die aanskoue van die plegtigheid iets nuuts. Onmiddelik na afloop van die diens het ons dan ook vergader aan die voorkant van die gebou waar ons kon ontspan in die koel skadurwee van ons nuwe kerk*” (NGSK Steinkopf, 1967:57).
- 23 Emeritus minister and former minister of Steinkopf congregation, DP Carelse, wrote, “*Ongeletterde kerksaadlede het ook n groot bydrae gelewer tot die totstandkoming van [hierdie] kerkgebou. Baie kon nie lees of skryf nie, en het nie n kruisie gemaak. Ongeletterdes was geestelik ryp en hierdie eenvoudige mense het gedien as voorsitters van die gemeente aksie en het self die gemeente program opgestel. Hulle het die gemeente tot op die sinodevlak verteenwoordig ...*” (De Klerk, 2016:46).

RING VAN GEORGE IN SITTING TE BLANCO 1975



Voor v.l.n.r.: Dii. J. W. F. Minnaar, N. A. Apollis, S. A. Gideon, G. Atkins, M. G. Bosch, C. J. Petersen, J. P. Strauss en C. J. April.  
Agter v.l.n.r.: Oudge. J. van Rooyen, N. Pedro, M. Juries, E. F. Gelderbloem, F. Jansen, W. Erasmus, G. F. Valentyne, P. S. Gelderbloem en A. Joseph.

Figure 10: Nick Apollis during a Presbytery Meeting in George



Figure 11 Inauguration of the new building Steinkopf



Figure 12: Unveiling of plaque of new church building in Steinkopf

It seems through the interview of members that served under his leadership that he knew every one of them by name, and did regular house visits at their homes. He was also part of a rugby club in the community and played the position of number eight due to being tall in stature, though some of the elderly members disapproved of this. His passion for the ministry could be felt in the congregation when the interviewees would attest that due to apartheid, white ministers could not ‘socialise’ with them (congregants of the DRMC) or even eat in the same room as brown members of the church. This changed drastically when Apollis came. They hailed him as one of their own, and a person that spent time in their homes through regular house visits. There were times when some of them would not even attend church and others would play rugby, but he would visit them after church to reprimand them (Van Wyk, 2020). He was also responsible for the establishment of a children’s ministry [*kinderbond*]. This can be attested by his family – that he had a special place in his heart for children. He was inducted on 12 November 1967 in DRMC Ebenhaezer (Olifantsrivier), of which little is known because of his brief ministry in that congregation.



**Figure 13: Nick Apollis and his wife during their wedding anniversary**

Steinkopf congregation was not the only congregation where he managed to construct a building; the church hall and parsonage in Mosselbay were also completed through his leadership. When he arrived in Mosselbay, there was no parsonage because the church council rented a house for his family in Groot Brakrivier and services were held in a school classroom, whilst Holy Communion services were done in a school hall in Hartenbos (NGSK Mosselbaai, 1996:2). Certain members recall that Apollis never complained or begged members to hire a ‘handyman’ to ensure that the work is done. Some infrastructural changes needed attention, but he would in his own influential way get a group of craftsmen together, provide for some fundraising in the congregation and, in record time, fixed the problems. Therefore, he was described by his members in most congregations as an illustrious person who would not only regard his responsibility as ministering the Word of God, but also to build a manse and structures for the church to flourish. He made use of the skills and resources of those in his congregations that were skilled in the construction industry. He was also a minister who was working in partnership with the white farmers, and some of the church council members would also remember that he would never preach about ‘party politics’ in his sermons – something that some would appreciate in the congregation. However, although he would discontinue the incoming funds of the white DRC church to his congregation, he would accept their offers

during the *bazaars*, etc. However, he would also be mistreated by some of the white farmers, as some recall that they ‘disrespected’ him, but he never held that against them.

His last congregation was Worcester-East, where he was the minister of the Word for 17 years. On 16 November 1980, he delivered his opening sermon, preaching on Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ ...” (Apollis *et al.*, 1992:30). However, unlike the other congregations where he built some of the structures at the congregation, this was the congregation where he was mostly involved in building the relationships between the churches within the DRC family. It is from this congregation that he would become the Moderator of the DRMC, as well as the first Moderator of URCSA. He encouraged his congregation to also work in the community, in terms of the spiritual, social welfare and moral conditions of the community (of Worcester) at the time (Apollis *et al.*, 1992:34).

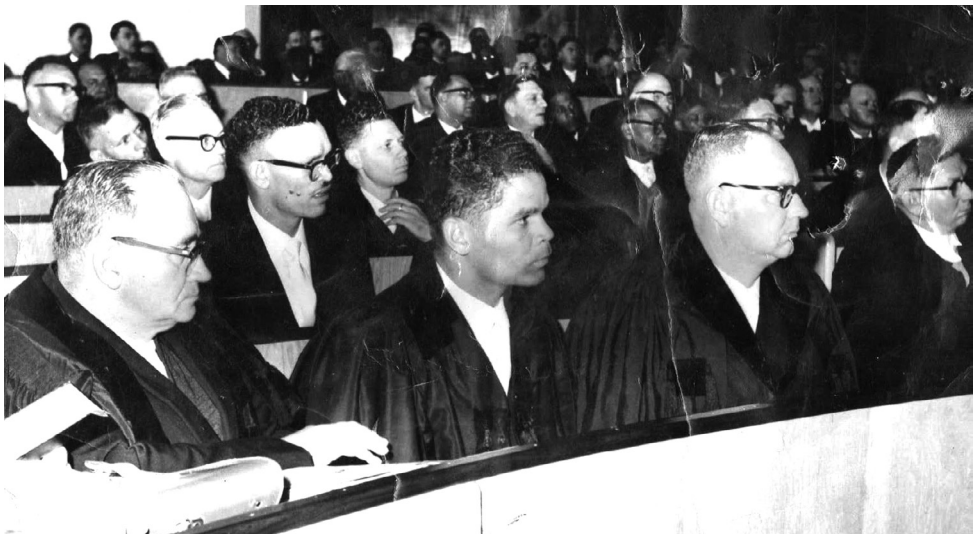


Figure 14: Nick Apollis attending General Synod sitting of DRMC

He became a leader within the synodical structures of the DRMC. In 1978, he was elected as the Actuaris of the General Synod of the DRMC. At the DRMC General synod meeting in 1986, he was the Actuaris where he was



also elected as the Moderator (NGSK, 1986:1) of the DRMC.<sup>24</sup> During his term as moderator, the DRMC accepted the Belhar Confession, as well as to unite with the DRCA. He served two terms as the Moderator of the DRMC and was then elected by the founding synod of URCSA as its first Moderator (1994-1997).

Despite the challenges in terms of ongoing litigation between URCSA and the remnant ministers and congregations of the DRCA in the Free State, in the central part of South Africa and various transitional challenges within URCSA to ensure that the 'ship sails smoothly', his wife also passed on in his first term (1994-1997) after a sickbed on Friday 25 October 1996 (Boshoff, 1996). However, it is interesting to note that he had not been nominated as a delegate to the next General Synod (GS) meeting in Bloemfontein (April 1997) by his presbytery in Worcester. This was because it was not clarified at the time that the GS executives needed to have been delegated by their respective presbyteries. Nonetheless, at the time of the General Synod meeting, he also retired as the Moderator of URCSA on 20 April 1997, following 37 years of ministry. During this Synod, he delivered his last address as the outgoing Moderator of URCSA, and James Buys was elected as the next moderator. What seems to be essential, and to be discussed later, is his emphasis on unity in the church, and therefore he proposed some practical guidelines for the church in this regard.

After his retirement, he became a member of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) of Audensberg in Worcester. He was later ordained as an elder in the church and was also nominated as a delegate of his congregation to a DRC Cape and Southern Synod meeting. On 20 September 2009, he passed on at the Louis Leipoldt Hospital and was buried in the DRC Audensberg congregation in Worcester on 26 September 2009.

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24 Nick Apollis was part of the moderation of the DRMC of 1986 (Allan Boesak, moderator, IJ Mentor, Assessor, and Dr AJ Botha, Scribe) and Synod that accepted the Belhar Confession. There is a picture of this Synod and moderation (NGSK, 1986:1).



DIE nuwe Moderatuur van die Sendingkerk is van links: ds. N. A. Apollis, Actuaris; dr. Allan Boesak, Assessor; ds. I. J. Mentor, Moderator, en ds. P. W. L. Sinclair, Scriba.

**Figure 15: Nick Apollis as Actuaris of the Moderature in 1986**

#### 2.4. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A LEADER DURING A PROCESS OF CHURCH UNIFICATION

Nick Apollis was elected during a critical phase in South African politics and the politics of the church. It was the time of Nelson Mandela's release from the Victor Verster prison<sup>25</sup> and the euphoria that accompanied it, but also the breakdown in negotiations at CODESA<sup>26</sup> which led to the Boipatong massacre in June 1992, and the brutal killing of Chris Hani – an SACP leader who was assassinated by right-wing leaders at the time – which also brought the country much turmoil. This showed the intense times in which the church also embarked on unity consultations. This was emphasised by Apollis' successor, Thias Kgatla, when the news broke of his passing, who hailed him as the one who was able to lead the church “across the Jordan river” (URCSA, 2013:2). In Apollis' case, there were no previous experienced leaders in whose shadow he could walk, or one that had been able to facilitate the unification of a church that was for so long divided along

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25 The name of the correctional facility has since changed to Drakenstein Correctional Facilities. Drakenstein Correctional Centre is a low-security prison between Paarl and Franschhoek, on the R301 road, 5 km from the R45 Huguenot Road, in the valley of the Dwars River in the Western Cape of South Africa.

26 Convention for a Democratic South Africa.

racial lines with different church orders, practices and languages. However, it was also a church that was under-resourced and often dependent on the white DRC for subsistence, and with ministers whose livelihood was often reliant on such subsistence. This was indeed an uncharted territory in which to lead a fragmented church, which was often regarded as ‘irreconcilable’ (DRC family). He was known as a person who strove for fairness (URCSA, 2013:2), which became a crucial characteristic in particular during the amalgamation of two separate black (DRMC and DRCA) churches with their own culture, ethnicities and languages.<sup>27</sup> The members within the DRC family spoke different languages, from isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Setswana and Afrikaans. In this socio-cultural and socio-economic context, fairness<sup>28</sup> would indeed be a crucial characteristic of a leader. He was perceived by his peers and colleagues to be successful in terms of the crucial characteristics and values espoused to lead the church in its transitional phase. It is evident that during the moderation meeting on 5 February 1991, at which he acted as chairperson, the decision was made that the founding synod in 1994 should be equally represented by members of the two (DRCA and DRMC) churches, and that there should be an understanding that members of both churches should serve on the URCSA moderation (NGSK, 1991b:5).<sup>29</sup> Frits Gaum, as the former Moderator of the DRC Western Cape Synod, regarded Apollis as a natural leader. He played a crucial role in the manner in which he conversed and reflected on the unity between URCSA and the DRC.<sup>30</sup> He has been lauded for his “soft heart and a calm spirit”<sup>31</sup> which would be much-needed qualities for a person that could not circumvent the

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27 Van Rooy (2020:1), a retired minister and member of his congregation, describes him as a person with a deep sense of fairness.

28 One of the interviewees of Steinkopf congregation also attest to his character, as someone who was fair and treated everyone the same, irrespective of the different classes that exist within the community and congregation in Steinkopf.

29 In 5.3.3 of the minutes, it states the decision of the DRMC moderation, “*Dit lyk wenslik dat dit volgens normale kerklike prosedure sal moet geskied met ’n verstandhouding om beide kerke aanvanklike gelyke verteenwoordiging te gee*” (NGSK, 1991b:5).

30 Gaum states, “*Hy het n belangrike rol gespeel in die wyse waarop oor die eenwording van die NG kerk en die VGK gedink en gepraat is*” (Yssel, 1997:10).

31 This is how Rev. Dr Henry Platt describes him during his passing. This is also a characteristic that was attributed to James Buys by his colleagues.

heated debates and the strong sentiments that were raised for and against unification in the Dutch Reformed Church family.

Though he was serious about unity between URCSA and the DRC, he was not naïve. It seems evident in his opinion piece “*Rooi ligte flikker nog, sê Moderator ná NGK Sinode*” (*Die Ligdraer* on 13 October 1994) and his reflection on the attitude of the ministers of the DRC during discussions related to the unity process that he was of the opinion that the ministers within the DRC were not serious with church unity. He felt strongly that the leaders of the DRC should not have been too focused on those members in their respective congregations and the church at large who were concerned and reluctant to become united with the black churches. Therefore, he questioned those white ministers who would use those reasons to stall the process. This (“*rooi ligte wat aangaan*” [red lights flickering]) made him pose critical questions on their (DRC ministers’) disposition on church unity. Thus, he questioned their lack of radical church leadership (Apollis, 1994b:16).<sup>32</sup> This is how he also approached the unity process between the DRCA and the DRMC. Consequently, some would argue that the unity between the two churches was premature.

Nevertheless, this showed his approach on unity, as well as his leadership style – that a leader should provide guidance and influence their members towards a new vision of church and society. He believed that there were instances where leaders would have to make unpopular decisions – like the sacrifices the DRCA and DRMC made – that their followers might not always agree with, but it is required from a leader who follows Jesus Christ’s example. However, Apollis was also not in a hurry, in a manner that would allow the flouting and the disregard of the Church order(s) (DRMC and DRCA) and related legal processes.<sup>33</sup> He comes across in his engagements as a strategic thinker and leader with exceptional abilities. When he was accused by the media of delaying the unity process (between DRMC and

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32 Apollis states, “*As daar na die twee uitgangspunte gekyk word dan gaan die rooi flikkerligte maar weer aan. Iewers langs die pad sal waagmoed aan die dag gelê moet word om radikaal met bepaalde dinge te breek, sonder om die oë te veel te vestig op beswaardes in ons midde*” (Apollis, 1994b:16).

33 It seems he was passionate about the law because, for some time, he also studied law at Unisa (Kuys, 1990) during his ministry.

DRCA), he informed them of the reason(s) for the presumably delayed progress, and that the reason thereof was his and his colleagues' careful considerations of the URCSA GS church order and its subsequent processes (Apollis, 1992:13).<sup>34</sup>

It seems that Apollis understood the role of injustice and reconciliation both as a participatory and collective process, but also in terms of an ethic of (personal) responsibility. It is most likely that Apollis would have been exposed to the corpus of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (the German theologian) and understood his position as that of the Confessing Church in Germany. Whereas it would be much easier to blame the politics of the day (especially church politics) and the Nazi regime of Hitler and the massacre of Jews, Bonhoeffer argued that the church should take a position of responsibility (but specifically each person) to what is happening in the world and their context. This seems to be evident in the theological praxis of Apollis – precisely what transpired within the unity talks and processes between the DRCA and the DRMC.

Nevertheless, in 1994, as the Moderator of URCSA, he was excited about the decision of the DRC to unite with URCSA and the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA). He then projected that the unity process would be concluded already in 1998 (Gouws, 1994:6).<sup>35</sup> This had, until the twenty-fifth celebration of URCSA (2019), not materialised but has become an almost elusive dream. However, his continued and persistent engagement with the DRC and other churches within the DRC family demonstrates his commitment, optimism and hope that such an ideal could become a reality.

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34 He states, “*Die belang van die NG Sendingkerk en dit wat die eenheid die beste dien, sal ons ten koste van onself met ywer soek en najaag. Dit sal ons doen deur 'n optrede wat die kerk van Christus en die NG Sendingkerk nie tot skade en skande sal strek nie. Hierin vertrou ons in die Here, sowel as op die voorbidding en samewerking van elke kerkraad en gemeente*” (Apollis, 1992:13). Thias Kgatla (the Moderator at the time) wrote in URCSA News on Nick Apollis' passing, describing him “as someone that abides by the church rules” (URCSA, 2013: 2).

35 The *Beeld* (regional newspaper of Transvaal) reports, “*Dit klink vir hom aanvaarbaar dat die proses van kerkeenheid teen die volgende algemene sinode van die NG kerk in 1998 afgehandel kan word, het Ds. Apollis gesê*” (Gouws, 1994:6).

Nonetheless, his joining of the DRC as an elder after his retirement in the DRMC might perhaps give the impression that he even had hopes that this ideal (unification) would become a reality during his lifetime. In 2003, the Cape regional newspaper, *Die Burger* reported that Nick Apollis, as the last Moderator of the DRMC and first Moderator of URCSA, was registered as an elder and delegate of the DRC Audensberg (Worcester) at its Western Cape and Southern Cape Synodical meeting at Goudini Spa (Rawsonville, Worcester). Why is this interesting for a local newspaper and its reporter, Neels Jackson, to report? (Jackson, 2003:2). Jackson reflects on this event in an ironic fashion when he reports that it was Nick Apollis and Sam Buti who fought against the white leadership of the DRC and that Nick Apollis was one of those who did not accept the apology of Willie Jonker (a white minister of the DRC) at the Rustenburg consultation. He goes further to argue that it was Nick Apollis who also accused the DRC of being masters in the manipulation of words!

Therefore, Neels Jackson finds the issue that Nick Apollis became a member of a DRC congregation (at the time, only white members) after his retirement quite ironic and contrasts it to the ‘values’ he and other colleagues with the likes of Sam Buti embodied. It is only then that he provides some of Apollis’ reasons for his decision: because he lived near a DRC congregation. The report might itself be an intentional attempt to instigate betrayal of his loyalty to URCSA and issues raised within the DRMC, and his undersigning of the Belhar Confession, that perhaps cast a shadow on his integrity as a proponent of justice to his ‘comrades’ and members of the black church on whether Nick Apollis was selling out Belhar! However, this would be an oversimplification of his move to join the DRC Audensberg. Nick Apollis never sold out Belhar.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, he demonstrates that one’s principles do not have to estrange and separate us from the ‘other’, but that although our approach should be honest and frank on issues of justice, unity and reconciliation, that does not mean that one should be engulfed by hatred and animosity, but should continue to act in love and embrace.

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36 He pointed out the crucial aspect to the URCSA synod that they should talk to the DRC that denies that a *Status Confessionis* was ever needed and therefore raises critique against the DRC, because this would make the unification with the DRC difficult. It is evidence that the DRC should recognise and accept that such a moment was needed in the history of the church.

Therefore, as Jackson also states, at that DRC Cape Synod and South Synod in 2003, he was positive about the agenda of the meeting and the discussions on and related to church unity within the DRC family. He also had good conversations with the delegates at the DRC Regional Synod meeting and was perceived to be humorous at times and in good spirits with some of the delegates at the meeting (Jackson, 2003:2). However, others could also attribute such a move from Apollis as his ‘pastoral’ response towards the DRC, as well as his sadness that the unification between the DRC and URCSA did not materialise during his lifetime and that he therefore took the first step through joining a DRC congregation (Apollis, 1995:6).<sup>37</sup> We can observe his approach towards unity when he also encouraged the members of URCSA that they should never “let go their hand” with reference to the DRC, because they are their brothers and sisters in the Lord (Apollis, 1995:6). It should also perhaps be assumed that Nick Apollis would follow the line of Allan Boesak and others during their 1990 meeting with the DRCA that, as long as Belhar (Confession) is embodied, that would suffice a concession (NGSK/NGKA, 1990:7) and to work with them.<sup>38</sup> However, as would be referred to in the chapter of James Buys, in his last years before his passing, he argued at a URCSA Workshop at the SA Gestig congregation in Belhar that the Belhar Confession should not only be embodied but accepted as one of the confessional documents serving as a pre-requisite for church unification – which was in contrast with Allan Boesak and others’ sentiments mentioned above.

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37        However, there are also other sentiments that would emphasise his dissatisfaction with URCSA.

38        When there were doubts about the reception of Belhar by the members within the DRCA, Dr Boesak responded during the combined meeting of the DRCA and DRMC, “*Eindelik deel Dr Boesak die vergadering mee dat die afvaardiging van die NG Sendingkerk reeds aan die NG Kerk gese bet dat die Belydenis van Belhar nie in die pad van eenwording moet staan nie. Dit se ons nou ook aan die NG Kerk in Afrika. Die getroue uitvoering van die Belydenis van Belhar impliseer reeds eenwording en daarom sal eenheid juis die Belydenis van Belhar getrou wees*” (NGSK/NGKA, 1990).



Figure 16: Nick Apollis and Prof Daan Cloete with their spouses at the house of Nelson Mandela

His agency was not only demonstrated with the establishment of unity within the church, but also during the transitional phase of South African politics when he raised his voice against the evil system of apartheid. He demanded the ‘powers-that-be’ to annihilate the pillars of apartheid (NGSK, 1991c:1).<sup>39</sup> Still, when he was invited by former president Nelson Mandela to conduct the opening prayer in parliament during the inauguration of new cabinet members, he showed support for the State (Apollis, 1994b:6). This demonstrates that Apollis was able to hold his support for a new democratic leader and state in creative tension with his criticism for them when they would not act justly.

Apollis’ colleagues and acquaintances, especially younger colleagues, regarded him as a ‘father figure’.<sup>40</sup> This characteristic is mostly related to his manner of handling the unity processes and his encouragement to members of the DRMC to embrace one another and hold each other’s hands and obedience to their calling and ensure that those issues that stand in the way of unity should be dealt with through demonstrating the attitude of Jesus Christ

39 In point 3.3.1 of the minutes of the moderature it states, “*Opheffing van pillare van apartheid ...*”

40 cf. Interviews with Strauss (15 May 2020) and Smith (6 May 2020).



(Apollis, 1991e:8).<sup>41</sup> It meant that he was consistent with the principles of the church order, and open to the processes of embrace, as long as it was based on justice and fairness (URCSA, 2013:2). This was why he was not reluctant to participate in court processes as part of the URCSA moderature to defend the church against a group of DRCA ministers who would challenge the constitutionality of the unification process (URCSA, 1995:6). He shows his consistency with unity within the church that he addresses in his last moderator's address (1997) in Bloemfontein, during the second URCSA GS meeting, with a warning that the journey in pursuit of unity would even get difficult in the future (Apollis, 1997:566).<sup>42</sup> This was shown in various incidents of ethnic and cultural challenges that occurred within URCSA which came to the fore on congregational as well as synodical level in the last decade.<sup>43</sup>

He was also deeply aware of his integrity and therefore became immensely disturbed when journalists did not do justice to his character when they reported on him in one of the national newspapers. He took the matter to the DRMC members through a column in the church's newspaper (*Die Ligdraer*) to clarify and defend his own character and integrity. He went further than 'defence' and accused the media of endangering the current process of church unification that was underway (1991), to which he and the moderature were still committed (Apollis, 1992:13). He utilised the platform to set the record straight – why he and others insisted on the postponement thereof. He defended his position on the postponement and his fierce commitment to unity and reconciliation, but insisted that it should be done within the perimeters that the church order provides.

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41 Nick Apollis states in *Die Ligdraer*, “*Ons sal wat die pad vorentoe betref, mekaar moet vashou, na mekaar moet omsien, en ons roeping nakom om dit wat die NGSK en die NGKA aan die eenkant, en ander lede van die familie aan die ander kant, uitmekaar hou, broederlik en in die gesindheid van die Here Jesus onder oë te sien. So sal ons die Here behaag ten einde te kom tot een Verenigde, nie-rassige Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider-Afrika*” (Apollis, 1991d).

42 “*As ons mekaar met hartlikheid, innige en opregte blydschap groet dan se ons vir mekaar: Ons aanvaar mekaar as bondgenote in 'n stryd wat vir die kerk moeilik is en al moeiliker en gevaarliker gaan word*” (Apollis, 1997:566).

43 This has been raised by Plaatjies van-Huffel (2019:8) when she reflects on her resignation because of cultural and ethnic challenges posed by members during a debate on composition of the executive of the Cape Synod relating to the 50/50 principle (50% Afrikaans-speaking and 50% Xhosa-speaking members) that should be taken in consideration when electing members for the moderature.

Though there is merit on both sides of the divide in the moderation and DRMC, he believed this to be the best way forward in his genuine pursuit for unification. Whilst for others (Buys and Botman) their position was crystal clear, Apollis was also serious in his attempts, and therefore the issue here should be seen beyond the technical, church order matters that were raised but rather in the context of the genuineness of his wish to see the church in its glorious unification in 1994.

## 2.5. CHURCH AND SOCIETY THROUGH THE EYES OF RECONSTRUCTION

We can also observe his own analysis of the transitional phase within the South African political scene (1990-1994) and how he understood the position and role of the church and individual Christians. This section would, through an analysis of his writings, reflect on his analysis of church and society. This is well captured, especially in his regular column in the official newspaper of the DRMC and URCSA (*Die Ligdraer/Ligstraal*).

His opinion pieces that were published were commonly known as *Die Uurglas*. In those pieces, Apollis reflected on the 1990-1994 situation and challenges in the DRC family, as well as the role of the church and its challenges and impact on the broader society. It is important that one keep in mind that Apollis was suffering the brunt of the apartheid system and could also witness the transition towards a new democratic system.<sup>44</sup> In the transition of the political landscape in South Africa, he was clear about what kind of role the church should play (Apollis, 1994:6). He argued that the impact of the apartheid system could be seen in the “material, psychological and moral devastation” that is evident in post-apartheid South Africa (Apollis, 1994:6) and therefore what South Africans needed was “... material and economic reconstruction and development, but also moral and spiritual reconstruction” (Apollis, 1994:6). In 1997, Apollis again refers specifically to the restructuring of the church during his last address (1997) as the Moderator of URCSA (Apollis, 1997:571). The issue of structural reforms in society was apparent

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44 This is well illustrated in the introductory section, about his teenage years, and his exposure to the ‘politics’ of the day, that was conveyed to the authors by his sister, Dorothea Schippers.

in his life and work and that of his comrades (Allan Boesak and Sam Buti), in which they became outspoken against structures that they regarded as irrelevant and unsympathetic against the plight of the poor – even church structures which had the white ministers of the DRC at the helm of the Federal Council of Reformed Churches in South Africa. These and other structures would not be able to address the situation of millions of South Africans that live in dire poverty – a priority! (NGKA, 1988:162-163)

He used his position and the official newsletter of the church on 7 April 1994 to encourage people to participate in the then-upcoming elections in South Africa in 1994. The rubric reads, “*Moderator sê: Gebruik magtigste wapen op 27 April!*” [Moderator states: “Use the most potent weapon on 27 April!”]. He goes into depth to explain the suffering under the previous apartheid regime and how it caused immense pain and suffering to the poorest of the poor. He did a thorough critical and political analysis in a church newsletter – which shows his understanding that the church could never divorce itself from its prophetic role. He regarded the role of the church and individual Christians as members that should be active within the public and political sphere of society. The subheadings of some of his columns attest to it, “*stryd ... gehate era ... wapen*” [“struggle ... hated era ... weapon”] (Apollis, 1994:3). He urges church members to vote because their struggle which started in 1948 would only end on 27 April 1994, when citizens would use their vote without fear or favour as a ‘weapon’ to change the world.<sup>45</sup> His reference should not be confused in this context of the Bible, which would be for pietistic Christians the first thing that comes to mind, but as a truthful act of Christians who lived according to the biblical imperatives, to do their part in the transformation that was about to take place, and not only to pray for such a change.

In the transitional phase and election of most ‘struggle’ veterans of liberation movements in South Africa, it became evident that, as with the former National Party (NP) government, that corruption – especially

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45 He states, “*U stryd en my stryd wat in 1948 begin, eindig eers op 27 April 1994 wanneer u die magtigste wapen wat u nog ooit in ons land in u hand gehad het (en vir baie lank sal hê): U STEM – gebruik dit sonder vrees*” (Apollis, 1994:3).

within governmental spheres – was increasing. Apollis rose to the occasion and in the quest to fulfil his prophetic role, vented his concern about the moral decline in South Africa. Therefore, he joined hands with the former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, to raise the alarm to the endemic forms of corruption that were rampant in the South African society. Though he was critical about issues of race and segregation (promulgated by the apartheid government), he was also concerned about public morality and moral accountability across racial lines. He wrote extensively on the issue even in the church's newspaper at the time.

It was more or less a year after the unification of URCSA that Apollis reflected on the situation in South Africa as well as the church. He argued that, as much as people would contend that South Africans dragged their baggage of the past into the future and were still 'living' in the past, he urged the church to liberate itself from their past; to be reconstructed and reformed (Apollis, 1994d:6). This might also be why he would not have a problem with becoming a member at the DRC Audensberg congregation in Worcester. But his call seems to be more than this – to become a church which would become a mirror for a society that was still fragmented. His call was one of ecclesial transformation which would translate into a real and authentic change in society. Therefore, his view of the church relates to the 'salt and light' metaphor – a witness to South African society which is still struggling with issues of racism, sexism, corruption and other societal challenges. His call is that the church should provide moral leadership that calls for more than a "Sunday morning church service" but to enrich society with embodied moral values of "justice, integrity, fairness, and to serve the other" (Apollis, 1994d:6). In his analysis of change and transformation in society, the church would be the bedrock of it, and the intrinsic link between the two (church and public sphere) has often been observed in his addresses and sermons.

It seems as if the analysis of Apollis could be closely linked with the Kenyan theologian, Jessi Mugambi, who calls for a transition from the 'liberation' paradigm to the 'reconstruction' paradigm. A move from the 'Egypt' motif to the 'post-exilic' motif in which the reform of the 'temple', the 'law' and other reforms and reconstruction could be seen in the biblical narrative of

the Israelites with their return out of captivity (Mugambi, 2002:200-201). Therefore, one can observe especially this in his request to members of URCSA (after the unification of the DRCA and DRMC) – to commit themselves towards ‘reconstruction’ and contrast this to the approach of the church during the apartheid period – that of liberation. He states, “As we have in the past dedicated our whole being to the eradication of the formal apartheid structures, we must now commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the reconstruction process” (Apollis, 1994d:6). He argues that URCSA should play a leading role in “reconciliation, healing, and renewal” (Apollis, 1994:6).

## 2.6. A THEOLOGICAL ETHIC OF LOVE, TRUST AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

We can gather from the life of Apollis and his ecclesial addresses that he espoused both a biblical and contextual hermeneutic. His analysis of society made him reflect on the ethos of the Bible. This is evident in his columns in *Die Ligdraer/Ligstraal*, and his reflection on the church and society. Apollis found the Bible relevant for the interpretation of the struggles during apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, where the church was reliant on the Word of God to guide them. In one of those instances, he reflects on leadership as a position in which one should be ‘principled’ irrespective of the consequences. He relates this to Jesus and the way he was mistreated by significant others but also the ‘powers-that-be’. However, he argues that Jesus continued to be obedient to his father. In relation to this, he argues that a leader should be honest, transparent and truthful to establish trust within the church and in society. They should not settle for a quasi-peace but should be principled and consistent in their commitment to the truth. This he places within the context of strife in church and society and the work towards unity.

Continuing with the ‘father figure’ characterisation of him, it should be noted how he encourages his fellow ministers with the biblical example of leadership through Jesus’ love for the world, who acted through love, but simultaneously was committed to justice in society. He preaches on the challenges to love one another during one of his sermons –

as a biblical mandate.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, he always engaged in society with the Word of God and proposed an alternative lifestyle in which God's church would receive their credibility. These notions of justice and love are reflected in his biblical analysis of various biblical texts especially related to the historical and biblical Jesus' commitment towards the truth, and he relates it to the current leadership that should be actively involved in church and society to proclaim the truth. Apollis showed Jesus' context and relates it to the 'powers' within the church and society that should be confronted with the truth. Therefore, it seems evident that, for Apollis, the Bible was his basis on which he would address the conditions within apartheid and post-apartheid context. He states that his commitment towards the word of God has been confessed in the Belhar Confession (Kuys, 1990:2).<sup>47</sup>

He regarded the leaders of the church as those that should be courageous and willing to own up to the battle for truth, for God, for their neighbour, for justice, reconciliation and peace (NGSK, 1991a:8-9).<sup>48</sup> He brought the conditions of society and the current divisions in the church in relation to responsible Christian leadership. Therefore, his theological reflection told him that it is a sign of the lack of radical Christian and church leadership in the South African society that is the cause of the breakdown of morals in society.

His analysis also demonstrates his reformed theological perspective on issues, especially how he relates the struggles of black South Africans within God's involvement in our daily struggle. This also indicates his Calvinistic views on the providence of God. This is particularly evident in his reference to the "God factor" [*Die Goddelike Faktor*] in his column in *Die Ligdraer* (Apollis, 1991b:8). He argues that because people seek their selfish ends,

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46 Some of his church council members in the Mosselbay congregation also attest to his sermons on 'love for God and one's neighbour', particularly the text in 1 Corinthians 13 (Interviews held on 15 September 2020).

47 "*Die kerk gaan voort op die pad soos tot nou toe. Die basis daarvoor is die Belhar Belydenis. Daarin kry die eenheid en geregtigheid aandag. Ons verdere pad is die van versoening. Ons rol in die toekoms sal een van versoening wees, sonder om die ander sake van die belydenis na te laat*" (Kuys, 1990:2).

48 He stated in one of his pieces in *Die Ligdraer*, "*Die betekenis van Christelike Leierskap*" ... "*Ons moet onthou dat die kerke 'n stryd het om te stry, 'n stryd vir die Here en vir die naaste, 'n stryd vir waarheid, reg en geregtigheid, versoening en vrede. 'n Stryd vir die teenwoordige en toekomstige geslag*" (NGSK, 1991a:8, 9).

God's plan on earth will not come into fulfilment. His biblical analysis allows him to argue that there is not a faithfulness and truthfulness to God, and therefore, members of the church (DRCA and DRMC) became despondent to the dragged-out process of unity. He emphasises the importance that Christians should know that there is a God, and because there is a God, there is surety for the future of the church (Apollis, 1991:8).

His reading of the Bible was one that would allow him to reject racism, and all forms of segregation, oppression and marginalisation. He imagined the future church as a 'non-racial', and united one (Apollis, 1991b:8).<sup>49</sup> The DRCA accused the church of not being serious about church unity when it postponed the establishment of the constituting Synod of URCSA from 1991 to 1994. What is indeed significant is that Apollis, as part of the moderature, reflected on their commitment to unity as a biblical and theological mandate. Therefore, their motivation for unity was a reformed approach (*Sola Scriptura*),<sup>50</sup> with its roots in the biblical responsibilities as a church in the world (NGSK, 1991a:1-2). He was known for his biblical motivation of church unity and therefore, at his retirement, one of the ministers raised his concern that he hoped that there would be someone that would also be as serious about the biblical mandate of church unity as Apollis. Therefore, when Apollis had to resign, Willie Botha prayed for a new Moderator who would be as committed to the biblical mandate of church unity as Apollis (Yssel, 1997:10).

However, more should be said about his theological interpretation – that he read and interpreted issues in the light of apartheid realities – however, he does not take it as far as liberation theology and Kairos theology in his textual interpretations. This could be confirmed by his own leadership during the debate and discussion at the General Synod on 10-18 June 1987 in Umtata, which eventually rejected the Kairos Document. During the meeting, there were concerns from the delegates that the document had

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49 This he mentions in his piece *Die Uurglas* with the title "*Loop die eenheidspad saam vorentoe*". He talks about a "*Verenigde, nie-rassige kerk*" [united non-racial church] (Apollis, 1991b:8).

50 See also his address to his congregation in Worcester-East after serving the congregation for 21 years of ministry, "*Almal sal ook voortdurend in gehoorsaamheid en daadkrag hulle aan God en sy woord toewy. Dit sal elke individuele lidmaat en gemeente se behoud wees*" (Apollis et al., 1992:34).

some Marxists overtones, calls for civil disobedience and calls to violence (DRMC, 1987:236). The synod argued that the document contained theology that encouraged Christians to protest and incited violence against the government.<sup>51</sup> The church also contended that the spirituality and the Christian tradition that the church embraces was to rely upon God to intervene in his own, good time to put right what is wrong in the world. It is therefore not too clear what the perimeters of Apollis' position on Kairos theology were. Nonetheless, he was a firm supporter of the Belhar Confession and rejected all forms of violence to achieve a means to an end. Therefore, though there were also some ministers that had their doubts about the concretisation of the Kairos document in society, they were firm believers in the abolishment of apartheid and its heresy, therefore, also their support to the Belhar Confession attests to this and would suffice, and they would not see the need to sign another document to speak to the issues of the day.

## 2.7. TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PRINCIPLED AND CONSULTATIVE LEADERSHIP

Apollis had his own perspectives on how the church should facilitate the transformation needed within the church as well as society. In the pursuit of transformation, he showcases the importance of values and principles within such processes. In such a way, he kept his credibility intact. A close reading of his addresses reflects that he was a principled person who was seeking the counsel of others, but was also strictly following the rules and regulations of the church and strove for 'fairness' (URCSA, 2013:2).

During his tenure at the Worcester-East congregation, he refers to a collective leadership approach. His elders in his second congregation in Mosselbay reminisce on his leadership style that also empowered them towards becoming leaders and preachers in their own right. While in Mosselbay, he had various wards outside of town (on adjacent farms), and on Sundays he

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51 *Die Ligdraer* provides the reasons why the synod rejected the Kairos Document, "Die vergadering van die algemene sinode wat van 10-18 Junie 1987 te Umtata gehou is, het eenparig die Kairos document verwerp op grond van die vreemde teologie wat daarin vervat is en poging om gelowiges tot opstand teen die regering aan te spoor ... daarteenoor roep die Kairos Dokument gelowiges op om deel te neem aan politieke aksie wat nie anders kan as om uit te loop op geweld en revolusie nie" (NGSK, 1987:235).



would take a group of elders with him and drop them at each of the wards (ministry points) to preach, and then pick them up afterwards. He was one that would take his elders with him for house-visitation and would make them inherently part of the ministry to the congregation in Mosselbay.

In the Worcester-East congregation, he would fondly speak publicly about the leadership team that supported him during his tenure as the Moderator of DRMC and URCSA.<sup>52</sup> He admitted to the challenges of being a Moderator and the time constraints as well as the responsibilities that came with such a position. It was more strenuous during his time, when the tensions were high, to establish unity between the ‘sister’ churches. He found it to be a good opportunity to utilise the skills and abilities of his church council members to handle most of the situations in the local congregation and then refer only those matters beyond their jurisdiction for his attention.<sup>53</sup> Through his leadership, he was empowering<sup>54</sup> others who were part of the leadership team in the congregation (Kuys, 1990:2; cf. van Rooy, 2020:1).<sup>55</sup> The same could be said about his work in Steinkopf, how the building – though it came about through his leadership – was a concerted effort and each member was involved from the decision through to the fundraising of the congregation’s new building. It seems through an analysis of his leadership that he influenced his followers by making them part of the processes, to share in the leadership, and therefore they could celebrate when it was time to reap the harvest! One of the most significant pictures that still bring back nostalgia is the front page picture of *Die Ligdraer* during the official establishment of URCSA, where one can observe everyone in the SA Gestig building in Belhar (Cape Town) filled with joy, shaking each other’s hands and hugging

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52 Directly after he was elected the Moderator of the DRMC in 1990 he states, “*Ek gaan nou rustig aan met my werk, en bowendien het ek ’n lekker span rondom my*” (Kuys, 1990:2).

53 Van Rooy (2020:1) states, “*Hy het groot klem op die skoling van sy kerkraad en gemeentelede geplaas en met sy sterk klem om prosedurieel die regte pad geloop het by tot ’n groot mate sy kerkraad op hierdie pad met hom saamgeneem*”.

54 Van Rooy (2020:1) states, “*Aktiwiteite wat vir hom belangrik was, is skoling en die opbou van die gemeente op verskillende vlakke*”.

55 Nic Apollis states how he manages his congregation and his leadership style, “*Die Kerkraad in elke wyk stel ’n verslag op en op grond daarvan gee ek aandag aan gevalle. Dit is egter nie net die kerkraad wat werk nie. Ons het ’n stelsel van dienswerkers in die gemeente. Die gemeente word aktief betrokke hierby. Die stelsel help baie*” (Kuys, 1990:2).

one another.<sup>56</sup> This would not have been the reflection of unification if it were only the doing of one person (Apollis), or the vision of the leader, but indeed it was a journey which delegates undertook and were willing to associate themselves with through his leadership style.

During the process of unification between the DRMC and the DRCA, there was evidence of his consultative leadership. Through his leadership, the process included information sessions by the moderation members to the different regions in the DRMC, which included Reverends Buys (South and Eastern Cape), Botman (Peninsula and Boland), Apollis (Karoo and Boland) and Botha (West Coast and Namaqualand). He notably indicated that these sessions should not merely be an information session but rather consultation sessions (NGSK, 1990:3).<sup>57</sup> These abovementioned workshops and events show signs of his collective leadership strategy.

Moreover, after the establishment of URCSA, other DRCA congregations situated within the Free State and Phororo Synod protested that they were not adequately consulted and therefore not part of the new church (URCSA). Later, this would become tantamount to a litigation process that almost led to a schism in URCSA. What is not often emphasised is the fact that Apollis was consistently and regularly informing URCSA members through the official newspaper of the church of such developments and processes of unification of the DRMC with the DRCA. Before the establishment of URCSA, he also suggested the postponement of the establishment of the new church when it seemed there was a lack of adequate consultations with members and congregations in the DRCA (NGSK, 1990:1). He, along with other members on the moderation, arranged a meeting with the DRCA moderation and some legal advisors to talk through the legal processes of the structural unity between the two churches (NGSK, 1991b:2). He and others also reeled in the advice of seniors professors

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56 See photo on Chapter 2 point 5

57 He states, “*Die moontlikheid word bespreek om die leraars van die kerk geografies gewys te ontmoet om die kerk op hoogte te hou oor die vordering tot Kerkeenheid, ons gesprekke met die NGK en om oor die Rustenburg beraad verslag te doen. Die gedagte is nie net die oordrag van inligting nie, maar ook die raadpleging van die kerk op hierdie wyse*” (NGSK, 1990:3).

and lecturers of the church, namely Dirkie Smit, Hannes Adonis and Phil Robinson (Faculty of Theology, UWC), who were also invited to the meeting to advise the DRMC moderation (NGSK, 1991b:2). Therefore, the court battle should be seen against the backdrop of his commitment to participatory, consultative leadership.

Nevertheless, in his response in *Die Ligdraer* to the litigation process between URCSA and DRCA, it is clear that he brings across the constant efforts of engagements and dialogue, or attempts thereof, to solve matters. However, in the same address to URCSA members, it is evident that he sees his role of clarifying and simplifying the matters that are before the court (Apollis, 1996:6).

Apollis was part of the representation of the two black churches in the Dutch Reformed Church family (DRMC and DRCA) which included Sam Buti and Allan Boesak who raised a serious concern to the Federal Council of the DRC about the way they regarded the situation between the churches. They, as a collective, stated the following to the council:

In light of the decision of the council, the representatives [Buti, Apollis, Boesak] argue that the council is not truly serious to attend to the concern of the Black churches, and their responsibility to regard the current apartheid situation in South Africa as a priority. The credibility of the DRC is questionable. The situation in South Africa is about life and death for millions of South Africans today, but it seems it is not of paramount importance for the majority on the council. Therefore the representation has decided that they will no longer participate in the deliberations of the council (NGKA, 1988:162-163).

Directly after their report, they left the meeting, because they argued that the platform was no longer relevant for the constituency that they were serving. This illustrates that he was indeed a 'team player', a consultative leader, when it concerned issues of the masses and the dire conditions of the poor. He also

found himself on the side of the 'black solidarity' groups that were concerned with the oppression and marginalisation of South Africans. Therefore, he did more than speeches and delivering of keynote addresses and sermons, but was willing to walk out of a meeting that showed no sensitivity to the conditions of blacks in South Africa! We therefore also observe a little bit of his activism for a 'non-racial' church and society.

It seems that he had some reservations concerning the properties and entities of the DRMC before they united with the DRCA. This became a lengthy discussion in the church and was also underscored in *Die Ligdraer* of 1 July 1991 (NGSK, 1991:4). He regarded it also as his responsibility to assess and to caution the church of any church orderly challenges. He insisted that during the process and a consultative process, members at the grassroots should not be bullied into a decision by their presbyteries. Each congregant has the right to raise his/her voice for or against church unity. The process should allow people to decide on their conscience and should not be forced by their chairs of the presbyteries or misled that they have to decide in favour of unity with the DRCA because the synod 'obliges' them, but that it remains an 'open' decision with the members and delegates of the synod (NGSK, 1991:5).

He cautioned against a founding synod in 1991 because he argued that sufficient consultation had not been done. Therefore, on 1 July 1991 *Die Ligdraer* reports: he cautioned DRMC members in terms of church order processes, and pleaded to postpone the process of unification at the upcoming Synod on 17-21 July 1991. He and another member of the then DRMC moderation (Dr AJ Botha – Scribe) felt that it would again put the church in an awkward position from a legal and church order perspective (NGSK, 1991:15). In June 1991, the Presbytery of Ebenhaezer with the chairperson Sakkie Mentor took a strong stance and position against the unification talks between the DRMC and the DRCA. They wrote their petition to the moderation, and Nick Apollis was also conveying his discontent in their stance, but without rejecting their petition outright,

he explained to them the church order process.<sup>58</sup> It is also evident in his approach and commitment to the church order that he took heed to the advice received (DRMC, 1991:12). Though the respective presbytery accused the moderation of not following due church order processes to have a two-thirds majority from the congregations and church councils, Apollis was putting them at ease that the process will not be conducted haphazardly but would allow time for adequate consultation before any decision is made.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the moderation allowed for such a process for the congregations to vote for or against the postponement of the amalgamation between the DRMC and the DRCA.

It is not a secret that a person such as Nick Apollis might have too much ‘political’ baggage that he might drag with him into the future and the new vision of the church, especially because he had been exposed for an extensive period to the vicious system of apartheid and its effects in the Dutch Reformed church family. At least, there were those that questioned that he would not be able to see through the process of unity, because of his ‘baggage of the past’.<sup>60</sup> However, even though this might be the case, it shows his attitude of overcoming his own prejudices and leaving his baggage behind, which is confirmed through his act of becoming an elder at a DRC congregation. Therefore, it is apparent that Apollis chose not to isolate himself from those that were previously part of a church that supported apartheid, but to share a space with them at a time when the DRC was still not decisive on unity, reconciliation and justice. He was willing to journey with his own vulnerabilities. He believed in ‘small’ reconciliation ‘moments’ in the quest for unity and justice, and this is

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58 Van Rooy (2020:1) states, “*Ons moet onthou dat gedurende sy tyd as Moderator daar binne die kerk ’n groeiende groep leraars en lidmate was wie se aandrang op daadwerklike veranderinge binne die kerk en gemeenskap al sterker geword het. Aan die anderkant was daar ’n groot groep behoudende predikante, veral persone wat vanuit die NG Kerk afkomstig was wat die status quo ten alle koste wou handhaaf. Hy [Apollis] het die vermoë gehad om hierdie twee groepe met mekaar te versoen, maar hy was ook baie deeglik daarvan bewus dat veranderinge binne die kerk en gemeenskap onafwendbaar was*”.

59 “*Die NGSK het dus duidelik probleme gehad met die prosedure wat gevolg is. Die hartlike begeerte was dat weer daaroor besin moes word. Die NGSK het gevrees dat die besluite wat in stryd met die kerkorde geneem is, geen regs krag besit nie*” (Apollis, 1991:6).

60 In the local newspaper (*Beeld*), the journalist refers to former and long-serving ministers with too much baggage. Nonetheless, though he does not directly refer to Apollis, to use Apollis in the context of his article suggests that Apollis is viewed as a leader with too much ‘baggage’ from the past (Yssel, 1997:10).

explicitly stated by him after being elected as Moderator of the DRMC in 1990 (Kuys, 1990:2).<sup>61</sup>

However, one would ask: What does the above mean in terms of power relationships? Would he not now be perceived as one that would succumb again (!) to the powers of ‘subjugation’ oppression and marginalisation? How would this relate to Biko’s black consciousness thought, in which he argues for ‘black solidarity’ as one of the pragmatic steps for the liberation of blacks? This was illustrated through Steve Biko and other black students’ decision to withdraw from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) because they argued that it was a white liberal organisation that did not prioritise the issues of blacks. Therefore, they formed the South African Student’s Organisation (SASO). However, Emmanuel Katongole (2011:113) refers to a different form of power when he argues that “revolutionary madness” should be considered with Jesus’ spirituality of subversion of the powers of the day. Is this not the kind of power that Jesus reflected in the beatitudes? Jesus confronted them through his acts of love and embrace – which was not a sign of weakness, but a subtle sign of confrontation and subversion. This is seen in Apollis’ own words after the establishment of URCSA and the jubilation that he shows this paradox when he states, within the context of a united church, how extraordinary it might be if the church should – like its predecessors – be consistent with opposing the heresy that emerges at the eucharist (Apollis, 1994a:5).<sup>62</sup>

He showed patience towards most of the churches in the DRC family which they (DRMC and URCSA) sought to unite. It was Apollis who, directly after the unification, maintained that on the road of unity, the church should deal with the other parties that are not part of the unity yet

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61 “Die kerk gaan voort op die pad soos tot nou toe. Die basis daarvoor is die Belhar Belydenis. Daarin kry die eenheid en geregtigheid aandag. Ons verdere pad is die van versoening. Ons rol in die toekoms sal een van versoening wees, sonder om die ander sake van die belydenis na te laat” (Kuys, 1990:2).

62 “Die geleidelike proses van kleurskeiding in die kerk van gereformeerde belydenis aan die Kaap het helaas begin by die Nagmaalstafel, daar waar die eenheid van die liggaam van Christus op sy duidelikste tot uitdrukking moes kom. Maar dit is juis in hierdie verband waar van ons voorgangers geëer behoort te word vir hulle pogings om hierdie dwaling teen te staan” (Apollis, 1994:5).

– pastorally (Apollis, 1995:6). Therefore, he went to meet personally with three Reverends in the Free State of the DRCA who raised their concerns with the unification of the DRCA and the DRMC (Apollis, 1995:6).<sup>63</sup> He was hopeful and regularly engaged them to seek clarity and understand their position. Is that not a form of power that Apollis eventually held – one in which he was able to open up spaces for conversation and engagement? These were spaces that were not ‘opened’ before. He was able to enter ‘territories’ (DRC Synod meetings) that were not accessible for black people before! It remains to be seen how his influential power would open up a responsibility within the DRC to act appropriately towards the challenges that were brought to them through those conversations and engagements.

Apollis was able to facilitate a process from 1990 to 1994 in which there were constant debates and conversations until the establishment of URCSA. Van der Ventel (1994:5) argues that it was because of his statesmanship, his understanding, and his patience that members in the two churches and leaders’ tempers had been kept in control. However, there was one meeting held on 15 June 1991 that was immensely heated with the exchange of strong-worded sentiments between the moderate members on the combined moderate that the Scribe (Andries Botha) eventually resigned.<sup>64</sup> The issue on the table was the postponement of the founding synod scheduled for 17-21 June 1991 – whether to postpone or to go ahead as planned (NGSK, 1991a:5). It also seems evident through Apollis’ columns in *Die Ligdraer* that he and Andries Botha were both accused by the DRCA of ‘racism’ because they argued for the postponement

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63 Nick Apollis tells the members of URCSA in *Die Ligdraer/Ligstraal* on their approach with the concerned group in the Free State that refused to become part of URCSA, “In the spirit of the founding Synod of April 1994, the Executive went out of its way to try and meet the opponents of the present unification process. We finally succeeded to meet with Reverends AS Buhrman, MS Kuekue and MJ Ramolahleni as representatives of this group. We assured them that their concerns would be dealt with in the relevant commissions and meetings of the URCSA” (Apollis, 1995:6).

64 He gave his reasons for his resignation, “*Dr Andries Botha maak bekend dat hy onder die omstandighede nie kan voortgaan met die opstel van die Skema vir die eerste sinode van die VGK nie en die gevaardgaande reelings en dat hy daarom sy bedanking bekend maak as skriba van die gesamentlike moderature. Hy onderneem om dit skriftelik aan elke lid van die gesamentlik moderatuur te stuur*” (NGSK, 1991a:5).

of the 1990 synod (Botman, 1991:8).<sup>65</sup> It is therefore evident that the ‘ship’ towards unity was sailing through some stormy and troubled waters and often had some casualties on the way. It often created animosity between the two moderators, Nick Apollis and Sam Buti, especially when the latter accused him of being insidious in the unity process.<sup>66</sup> However, his willingness to handle the situation pastorally and arrange a conversation between the two of them (Nick and Buti) to clarify the matters, as well as expressing his disappointment in Buti, reflects his matured leadership in order to imagine the events that transpired as bigger than himself or the two churches (DRMC and DRCA) involved.

After the establishment of URCSA, Apollis had countless conversations and meetings with the DRC. Therefore, he argues at the end of 1995 that it is important that all the parties involved should consult and ask God to teach them how to live out their faithfulness towards him and to be unconditionally obedient towards his Word (Apollis, 1995a:6). Apollis’ approach towards unity was, therefore, more than only to ‘ask God’ but to arrange events where people would be in a position to be honest with one another, and where attitudes towards each other would be challenged and transformed into trust and responsibility towards one another (Apollis, 1994b:6). The strategies towards unity for Apollis had to do with the biblical metaphor of a mustard seed that has to be put in the ground and die to bring forth fruit.<sup>67</sup> He argued that for the church to become unified, URCSA would have to “die to bring forth a harvest”, which would imply that the church’s ideas of whatever it may be should be up for scrutiny with the Word of God.<sup>68</sup>

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65 Botman reports in *Die Ligdraer* 5 August 1991, “*Dr Andries Botha wat die eerste oggend van die konferensie (ASK) bygewoon het, moes uit protes en onder bewige spanning die vergadering verlaat nadat die probleme in die NGSK moderatuur tot rasisme herlei was*”. Botman was part of the moderation with JD Buys that called for the founding synod in 1991, but Nick Apollis and Andries Botha opposed it, and therefore some DRCA members interpreted the action as ‘racism’.

66 The minutes state on point 4, “*Ds. Apollis spreek sy persoonlike onvergenoegdheid uit om aan die volgende ontmoeting met die NGKA deel te neem in die lig van die beskuldiging dat die voorsitter en die skriba volgens Ds. Buti, verraderlik opgetree het in die eenwordingsproses*” (NGSK, 1992:3).

67 He refer to the following biblical text, “In truth, in very truth I tell you a grain of wheat remains a solitary grain unless it falls into the ground and dies, but if it dies it bears a rich harvest” (John 12:24).

68 Apollis states, “*Die VGK sal soos die koringkorrel gevolglik sterwe ten einde ’n groot oes te kan voortbring*” (Apollis, 1997:570).



Apollis not only placed its confession of unity on the table but also some practical guidelines, during a time when internal and external unity was endangered. It would be interesting to reflect on these practical guidelines in the light of the unresolved unity process between the DRC and the rest of the DRC family and how this might still be of use.

1. The 'otherness' of the church should be embraced, built upon, otherwise it would not be able to be the Church of Jesus Christ.
2. In the past, there was a reliance on the state for legislation and to craft a path on how to develop morality. But the church can no longer depend on the state for crafting such a path, the focus should be on each individual believer and Christian to live a moral lifestyle. The church should concentrate on the spiritual maturity of the members. Individual members should deepen in their faith, grow in it, and develop a passion to convey the good news of conversion, faith, and reconciliation through an unambiguous voice.
3. The nature of the church should not be based solely on words, but it should be embodied through concrete actions. Reconciliation should not only be preached, but should be practiced beyond borders, limitations, and stumbling blocks.
4. Endless conferences, conversations, debates should be replaced with concrete acts of neighbourly love, that find expression in the eradication and the assistance and provision in the needs of people. We cannot all do big things, but would do well to follow the advice of John Wesley – do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.
5. Proclaim justice and righteousness and peace, not only to others, but in their own communities.

6. If the DRC family would want to be a powerful prophetic voice and a unified voice, they should move closer to each other. Place church and society and the Belhar Confession as a guideline whereby unity can become a reality. Nevertheless, the synod should be clear on whether they are still interested in pursuing unity. How can the URCSA and DRC go ahead with unity talks if there cannot be said, in unambiguous terms by the DRC, that a State of Confession was indeed needed by the church in the light of apartheid theology in South Africa?
  
7. Sound ecumenical relations will be of the utmost importance for us from now onward, but when the guidelines for partnerships will be discussed, cognisance must be taken of the fact that, for many years, even up to now, the donor and recipient mentality was at the root of our partnerships. We were and in some instances are still in the same position. That mentality must be overcome. We must also think of restructuring ourselves for a mature relationship, a relationship with the whole body rather than one part of the body. We must help each other to understand ourselves as being a church for others. In Europe and America, up to now, our partners showed us that for them, 'partnership' means 'comradeship' and that they are more than willing to share pains and burdens, expertise, and so forth with us. I think that that's the way we must go in the future.

## **2.8. CHURCH UNITY: AN OUTCOME OF DEPENDENCY ON GOD**

Apollis held a dominant position as the Moderator of URCSA, and yet he stated that he wanted to resign a year before his retirement. He therefore only served one term as URCSA Moderator and did not reflect any signs of protest to continue or hang on to such a position (Yssel, 1997:10). One wonders if this relates to his belief in the sovereignty of God and that one should not underestimate the hand of God in situations. Nevertheless, he argues that to factor God into a new situation is to imagine the ontological implications, not only the turn of events of the benefit of people and organisations, but for

God's sake (Apollis, 1991b:8). It is possible that within the context of 1991, when the unity deliberations were often embroiled with tension between various individuals in the Executive of the DRMC moderation and such cases, he shifted the focus of the members of the church, that unity would not come down to any one person's selfish interest but should be an issue of God's benefit. He states unambiguously that this should be the focus in meetings and discussions – a constant awareness of the presence of God (Apollis, 1991a:8).<sup>69</sup>

Apollis also reflected a deep dependency on God for his actions within the church.<sup>70</sup> In an interview, he reveals his dependency on God as a characteristic that each minister should have. He divulges that he would wake up early in the morning to appeal to God to take charge of the meetings of the day (Kuys, 1990:2). When he was particularly questioned about his words, directly after his election as Moderator of the DRMC in 1994, he argued that he was not so much concerned about the meetings and his responsibility, because he had immense experience, but that he and his colleagues on the moderation should not forget their dependency on God for his guidance (Kuys, 1990:2).<sup>71</sup> He therefore also called for URCSA members to pray to God that all parties in the unity process should hold each other's hands tightly and that they would not lose grip of each other's hands because the unity road is slippery (Apollis, 1991e:8) (Apollis, 1995a:6).<sup>72</sup> Unity, for Apollis, was an issue that should be dealt with as a spiritual matter – disobedience towards God (Apollis, 1995a:6). Therefore, he would argue that the reason that the unification was

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69 He states in *Die Ligdraer*, published on 6 May 1991, "Wanneer met die Goddelike faktor rekening gebou word in samesprekings en vergaderings en byeenkomste na die eise ingerig word, word egter Godvererende en Godverheerlikende rigting en koers aangewys. Die mens en wat sy ambisie en begeerte ook al mag wees, staan op die agtergrond" (Apollis, 1991c:8).

70 In an Interview of the founding synod his dependency on God could be found in his word, "Aan die eenkant is daar dankbaarheid en blydschap, maar aan die anderkant, ook die besef van jou kleinheid en jou nietigheid, en dat die Here ondanks jou kleinheid en nietigheid, jou tog kon gebruik het, om aan die begin te staan van 'n heel nuwe pad, met soveel uitdagings, wat nou aangedurf moet word. Ek glo dat die Here, wat in die verlede jou by die hand geneem het, na liggaam en siel toegerus het, dat Hy ook sal toerus om die pad vorentoe aan te durf, in die wete dat Sy seen ook daarop sal rus" (Kuys, 1990:2).

71 "My bangheid lê daarin dat n mens kan vergeet dat die Here die een is wat die vergadering lei" (Kuys, 1990:2).

72 He states in his column, *Die Uurglas* on 19 August 1991, "Ons moet in ootmoedige gebedsgestalte voor die Here lêwe en om genade smeek om mekaar se hande styf vas te hou om n uiterse gliberrige weg".

incomplete was that the church had not seriously consulted God on the way forward.<sup>73</sup>

He was an open and frank person who would also state his disagreement and disappointment with an issue and was bold enough to state it in the public domain. One of those occasions was when he addressed his own disappointment in how representatives of the DRCA (Sam Buti and Nico Smith) would make it seem as if they were not in favour of the unity between the church, because of his reluctance to agree for a founding synod in 1991-1992. He reflected his disappointment with such members that made it public and which subsequently allowed others to question their integrity in the processes and, in doing this, made it difficult to proceed with the unity process at the time (Apollis, 1991a:6).<sup>74</sup> In the same *Die Ligdraer* edition, he would also have the support of Deon Potgieter who accused Sam Buti and Nico Smith as the culprits who were damaging the unity talks and process (Potgieter, 1991:6).<sup>75</sup> However, whereas some of his other moderation members would vehemently disagree (Botman and Buys) that the matters that were unresolved should be dealt with as part of the new church, Apollis felt that those matters should first be resolved before the amalgamation of the two churches; otherwise, the church would be at risk of schism. Therefore, he would also suggest that in the meantime congregations could already act in an informal manner and should in practise be operating as ‘non-racial’ and ‘multi-racial’ congregations (Apollis, 1991a:6). In the November 1993 edition of *Die Ligdraer/Ligstraal*, it reports on the developments between the postponement and the coming founding synod of April 1994. It reports that those involved in the negotiations became like brothers and sisters – like family! They began to pray together, sing

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73 Apollis states, “Miskien moet ons God vra om ons te leer hoe om ons lojaliteit teenoor hom daadwerklik uit te leef en hoe om sy Woord onvoorwaardelik te gehoorsaam. Miskien sal ons dan ons eenheid in Christus beter beleef en iets ervaar van die herlewing en vernuwing waarvoor ons gereeld bid. Kom ons vra dit weer – maar dan in opregtheid en volle oorgawe” (Apollis, 1995a:6).

74 Nick Apollis states in his column, *Die Uurglas*, “Die mededelings wat hierdie afgevaardigdes gedoen het, het aanleiding gegee daartoe dat die moderatuur van die NGSK voorgelê is as onbetroubare vertolkers van die werklike feite tenopsigte van die onderhandelinge met en besluite van die NGKA se Algemene Sinode”.

75 Deon Potgieter states in the 4 February 1991 edition of *Die Ligdraer*, “Wat het gebeur onder die Buti-Smith leiding by die NGKA se Algemene Sinode? Vir sekeres moes die kerkvereniging ten alle koste op 5 Oktober 1990 afgehandel wees, ‘by hook or by crook’. So sou gesig gekoop kon word by buitelandse gaste” (Potgieter, 1991:10).

together and confess together! It reports positively on the postponement, and that the interim period was fruitful indeed (NGSK, 1993).

In these few paragraphs, it is evident that his love for people, for the church and, above all, his integrity and character were what made him a good leader in the most delicate time of the church. His choices and actions were always to consider its effect on God's church and its credibility in the world. He was also conscious of his own actions and that he did not disobey God and, therefore, he mentions his 'dependency' on God and his prayer in the mornings.

But his reference to 'dependency on God' should also be read alongside his faithfulness towards God's work through church orderly processes. During the unity talks, he reflected a deep commitment towards abiding by the church orderly processes. It seems that he found himself many times part of a commission that would be concerned about the church order processes and the implementation thereof. He, along with James Buys and Isak Mentor, was part of an *ad hoc* commission that was nominated in 1989 to look into the legal issues of the unity process, even when the consultation and advice of legal experts fell short (Botha, 1989:213) of providing clarity on certain challenges.<sup>76</sup> He also showed interest in legal process and thus studied law at Unisa during his career. However, during the end of his terms on the executive structures of the church (URCSA), during his final address as Moderator in 1997 (Bloemfontein), he reiterated that the church should not be captured by its own church order regulations and its

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76 The then Scribe, Rev. AJ Botha (1989) wrote on one of their reasons for the establishment of such an Ad hoc commission due to the inadequate legal advice received. He states, "*Selfs die regsopinies van die kerklike geleerdes en advokate kon ons nie regtig help nie. Uiteindelik is besluit om 'n kleiner ad hoc kommissie te benoem bestaande uit Ds. IJ Mentor, Ds. NA Apollis, en Ds. JD Buys om al die tersake artikels en bepalinge na te gaan en die nodige wetsverwysings vir die volgende sinode voor te berei, met die oog daarop om dit duidelike te formuleer en te laat voldoen aan die gereformeerde kerkreg*" (Botha, 1989:213).

own structures so that it dismisses the person of Jesus Christ, and that the Word of God is not heard anymore (Apollis, 1997:569).<sup>77</sup>

## 2.9. CONCLUSION

It is evident that Apollis was a father figure, principled with making known his dependence on God, though not oblivious to the wrongful actions of others. He was able to bring together his ‘pastoral approach’ with ‘justice’ when he also engaged with the moderamen on a court case with DRCA members who continue to exist as DRCA irrespective of their church that became part of the new church. As Smith (2020) would argue, he showed himself as a mature ‘father figure’ who acted on behalf of the cause, but with patience and humility. He would always use his inspirational approach and ask leaders to reconsider so that we keep both ends “[fighting for] the ‘cause and the brother and sister’ with a joint outcome”.<sup>78</sup> He was a consultative leader who would ensure that everyone was ‘on board’ with decisions and processes before embarking on a new venture. His consultative leadership and his spirit of forgiveness (to those that wronged him) made him a phenomenal leader amongst his peers. However, he was concerned about his integrity – but also that of the church to faithfully fulfil its mission on earth.

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77 Nick Apollis, in his last address as Moderator of the church, argues that the Word of God should be honoured often at the expense of the church order and church structures, “*Hoe besig is die Kerk, partykeer so besig, so gebonde aan die maaksel van sy eie waarbede, beskouinge en teorieë, so vasgevang deur sy eie Kerkordelike bepalinge, so aan bande gelê deur sy eie organisatoriese strukture dat die Bybel, die persoon van Jesus Christus daaragter verdwyn, die Woord nie meer so duidelik gehoor word nie, die stem van die Kerk nie meer so helder en duidelik en ondubbelsinning gehoor word nie*”.

78 Interview with Smith, 6 May 2020.



## CHAPTER 3

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# LEONARDO APPIES: THE QUEST FOR CHURCH UNITY, JUSTICE AND NATIONAL LIBERATION

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

The dialectic in undertaking a study on the life and work of Leonardo Appies is constituted by the following tension. On the one hand, there is an easy side to the attempt at bringing into focus a colourful and dynamic personality like Appies for the simple reason that his role as a student leader, minister of religion, ecumenical figure and struggle activist was observed up close. Numerous anecdotes, incidents and stories relating to his presence at the theological hostel, student leadership, closeness in the ministry along the West Coast as he was serving a congregation in Saldanha Bay,



being cofounder of the West Coast Council of Churches, the collaboration with the working class, mainly of the Food and Canning Workers Union and active involvement in the United Democratic Front, all come to mind.

In staying with the logic of the praxis cycle, the study is organised in the following manner. First, the issue of insertion or agency is dealt with. The concept of insertion as it is used by Holland and Henriot (1983) is complicated, but could in simpler terms be understood on the basis of the question “Who am I?” as suggested by Kritzinger (2008:1) who also opts for the concept agency rather than insertion. However, whether one says insertion or agency, the issue is about identifying or analysing how someone fits into the instances of active involvement. The challenge in dealing with the insertion or agency of Appies is to show how he fitted or fits into the student movement, the congregation, national church structures, the ecumenical movement, the local community and the mass democratic movement. A further issue, as far as insertion and agency are concerned, is to investigate the choices he made and the values he espoused that have informed his involvement on various levels over an extended period of time. Second, his interpretation of context is looked at. What were his analyses of the situation on the University campus, the church, the community and the country at large? The question could also be posed in theological terms by asking: What was his reading of the signs of the times? What did he see? What was his discernment and in what way was he not satisfied with commonplace and superficial interpretation, but probe in a more radical fashion? Third, has he allowed his own agency – which is the first step in the modes of theology that he was leaning towards – and his context analysis to inform his reading of the Bible or theological reflection? What has been the hermeneutic he opted to use in trying to not only indulge in social analysis, but also deep theological analysis? Fourth, what were the strategies applied in working towards change on the diverse levels of involvement? Were matters left to chance or were there deliberate and conscious strategic options exercised? Fifth, is it at all feasible to construct or reconstruct the underlying spirituality that has kept Appies going and that has inspired him to keep on keeping on? The authors will discuss the agency and involvement of Appies within church and society, in terms

of the following: revolutionary student leadership, parish pastor, national church leader, ecumenical figure, community leader and activist.

### 3.2. REVOLUTIONARY STUDENT LEADERSHIP

Perhaps a little bit on the anecdotal side, but there is an interesting suggestion that with the emergence of the *tokkelokke* (theological students) on campus, there had been an assumption that it was time for the 'secular radicals' to step back in favour of leadership by the theological students, with the name of Appies being quite prominent (Mathews 2018:17). The trust the theological students enjoyed at the time finds expression also in the assessment of Grootboom (2010:109) of a pretty volatile situation on the UWC campus in writing:

The student mass did not want to remain between the four walls of N7 (the science lecture hall) and wanted to take to the streets. As if by design, the students from the theological school ... took centre stage and started leading the students towards reason. I do not know what was at work here. Was it by design that God took over? All I know was that it was not by default. Because of the volatility of the time, many lives could have been lost if we took to the streets in full force.

It was clear from the onset that matters on the UWC campus would be much more than attending to the bread and butter issues of students and beyond student leadership during an extended period of time between 1965 and the late 1980s. As much as they were called into service as a pretext for furthering the struggle against apartheid, student leaders like Appies understood clearly that their role extended way beyond the university campus. It is in this context that he emerged as a revolutionary student activist. Morden (2018:126) makes the point that, at the time, UWC assumed a leadership role as far as the uprisings in the Cape were concerned, resulting in a situation where the likes of Appies, in his capacity as president of the Student Representative Council (SRC), obtained a strong political profile. It was indeed a time during which the attending of classes was not a priority, but the emphasis was on change. Like Mathews

and Morden (2018), Pedro was a student at UWC during the time of Appies' leadership. In a rather vivid recollection, Pedro (2018:20-32) relates the following incident relating to the student activism of Appies, and how he in his leadership role as Student SRC president led a march of about five-hundred students and how he acted wisely and with circumspection when danger was looming with men in camouflage uniforms jumping from the back of two trucks, lining up next to one another and taking aim at the students inside the university premises with long rifles. Appies had the presence of mind by cautioning the students over a megaphone in the following manner: "*Dames en here, ons keer terug na die cafeteria. Daardie mense het outomatiese masjiengewere en ons kan enigiets van hulle verwag*" [Ladies and gentleman, we return to the cafeteria. Those people have automatic machine guns, and we can expect anything from them]. In 1976, in the wake of the Soweto uprisings, Appies was detained and incarcerated at Victor Verster prison in Paarl for a period of three months without trial.

What was the ideological stance of Appies during the time of his leadership at UWC? As expected, the UWC campus was not different from other tertiary institutions as far as the diversity of ideological positions taken by the students were concerned. The common enemy then was, of course, the heinous system of apartheid. In general, therefore, the positions formulated by students were by definition anti-apartheid, whether they espoused Black Consciousness or Marxist-Leninist or Socialist tendencies. It would be safe to suggest that the stance taken by Appies is captured in a UWC-Soweto pamphlet which was printed by S&S in Belgravia Road, Athlone, and issued in the name of UWC students (Pedro, 2018:21-22). The main significance of the pamphlet, which has been preserved like a souvenir, is the insistence on the blackness of UWC students without necessarily feeding into Black Consciousness, *expressis verbis*. It contains a clear rejection of any form of education geared towards the entrenchment of a Coloured identity as constructed under apartheid. The rhetorical use of terms like 'suffering' and 'oppression' is an indication that students understood that the issue under the virulent system of apartheid was not merely an issue of human rights, but of liberation or national liberation for that matter. And that such liberation could only be achieved if the political machinery created by the apartheid regime, like the Coloured Representative Council, the South African Indian Council

and the Bantustans, were rejected completely and black people stood together. It emerged as hugely significant that 44 years down the line in February 2020, after an informal interview with Appies at Yzerfontein on the West Coast road, one of the first pieces he sent me was the UWC-Soweto pamphlet. The specific motivation for sending the pamphlet might be an interesting topic of discussion. Was it sent out of sheer nostalgia, or to say this is where we come from, but we have gone astray? Would Appies, for example, agree with the analysis of Patel (2010:166-167) that the idea of non-racial unity was being challenged today – challenged by the stresses and conflicts over resources, jobs, houses, by fear, challenged by some who see advantage in narrow group identity as a justification for access to power or resources? It is a profound betrayal of what the generation of 1980, as the generation of 1976 and, before them, the generation of the 1950s, stood and fought for. It is necessary that the deep commitment to the idea that we are one people is remembered and advocated for, openly and vigorously.

A rather clear indication of the ideological and strategic option exercised by Appies at the time is revealed by an incident recorded by Thomas (2010):

In July 1976, the UWC Social Sciences Society wanted to conduct a Saturday symposium on the future of the Coloureds. In a mass meeting attended by about 500 students, SRC president Leonardo Appies promptly put period to this idea. This was not acceptable, he explained, as the student body expected outreach to the black community, for which it sought solidarity. Appies reprimanded the SSS, saying, “We as a black campus cannot be so narrow-minded as to concern ourselves exclusively with a Coloured struggle”.<sup>15</sup> Appies summarily suspended the constitution of the SSS. Although multiple layers of identity and political persuasion no doubt existed among the UWC students, no one opposed the harsh words and measure meted out to the SSS. This incident perhaps shows that the black approach was accepted at UWC, albeit not unanimously so.

The use of the somewhat generalising term ‘black approach’ by Thomas (2010) makes for some interesting reading. In the context of UWC during the time of Isaacs and Appies, the two student leaders he pertinently connects to his understanding of the “Durban moment in Cape Town”,

Black Consciousness and the South African Student Organisation (SASO) had already made significant inroads on campus. My own recollection is that Isaacs, as a very charismatic and articulate student, responded to a question on SASO by saying: “I am SASO!” Is Thomas (2010) himself shying away from calling the approach he alludes to a black consciousness approach or is he using the more generic term to show wariness of the reality that some students at UWC might have adopted a ‘black approach’ without necessarily embracing black consciousness? Be that as it may, the critical issue to note if his version of the responses of Appies as contained in the story are authentic, is a rejection of the Coloured identity as constructed by apartheid.

The already cursory look at Appies’ role as student leader will be the more incomplete if nothing is said about the theological and philosophical awakening that undergirded his involvement in the student movement. In identifying some theological students who in his understanding were in the forefront of the student movement at UWC, including Appies, Grootboom (2010:109) asserts that the seminal work of Cone entitled *God of the Oppressed* “became our handbook” and the Doctoral thesis of Boesak *Farewell to Innocence*, a kind of second Bible which was widely read by students. This is the generation of Appies who has allowed himself to be greatly influenced by Black Theology and other modes of liberation theology. Botha (2020) alludes strongly to the influence exerted on Appies by Martin Luther King Jr. by suggesting that:

“Leonardo was sterk beïnvloed deur die lewe en styl van Martin Luther-King (Jnr). Hy het onverskrokke voor geloop en ondersteuning gegee. Hy het egter nooit geweld voorgestaan nie. Hy was in die eerste plek ‘n dissipel van Jesus Christus” [Leonardo was strongly influenced by the life and style of Martin Luther King Jr. He fearlessly took the lead in marches and provided support. However, he never propagated violence. He was first and foremost a disciple of Jesus Christ].

Indeed, King’s book titled *Why We Can’t Wait* had found circulation amongst students. On a more philosophical level, there were three people who exerted great influence on Appies, namely Biko (2005), Fanon and,

in a fascinating way, Amilcar Cabral, the agriculturalist, theoretician and revolutionary from Guinea Bissau. It is not for nothing that Appies' youngest son is named Amilcar. Before elaborating somewhat on the particular influences from the three, a comment needs to be made about the very interesting, creative and, more often than not, confusing mix in the thinking and ideological stances in the Cape that found expression on the UWC campus. The thinking amongst theological students at UWC is a case in point. Before being transformed into an Ecumenical Faculty, the Faculty of Theology at UWC was confessional in nature, i.e. catering for students from the Reformed tradition only. The issue to ponder, as far as the mix alluded to is concerned, is that students trained in Reformed Theology mainly started getting exposure to modes of Liberation Theology like Black Theology and Latin American Liberation Theology, as well as to different political philosophies like Black Consciousness and Marxism-Leninism. Perhaps the fascinating learning here is that people can embrace and internalise diverse consciousnesses and ideologies simultaneously in a paradoxical fashion, but not when contradictory. There has also been an unspoken pragmatism as far as this was concerned, based on the argument that anything, any idea, any strategy that can enhance the struggle against apartheid should be called into service.

For Appies, the ideas on Black Consciousness coming from Biko (2005) were paramount for his conversion from being a Coloured youngster from Steinkopf, at the time where his parents were in the ministry of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, to a black person in solidarity with the racially oppressed and economically exploited. He understood that blackness had nothing to do with skin pigmentation, but was according to Biko (2005) a state of mind, a mentality and a self-affirmation. He equally understood Biko's (2005) razor-sharp analysis that the most potent weapon in the hand of the oppressor was the mind of a black person and that the only way to overcome was through black solidarity. In the Systematic Theology classes with Du Rand, Appies would have had some exposure to the thinking of the German philosopher Hegel in his construct of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. And this has probably assisted in getting a grasp of Biko's (2005) appropriation of Hegel's ideas by identifying apartheid as the thesis, the anti-apartheid struggle based on black solidarity as the antithesis, and what Biko (2005)

typified as “the glittering prize on a distant horizon”, namely a land with a more human face, as the synthesis.

Just as the ideas of Biko (2005) and King found circulation on the UWC campus, so did those of Fanon and Cabral. At the time, there were particularly two of the works of Fanon shared amongst students on campus, namely *Wretched of the earth* (1963) and *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952) in which Fanon brilliantly describes and analyses the true nature of colonialism and the psychopathologies emanating from colonial oppression. It would be fair to suggest that the more interesting part for students suffering under the system of apartheid and trying to formulate responses to it in the anti-apartheid struggle was Fanon’s deep analysis of the dire situation of oppressed people in the colonies and his ideas on resistance. Less attention was perhaps paid to his rather clinical and prophetic analysis on what may transpire after independence or national liberation had been gained. A major concern for Fanon was that the “middle-class taking over from the colonisers might be weak and underdeveloped and tempted to fall back into the old ways under which it suffered. When allowed to serve its true calling to the revolution, it will fall into the trap of narcissism and self-enrichment” (Fanon 2001:119-121). There was a strong convergence of thinking between Biko and Fanon as far as prospects were concerned. What were the dreams they were holding onto? What were they hoping for as far as the creation and construction of new societies was concerned? For Biko, such a dream is captured in his iconic statement on “the glittering prize on a distant horizon” which he understands to be “the gift of a world with a more human face”.

Fanon was equally concerned about what comes after independence has been achieved. First, his concern was about a “weak and underdeveloped middle class that takes over from the colonisers” and that in “its weakened state it will endeavour to fall back into the old ways under which it suffered, and when allowed to serve its true calling to revolution it will fall into the trap of narcissism and self-enrichment” (Fanon 2001:119,121). Second, positively though and what could be seen as the essence of what he was hoping for:

It is a question of the third world starting a new history of man (sic.), a history which will have regard to the sometimes

prodigious thesis which Europe has put forward, but which will also not forget Europe's crimes, of which the most horrible was committed in the heart of man (sic.) and consisted of the pathological tearing apart of his functions and the crumbling away of his unity. Let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions, and societies which draw their inspiration from her.

Humanity is waiting for something from us other than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature. If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us. But if we want humanity to advance a step farther, if we want to bring it to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must make discoveries for Europe, for ourselves and humanity, comrades, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man (sic.) (Saul 2008:173).

Conversely, the same could perhaps be said about the engagement of students with the ideas of Cabral, in particular those students with a leaning towards Marxism. If, for example, an analysis is made of Cabral's 1966 speech in Cuba as he was addressing cadres involved in struggles for national liberation, the following elements are identified. First, for Cabral, struggles for national liberation are by definition class struggles. This is so since he understood that even after independence, oppression and exploitation would continue in the mode of a neo-colonial economic regime. In a profoundly prophetic sense, particularly in terms of its relevance for today, Cabral expressed wariness of whether, after liberation, those who for "historical reasons, are capable of being the immediate heirs of the colonial or neo-colonial state" or in the case of South Africa, the apartheid state, will muster the political and moral awareness to deal with continued capitalist domination. In fact, Cabral suggested that a greater revolutionary consciousness of the petty bourgeoisie would be required if they were to interpret the aspirations of the masses faithfully and identify more and more with them. The truth or reality articulated by Cabral relating to the limited nature of the power of



the petty bourgeoisie is brought sharply into focus in his statement that, however high the degree of revolutionary consciousness of the sector of the petty bourgeoisie called on to fulfil this historical function, it cannot free itself from one objective of reality: the petty bourgeoisie, as a service class (that is to say that a class not directly involved in the process of production), does not possess the economic base to guarantee the taking-over of power. In fact, history has shown that whatever the role – sometimes important – played by individuals coming from the petty bourgeoisie in the process of a revolution, this class has never possessed political control. And it never could possess it, since political control (the state) is based on the economic capacity of the ruling class and in the conditions of colonial and neo-colonial society, this capacity is retained by two entities: imperialist capital and the native working classes.

The challenge posed to the petty bourgeoisie is to commit what Cabral calls ‘class suicide’. First, this would entail resistance to the temptation to become more bourgeois and, in doing so, not to negate the revolution. Second, class suicide would require a strengthening of revolutionary consciousness and to identify with the working class and the deepest aspirations of those they emerge from. It will all make for a very interesting analysis to determine whether, in a country like South Africa where national liberation in a very distinct form has been achieved, the petty bourgeoisie ruling the country is gravitating towards greater or lesser solidarity with the masses of people bearing the brunt of gross inequality and socio-economic discrepancy.

As much as one of Appies’ strengths as a student leader was to formulate his own opinion on matters, he was not a lone wolf student leader, but his name was inextricably linked to that of Botman, Buys and Visagie – fellow theological students. Several authors who have been tracing the history of the student struggle at UWC during the 1970s and 1980s draw attention to this by mentioning these names in the same breath (Grootboom, 2010:108-109; Thomas, 2010:27, Pedro, 2018:20, 43,51). Recordings on the very intense debates and discourses between Appies and the aforementioned three would have been a creative source for the reconstruction of student activism during those two very epoch making decades in the history of not only UWC, but the country. What could perhaps also not be overstated is that the name of

Boesak appears together with those of Appies, Botman, Buys and Visagie. A particular study on the influence which Boesak exerted on UWC students through his writings and sermons as student chaplain is long overdue.

### 3.3. A PROLONGED ACTIVISM

In one of the interviews on the insertion and agency of Appies, a respondent makes reference to how he ‘officiated’ as liturgist at a ceremonial burial of apartheid on the UWC campus, also mentioning his arrest and incarceration as a result of his political activism. The important issue here, as seems to be the interpretation of Botha (2020), is that Appies came out of the seminary with the ideal to help realise in practice what has been done ceremoniously on campus. Botha goes on to tell us that in the first few years of his ministry in Saldanha, the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church emerged as the voice of the voiceless not only of the congregants, but also of the politically voiceless. This was partly necessitated by the reality that the liberation movements were banned and most of the leaders were serving time on Robben Island or other prisons. Like quite a few of his contemporaries who trained at UWC during the 1970s, Appies was well equipped theologically, philosophically, spiritually and strategically to continue the struggle which started on the university campus in the real-life situation of the church and in society. Soon after he started in the Saldanha Bay congregation, the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church with its *status confessionis* – declaring as heresy the theological and moral justification of apartheid – and the Confession of Belhar emanating from this emerged as part of the vanguard of the ecclesial criticism against the heinous system of apartheid. Botha (2020) testifies to the fact that Appies was part of this with “*hart en siel*” (heart and soul) and stepped forward as the one that would preach about it and lived up to it in an unambiguous fashion. He helped the oppressed community of Saldanha Bay to overcome their fear and to start raising their voices and rising up. His ministry in the congregation was consequently characterised by this critical voice against apartheid for more than two decades, up to 1994. During this time, his spouse, Lizette, stood by him and their partnership of equality has gone a long way in solidifying their comradeship in the struggle. Her story warrants a study on its own, with a specific focus on the numerous strategic manoeuvres

relating to the training and equipment of the youth and women. She was a disciplined and dedicated member of the *United Women's Organisation*.

### 3.4. PARISH PASTOR IN SALDANHA BAY

There is no need for a disclaimer relating to the issue that the structuring of the study on the basis of the praxis cycle does not necessitate a balance in length between the different sections. It is to be taken for granted that the section on Appies' involvement in a parish of URCSA in Saldanha Bay spanning a good thirty years will be longer than all other sections in the chapter.

#### 3.4.1. *On Context*

One respondent suggests strongly that Appies' congregational ministry could hardly be assessed properly without taking the contribution of his spouse, Lizette, into consideration. Their partnership is typified as a partnership of equals working as a team, both in the parish and the community organisation, Vital Connection, which they established. More than that, the point is made that he would not have achieved what has been achieved without her input. In terms of her own worth, dignity, talent and capacity, she supported the ministry by making her own distinct contribution which has created space for him to play his role in the broader structures of the church. It is particularly in the restructuring of the congregation and the empowerment of the youth and women that she had played a tremendous role (Botha, 2020).

The ministry of Appies was stamped not only by the cooperation between his spouse and himself, but also by the clear choices made and options exercised in the context of the struggle against apartheid. Two respondents relate stories that reveal these choices more than words can tell. First, a respondent who joined the congregation way beyond 1994 narrates how he was told by Appies and fellow congregants about the central role of the URCSA congregation of Saldanha Bay in the uprisings and during the State of emergency in the 1980s. He goes on to say that during his time in the congregation, however, Appies never pushed any specific political agenda, but he did communicate the gospel on the basis of the Confession of Belhar forthrightly, exposing the

fault lines in society and insisting upon the keywords of unity, reconciliation and justice in the Confession (Du Plessis, 2020). Second, in the recollection of another respondent, there was a particular incident on a Wednesday night. As the congregation gathered for the weekly prayer meeting, they were not allowed to enter their own church building and, more serious still, the house of God, because the Security Police and the army with guns had cordoned off the building. The minister and congregants were not allowed to enter. However, Appies displayed courageous leadership by taking the lead in voicing his utter disapproval of the presence of the police and the army with the congregants following. The choices made and options exercised found concrete expression in the housing of the offices of the trade union, Food and Allied Workers Union on the church premises. Not only that, but the church building was made available for meetings of the working class and to enlighten congregants and community members on the situation under apartheid.

According to respondents, the concern of Appies about issues of justice did not stop with the arrival of democracy in 1994. On the contrary, his understanding was that the church should be wary of a situation where the very people who were trampled upon under apartheid may be betrayed and disappointed by the new princes. The issue for him was about the dignity and humanity of people in a new dispensation where they were actually still trapped and living in the 'old circumstances'. After 1994, he had to provide a perspective on the own identity of congregants, particularly when the cracks started showing in the new government. As minister he was constantly and consistently preaching hope in an attempt to keep the congregants standing (Du Plessis, 2020).

### *3.4.2. Attempts at consolidation in the congregation: On self-reliance*

The challenges faced were, however, not only of a socio-political nature, but internally – in the Dutch Reformed family of Churches, locally and nationally – there were serious hurdles to overcome. Based on the feedback of respondents, the local challenges in this respect could be looked at from at least two perspectives. In an initial or first phase during the heyday of apartheid when the relationships were defined by separation, alienation

and suspicion, Appies had to render leadership on a few hard decisions to be taken.

Principled decisions were taken that the congregation would not survive on handouts, but would henceforth live on income generated through their own stewardship and offerings. What emerged strongly was the vision of a church not reliant on fundraising functions, but living fully from the offerings of the congregants as a non-negotiable Biblical principle (Du Plessis, 2020). On the basis of such resolution and a new vision, the financial support from the NGK in Saldanha was stopped. A further consequence was that ‘brothers’ from the Dutch Reformed Church were no longer needed for taking services on a Sunday or the midweek prayer meeting, but elders in the congregation took that responsibility in the absence of the minister. The fundamental principle of the equality of all church councillors and that all opinions counted was established (Newman, 2020). This was the situation before 1994.

### *3.4.3. A people’s church*

These developments could be traced back to a very basic presupposition on how Appies understood the parish ministry. Newman (2020) alludes to the point that the basis of his ministry, one supposes apart from Scripture, was the wisdom of Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu:

Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them.  
Start with what they know. Build with what they have. But with  
the best leaders, when the job is done, the task accomplished,  
the people will say: “We have done it ourselves”.

Newman asserts that the entire ministry of Appies was premised on this citation. Whoever would be looking for the golden thread running through his ministry, would find it in this philosophical approach. The basic understanding of the church as a sociological reality is well captured by Newman in saying:

Vir Ds. was die kerk nie iets daar vêr in die lug wat as ons eendag sterf ons hemel toe gaan nie. Vir hom is die kerk hier by die mense, onder die mense en tussen mense. Die kerk beteken nou hier op die aarde iets vir die mense (For the minister the church was not something way up in the sky that if we die one day we shall proceed to heaven. For him, the church is here amongst the people. The church means something to people on earth here and now).

The point is well corroborated by Botha (2020) in his description of Appies' participatory leadership style. Botha goes on to accentuate how this leadership style was at the basis of equipping and supporting the leadership of the congregation and in the process galvanising the church council and other leaders in the congregation as a team. He provided leadership on the basis of strong convictions, but was never intent on dominating. His clear thinking and remarkable capacity of articulation enabled him to be persuasive and to generate more cooperation than opposition in the congregation. This resulted in an obvious and conspicuous independence, maturity and capacity in the congregation. The great gift at play was the ability to mobilise people by assisting them in developing their gifts. Concretely the strategies adopted for the training and equipment of church councillors specifically were to have camps where the unity of vision, goals and clarification of roles were to be hashed out and church council meetings were conducted outside Diazville where the church was located. This was aimed at taking church councillors outside the atmosphere of their own residential area (Du Plessis, 2020).

#### *3.4.4. A fine touch on liturgical celebration*

Respondents testify to Appies' fine touch and sensitivity as far as the liturgy is concerned – not liturgy in general, but with specific reference to the Sunday morning service. Botha (2020) alludes to the point that worship services during his ministry were characterised by “*n warm hartlikheid en gewyde ordelikheid*” [a warm cordiality and a devotional orderliness]. Other respondents also draw attention to the “holiness of the meeting between God and His people”, the dialogue between God and the congregation at the end of which God sends His people back into the community, into the world where they are supposed to maintain the very

same rhythm (Respondent L, 2020). All of it also entailed a revision of litanies and changes in the vestry practices *inter alia*.

Not only did he go through a lot of trouble with the preparation of sermons, but also with all other liturgical elements. Respondents emphasise his insistence on a Reformed liturgy for the simple reason that the congregation was not Pentecostal or Charismatic (Du Plessis, 2020; Newman, 2020). For example, Appies felt that there was no need for the singing of choruses or a band. His conviction was that their own hymnal containing beautiful songs both in terms of melody and content sufficed. Botha thinks that the attitude of Appies in this matter was to avoid the liturgical celebration degenerating into a concert, or as Du Plessis (2020) states, no 'side shows' were tolerated.

A critical comment here is perhaps that quite often in the congregations of URCSA, it is extremely difficult to drive the point home. In responding to the consumerist culture, congregants more often than not choose for what gratifies immediately – for instant satisfaction – instead of grappling with and internalising the deep content of the hymns in the *Sionsgesange*. In April 2019, at one of the major celebrations of the 25th anniversary of URCSA, a brand new hymnal aimed at bringing together different languages and different liturgical traditions was released. It is yet to be seen whether the hymnal will make any difference to the urge amongst congregants rather to go for, in some instances, pretty superficial, repetitive choruses. The issue at stake is much bigger than merely choosing between the own hymnal and choruses. It is in a real sense a matter of identity. It has to be conceded though that quite often when it comes to the issue of identity the choruses composed in the community are perhaps more functional in identity development and formation than hymns which are import articles. One supposes that in both instances, i.e. hymns and choruses, the question will be whether they help in inculcating a sustainable spirituality. There is evidence that in instances where a 'Charismatic lite' approach had been adopted, with specific reference to the singing of choruses, a remarkable improvement in stewardship was noticeable.

Other peculiarities as far as Appies' inclination on the liturgical celebration is concerned were that you had to contribute to the liturgy at each service

and not only at special occasions. The example given by Du Plessis (2020) is that of the choir, which would not contribute to the liturgy every Sunday, but expect to perform during Easter or Christmas or at the funeral of a respected congregant. Appies was quite firm on this by insisting that the worship service was not an occasion to show off. It was also his firm conviction that taking photos at baptism would 'spoil' the sacrament.

### *3.4.5. Attempts at unification on a local level*

A second phase in the relationship between the URCSA Saldanha and the NGK Saldanha emerged after 1994. This seems to have been a very promising phase in terms of overcoming the hatred and alienation caused by apartheid. A process of serious talks and negotiations was set in motion with a view to the unification on ground level. Feedback from respondents on the matter is quite rich in revealing the hope-giving and promising aspects of the process, but also the challenging and complex aspects. Informed by the Confession of Belhar, Appies would constantly remind his church council about the unity of the church being "a gift and an obligation" (Du Plessis, 2020). We have no unity in and of ourselves, but can only receive it as an unspeakable Word from God in Jesus Christ and this would be the motive force for striving towards unity. He was passionately bound to the unity of the church of Jesus Christ (Botha, 2020).

The commitment of Appies to this process of unification was aimed at narrowing the gap between the congregations of URCSA and the Dutch Reformed Church. He invested a lot of energy in it, but was adamant that unity does not mean mere cooperation. Unity for him was structural unity. He came from the generation that believed the only concrete evidence of the Dutch Reformed Church having shed racism was the coming together with their sisters and brothers who were identified as Black, Coloured and Indian under apartheid in a united, non-racial, non-sexist Reformed Church. There is evidence that he went out of his way to develop good relationships with his colleagues in the Dutch Reformed Church. Unfortunately, these efforts were stifled more often than not by colleagues with whom he had established a good rapport, leaving Saldanha for another congregation (Botha, 2020). Despite his 'soft and wise' approach towards the colleagues from the Dutch Reformed Church, particularly in the initial stages of the



talks, the process went haywire after two years, because the sisters and brothers from the Dutch Reformed Church of Saldanha shied away from a “more concrete practice of tangible unity”. Appies insisted that any form of cosmetic unity would not suffice and had to be judged on the basis of the Confession of Belhar (Du Plessis, 2020).

### 3.5. ATTEMPTS AT UNIFICATION ON THE LEVEL OF THE PRESBYTERY

Not only on congregational level, but also on the level of the Presbytery, attempts at unification were undertaken. In this respect, the *Wesland Verenigende Ring* or Presbytery saw the light. As firm and resolute as Appies was on the basis of principle, he never gave up on the ideal of unification. The first prize was of course structural unification on all levels of the church, grounded in the Confession of Belhar as part of the confessional basis of a united church. According to Botha (2020), the frustration was that there had been no evidence whatsoever that the Dutch Reformed Church was not serious about the inclusion of Belhar. Particularly on congregational level, no real efforts were undertaken to adopt the Confession of Belhar as part of their confessional basis. Some ministers from URCSA boycotted scheduled meetings with the Dutch Reformed Church for this reason. Appies remained steadfast in his commitment despite his own deep disappointment and discouragement and made decisive contributions more often than not. One such example, in the recollection of Botha (2020), is a meeting at Bridgetown where a resolution was taken to form one Presbytery. After the formation of the Presbytery, he went on to provide strong and positive leadership. This had to be done in a situation where the cultural, social and demographic differences were stark and where the differences in personality between the clergy were throwing up huge challenges for the new Presbytery. His insistence, though, was on not giving up on one another, but to ‘engage’ by confronting critical questions (Botha, 2020). It is believed that he retired with a measure of disappointment that there had not been a single instance of an URCSA and a DRC congregation coming together in structural unity in the newly formed Wesland Uniting Presbytery.

### 3.6. THE QUEST FOR NEW MINISTERIAL STRUCTURES

Quite a few issues that have characterised the ministry of Appies in Saldanha Bay have been alluded to and elaborated upon already. We are now turning to his quest for new ministerial structures, not as a fad but as an indication of his strong sense of strategy. There had been a realisation that the new vision of what the ministry and the congregation may look like would not be feasible in the old structures. Who knows whether he was benefitting from the learnings on the UWC campus in this respect. At UWC, there had been a major shift taking place between 1973 and 1976. Whereas in 1973 students were resolute in closing down the institution that, in their understanding, was nothing but a ‘bush’ college aimed at training them to become better slaves, between 1973 and 1976, a new sense of strategy and tactics emerged. Soon both the ideas of a walk off, which in a sense did happen, and the plans to start an independent free university were aborted. Students were now intent on transforming UWC into a basis for political education, mobilisation and organisation. In what sense would such learning be transferable to the congregational ministry? The exposure to student politics, the engagement with different ideologies and, for theological students in particular, the learnings from context-based modes of liberation theologies or flows must surely have helped in coming to grips with the situation on the ground. An added advantage, of course, was the exposure to some of the best theologians in the Reformed tradition and particularly with the assistance of Boesak, discoveries were made in Reformed theology on where God stands *vis-à-vis* the oppressed, the poor and the downtrodden. How, for example, Calvin the Reformer would state in reference to the poor that the rich and wealthy were like hungry wolves devouring the flesh of the sheep and sucking their blood.

Respondents draw attention to the new-wine-old-skins metaphor from the Bible that almost became a slogan for the search for new structures in the congregation. Right at the beginning of his ministry in Saldanha, Appies raised the matter of new structures to be developed on the basis of the metaphor, suggesting that pouring new wine into old skins is quite precarious since the old skins might be torn and the new wine spilled (Respondent L, 2020; Newman, 2020; Botha, 2020). Botha (2020) points out that Appies was responding to the model decided upon by the synods

of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in the 1980s. The church had then accepted and approved of the theology of '*Gemeentebou*' (building up of the congregation or congregational development) as the basis for understanding and organising the denomination and congregations. At the 1986 synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, a resolution was taken to substitute the model of different societies in the church inherited from the Dutch Reformed Church with the model of building up the congregation by getting each and every congregant actively participating in the undivided work and ministry of witness of the congregation. This would, so it was thought, render the existence of congregants joining a different society in the congregation obsolete. Botha (2020) shows that the migration from one model to another was undertaken on the solid basis of a study done by the synodical commission for Doctrine and Study (*Leer en Studiekommissie*) which came to the conclusion that the tendency to activate congregants along the lines of societies was rife in the church. According to the commission, this was to be juxtaposed with the Scriptural position of only one organisation where all aspects of the church's calling are attended to and where all congregants are incorporated and motivated to fulfil their obligations. That organisation is the church itself. In the New Testament, it is the whole congregation engaged in the service work of the church.

Botha (2020) testifies to the fact that Appies and himself were committed to the process with heart and soul, with Saldanha being one of two congregations in the Presbytery of Malmesbury taking the resolutions of synod seriously. The congregation was organised in a manner that every congregant, big and small, got involved in the activities of the church. There was no need for separate societies for the youth and women anymore. The thinking at the basis of these new developments was the theological understanding of the unity of the church. It should be taken as quite symbolic that, at one and the same synod of the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1986, it took the resolution on '*gemeentebou*' based on the unity of the church as well as adopting the Confession of Belhar, which provided further impetus for the building up of the church on the basis of its unity. In a rather ironic turn of events, the very unification between the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa that was supposed to give even further impetus to the unfolding process, put a halt to it. It was discarded.

There is evidence though that, as much as this must have been a great disappointment to Appies, it did not detract from the local efforts to develop the kind of congregation where unity and the quest for justice would be the guiding stars. In the understanding of Respondent L (2020), the service of love, care and presence of the church should confront injustice, need and want. Doing justice is to be affirmative and reconciliation is to be premised on change and not piecemeal improvements, but fundamental transformation. In the quest for the structural changes in the congregation that would best facilitate this kind of vision, a decision was taken to operate with teams rather than committees. In the process, teams for finances, building and care were created with a convenor for each and volunteers from the different wards. The teams worked under the banner or vision of the congregation “*Die Kerk as Arbeidspan*” (The Church as Labour Team). The transformation in the congregation was driven by workshops where planning and evaluation would occur. The typical action-reflection model was appropriated. This way, the congregation was continuously able to improve on the work done by feeding into the evaluation (Newman, 2020).

### 3.7. A SCHOLARSHIP FROM THE FREE UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

The very reason for factoring the particular issue in at this point in the study is simply that the foregoing section bears testimony to Appies’ prowess as far as practical theological questions are concerned with specific reference to liturgy and congregational development. Botha (2020) typifies him in a pertinent fashion as a practical theologian. Not only was it important for him to proclaim the gospel as purely and relevantly on a Sunday, but also to give it hands and feet. The issue was not so much about giving people hope for the hereafter, but to present the gospel as good news for here and now. This explicates his total commitment to and his passion for the social and political questions the people of Saldanha were grappling with.

In conversations amongst members of the *Belydende Kring* [Confessing Circle], the name of Appies came up as a potential and prospective successor for Bam who was then Professor in Practical Theology in the Faculty of Theology at UWC and one of the drafters of the Confession of Belhar. At the

time, the *Belydende Kring* – a Confessing movement consisting of ministers, church councillors and women from the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa – was facilitating scholarships for further studies by pastors from the two churches at tertiary institutions in Amsterdam, Groningen, Kampen and Utrecht in the Netherlands. Appies was earmarked for studies at the Free University in 1986. He kindly made documents available for this study relating to the issue, namely the letter of invitation, the letter of confirmation of the scholarship and his reply. It all makes for some fascinating reading. In typical Dutch style, the letter of confirmation dated 11 June 1986, written by Moleveld, secretary to the Office of the Dean of students, was business like, and containing only the most relevant information. This included the scholarship awarded by the Free University, the specific level of study that he was accepted for, accommodation arrangements stating clearly that the three-room apartment would be available from 15 September 1986, and a request for documents to be submitted. Sadly though, Appies declined. In a rather moving fashion, he explained in the letter why he had to decline despite the reality that he was delighted about the offer. In a pretty brave decision, which is in itself a wonderful display of solidarity, he made reference to the rather challenging situation in South Africa of 1986 in general and particularly in his own congregation where church councillors and some congregants were incarcerated for their resistance against apartheid. He requested an extension of fifteen months from the Free University, which was unfortunately not granted.



Figure 17: Leonardo Appies seen with the Presbytery of Malmesbury

### 3.8. ASCENDANCY TO THE NATIONAL ECCLESIAL STRUCTURE OF URCSA

For Appies, nothing could have been more historical than being elected first Scribe of synod at the very inception of URCSA. Botha (2020) makes some interesting observations on the rise of Appies to the position of Scribe. For example, that his election to the position was, even for himself, a great surprise since he had always tried to avoid that specific leadership role. He never felt any calling to this position and in fact shied away from any other leadership role in the Presbytery. According to Botha, he would almost always try to negotiate himself out of it at meetings of the Presbytery. Since there had been a particular arrangement on the chairing of the Presbytery on a rotational basis, he could not escape. Whenever it was the turn of his congregation to host the meeting of the Presbytery, he automatically had to step in as chairperson. Botha assumes that, ultimately, his election at the first General Synod of the newly formed URCSA had very little to do with any profile as a very competent Scribe, but would rather be attributable to his own story in the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church, sharpness of mind and the gift of articulation which enabled him to present well formulated contributions at synod. In the synods of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, his name appeared quite regularly in the nomination list. In 1990, he was elected assistant Scribe together with Peter Grove at the penultimate synodical meeting of the DRMC and also as Scribe of the church for the preparatory synod in 1994 with a view to the unification with the DRCA. Officially then, he was Scribe of the DRMC at the unification synod and constitution of URCSA where he was elected first Scribe of URCSA.



Figure 18: Leonardo Appies with Church Councillors and congregants of Saldanha Bay

### 3.9. ECUMENISM

#### 3.9.1. *Local and regional ecumenism*

The understanding of the church, the surroundings of the church and, in fact, the whole created universe as *oikos* was not foreign to the Saldanha Bay congregation. Such ecumenical interpretation was inculcated in a manner that the implications of *oikos* were well understood as part of the field of labour. Even the poor understood this to mean that they were not only recipients of the blessings of God and His gifts. From the nothing they had, they had plenty to contribute from their spiritual gifts (Respondent L, 2020). The ecumenical approach of the minister rubbed off on the congregation and the understanding that their ministry stretched beyond the boundaries of the congregation was internalised. A very distinct element of this new avenue of interpretation was the notion of solidarity which, in the case of Appies, was stretched to the point where standing in the gap for fellow believers, standing in their shoes quite often happened at the cost of their own family.

It would be fair to suggest that the coming into being of the West Coast Council of Churches (WCCC) was attributed to this ecumenical understanding. Appies and his wife were founding members of this body

in the mid-1980s and he was elected first chairperson. This was during the time that Beyers Naudé served as General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches of which the WCCC became an affiliate. With the inauguration of the WCCC, Appies' sense of strategy and tactics and symbolism was demonstrated in the choice of location for the event: Hopefield. It would be with Naudé as the keynote speaker. A thought is to be spared for the Van Staden-couple who were pastoring the Anglican congregation in Hopefield at the time, for graciously making their facilities available. Amazingly, the WCCC developed into a movement to be reckoned with in a short space of time, and churches from towns like Lamberts Bay, Piketberg, Laaiplek-Velddrift, to mention only a few, were represented in the WCCC. If respondent L (2020) is understood correctly, the aim of the Council was to galvanise and unite faith communities in the larger West Coast area, to foster networks and to expose the virulence of apartheid and to facilitate the church's role in bringing about transformation. These were dangerous times in the country with the State of Emergency looming, but the WCCC was quite unashamed and unapologetic about its political agenda.

### *3.9.2. International ecumenism*

In a real sense, the involvement and leadership in the local and regional ecumenism served as a preparation for greater things to come. Appies' ascendancy within URCSA as a member of the moderation, serving as Scribe for close to two terms, facilitated his emergence as international ecumenical figure. In his capacity as Scribe of the General Synod, he managed ecumenical relationships and booked a number of significant achievements. Amongst these achievements were promoting the transformation of ecumenical relations into full ecclesiastical partnerships. This means that fairly broad and general relationships were changed into direct church-to-church or congregation-to-congregation interaction. A second area was brokering partnership agreements between URCSA and Reformed churches in Germany and the United Protestant Church of Belgium. Third, when the South African desk of the Reformed Church in America transformed into a church-to-church partnership, URCSA was represented by Appies. Fourth, in the context of the Annual European Reformed Churches Consultation on South Africa, he played a central



role in interpreting developments in the country in the framework of the church's mission, witness and service.

A specific focus was developed in his participation in the worldwide ecumenism, namely on issues relating to climate change and sustainable development. This is demonstrated, for example, by his participation in three major international events. First, he participated in the World Conference on 'Sharing of Life' which deliberated on global resources sharing; second, the Pacific Conference of Churches on Climate Change and, third, the European Consultation on Climate Change and Sustainable Development at Driebergen in the Netherlands.

### *3.9.3. Leadership in the community*

The point has already been alluded to more than once in the study that most of the initiatives in the Saldanha Bay congregation and the community at large came about through the partnership between Appies and his spouse, Lizette. One great endeavour was the transformation of the diaconal services of the congregation into a full-blown community organisation, named Vital Connection. Botha (2020) alludes to the fact that, as with other initiatives relating to the church council, congregation and Presbytery, Vital Connection is an illustration of Appies' remarkable skills in facilitating strategic processes. Such skills assisted greatly in reflecting in a responsible way on vision, calling and the most effective line of action to actualise these.

The term 'vital' bears the meaning of 'very necessary' and 'full of energy' or 'full of life'. In terms of vision and particularly based on the challenges faced in the congregation and the larger community of Saldanha Bay, an NGO like Vital Connection was indeed very necessary and had to be energetic and lively. In their partnership, they were the embodiment of such and more than capable of mobilising human and material resources. The impact which the NGO had is clearly demonstrated by the fact that all respondents close to the ministry of Appies refer to it (Botha, Du Plessis; Newman; Respondent L; Van Schalkwyk, 2020). If Botha is understood correctly, the coming into being of Vital Connection represented a symbolic shift from the pre-1994 era, characterised by the struggle against apartheid, to a focus on healing and the development or building up of

the community. Vital Connection was aimed at off-setting the debilitating effects of apartheid somewhat. The NGO became an essential instrument in offering the disadvantaged community of Saldanha Bay more social and diaconal services (Du Plessis, 2020). A ‘twin’ organisation in Diazville, named *Indlu Yothando Dienssentrum*,<sup>79</sup> was established and aimed at the empowerment and care of the people of the West Coast. Particularly through Vital Connection, the elderly and children were cared for, and jobs were created. In addition to this, Vital Connection became involved in ecological projects along the West Coast and in the Northern Cape. The quality and nature of the work done enabled Vital Connection to make inroads and to enjoy the support of the government in the Western Cape.

There were still quite a few other instances of involvement in the community particularly aimed at the uplifting and economic empowerment of the people in Saldanha Bay and on the West Coast. Amongst these were his role as Board member of the *Weskus Gemeenskapstrust* (West Coast Community Trust), *Saldanha Ontwikkelingsprogram* (Saldanha Development Program), *Saldanha Opvoedkundige Forum* (Education Forum), West Coast Economy Development Forum and the *Tabakbaai Wassery* (Laundry) as an initiative of the Business Development Centre (Van Schalkwyk, 2020).

### 3.10. CONTEXT ANALYSIS: READING OF THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The conversation on the insertion into or the agency of Appies thus far, on different levels as student leader, parish pastor, national church leader, ecumenical figure and community leader, is permeated with implicit and explicit social analysis. This is not at all surprising since it points to the reality that, on top of all the other skills acquired, the analytical skill has been sharpened in struggle. More particularly though, the discernment and reading of the signs of the times have been greatly helped by the exposure to the political philosophies of Biko, Fanon and Cabral and modes of Liberation Theology, like Black Theology and Latin American Liberation Theology.

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79 The name could be translated as “House or Way of Love”.

Appies comes from the generation of anti-apartheid activists, or shall one say, comes from the circles of the mass democratic movement where a very specific kind of analysis was done in trying to understand the anatomy of apartheid. Broadly speaking, such analysis had a race, class and gender component. According to such analysis, the system had thrown up different fault lines and fragmentations. First, it is a system dividing South Africans on the basis of race in terms of its racial oppression. Second, it is a system dividing people along class lines in terms of the huge socio-economic discrepancies and inequalities created. Third, the system equally divides male and female by favouring male domination and patriarchy. On the basis of this analysis, special attention was drawn to the state of triple oppression of black women: as black persons, as poor people and as females. South Africa, amongst others, was consequently regarded as racist, classist and sexist. In looking at the South Africa of 2020, it would be fair to suggest that the theoretical framework or analysis might have been discarded, but the realities on the ground as far as racism, inequality and sexism in its manifestations as patriarchy and gender-based violence are concerned, are still quite glaring. The COVID-19 pandemic has violently and devastatingly ripped this open.

Appies himself reveals his sense of analysis in reflecting on the role of the church in post-apartheid South Africa in some broad strokes on “Understanding Today’s South African Society”. The issues raised are aimed at assisting the church in understanding the new challenges and contradictions in a democratic society. On the basis of the ‘needs’ hermeneutic, Appies identifies seven areas where the church could potentially play a role: (1) the challenges of poverty and the building of rural capacity, (2) the HIV/aids pandemic, (3) the need to transform into a truly non-racial society, (4) the challenge of moral reconstruction and responsible citizenship, (5) the need to improve the capacity of people and civil institutions, (6) the challenges of social equity, women’s emancipation, justice for the disabled, challenges for and of the youth, education, training and entrepreneurship, and (7) the challenge of environmental integrity. In an almost unavoidable fashion, the categories of race, class and gender are factored into the list with reference to poverty, non-racialism and women. There is some new language too, like the disabled, entrepreneurship and environmental integrity.

There is an interesting response from Beukes (2020) to the question on context analysis or the reading of the signs of the times, which could be viewed as a form of theological analysis. He writes:

I think that although it wasn't termed as such, the ministry of Saldanha under his guidance could be called missional or missionary diaconate in the sense that it not only was focused on the needy, the indigent and the marginalized, but also endeavoured to reach the whole of the community in all its sectors. He understood that the mission of the Church is inherently God's mission (*missio Dei*) to an exploited, disadvantaged, disenfranchised and broken society and needed to be healed in whatever small way that healing could be achieved.

In reflecting on the role of all four members of the moderation under discussion in the book, Beukes believes that all four were convinced that apartheid was a gross injustice, politically as well as economically. In his understanding, that was a difference in how they engaged the matter practically, identifying Appies as the most radical of the four. He mentions the leadership role of Appies in the establishment and successful running of the WCCC as an example of the radical stances he was prepared to take. He understood that the church was strategically positioned to be a change agent in this regard and could not proceed to preach a gospel that pacifies and silences the down-trodden into accepting the injustices they had to live with.

### 3.11. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: ON READING THE BIBLE

#### *3.11.1. Reading the Bible on top of the newspaper*

The reflections of Botha (2020) could serve as a kind of preamble to instances of theological reflection or the reading of the Bible where agency and context analysis clearly played a role. Not mentioning any specific text from the Bible, Botha does however mention that he has always been surprised by the freshness and originality of Appies' reading and hearing of the Bible. He would consequently not rely on gimmicks or techniques of mass

psychology like the tele-evangelists would, but relied fully on the persuasive power of the well-articulated word and the Word. As a practical theologian, he was convinced that the gospel speaks into the congregational practice and society. He believed in the transforming power of the gospel for the realities that members of the congregation in Saldanha Bay were grappling with. The situation in church and society was spontaneously playing itself out in his ministry. The relevance and actuality of his preaching derived from the fact that, as a good Reformed minister, he read the Bible on top of the newspaper.

### ***3.11.2. Beyond exegetical presuppositions***

On the anecdotal side, there is a recollection of a conversation with Appies where the manner in which the story of the exodus was appropriated to the South African context was striking. In what could be construed as transcending all manner of exegetical presupposition, he made specific reference to how God showed scant respect for the Pharaoh's economy by tearing it to shreds in his resolve to liberate his people. These were the days when the question on economic sanctions, as campaigned for by the liberation movements, was hotly debated in church and theological circles. If this anecdote is anything to go by, it would be safe to assume that he allowed his agency and context analysis to inform the way in which the Bible was read.

### ***3.11.3. I am because I belong***

His particular manner of reading the Bible is corroborated by his theological self-understanding. In a piece entitled "My Faith Journey: Its Impact on Life and Ministry", Appies (2020) reveals in moving fashion the radical integration between faith or, let us say, theology and real-life situations which he internalised in his youth through the ministry of his parents in the Namaqualand town of Steinkopf. His own calling to the ministry was inspired by the holistic ministry and sense of community which he observed in Steinkopf. The response of the church to the basic needs of people, such as water, electricity, healthcare, caring for the aged and the education of children, informed his faith in Jesus Christ. What is clarified marvellously is that, for him, faith was and is not a matter of doctrine, but a way of life. Such faith and way of life find expression in the diaconal and prophetic presence of the community of believers from which hope and life-restoring opportunities

emanate. His deep philosophical understanding of ‘I am because I belong’, is grounded in this ecclesiological and theological understanding.

In reflecting on his time at university, he asserts that his faith was informed by different exposures *inter alia* the philosophy of Black Consciousness, Black Theology and Liberation Theology. It makes for some intriguing reading that, in the same breath, he mentions the exposure to different political ideologies. Earlier in the study, the diversity of ideological influences on the UWC campus is mentioned. For an outsider, it may appear to be strange for students to have developed a sense of eclecticism, but in real terms, the espousing of Black Consciousness and Marxism, for example, was not experienced as contradictory but as reinforcing. And on top of it, for theological students, it was important to clarify why they thought that dimensions of these ideologies were not necessarily contradictory to their faith and theology. Appies fondly remembers the critical debates between students on faith and politics within the Christian student movement. Any politically conscious theological student would testify to the way in which these hot debates and conversations amongst them were extremely helpful in sharpening their own thinking. Appies also makes the interesting point on how even the engaging and interacting with what he calls “establishment theological teachers”, assisted in the clarification of thinking. One supposes that such interaction might have been confusing also for theological students confronted with the dilemma of lecturers perceivably not supporting the system of apartheid, but equally not being in full solidarity with the oppressed. Perhaps it is for that reason that Appies makes reference to the learnings which occurred outside the classroom with reference to interpretations from a black perspective and from the vantage point of the oppressed. A further perspective was the participation in the struggle for liberation. Drawing from Romans 8, he shows wariness of ideologies, though, and contends that the true inspiration is derived from the love of God and the love for God’s people.

#### ***3.11.4. The trial sermon: A discourse between text and context***

If Beukes (2020) recalls correctly, the text for Appies’ trial sermon was Luke 4:18-19, which in the Good News Edition from which Beukes cites, reads as follows:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people.

This had been a choice of text in a very particular context. As far as the particular time is concerned, this was between the student uprisings of 1976 and the State of Emergency of 1985, and therefore at the exact time of a new wave of student rebellion. It requires no stretch of the imagination to see the connection between the text and the context of oppression and repression during the 1970s and 1980s. The trial sermon is where the hermeneutic of bringing text and context into conversation with one another was sealed. A further issue was that the characteristics of Appies' missionary leadership emerged strongly. Not the often misinterpreted Matthew 28:19 that became known as the Great Commission, but the Manifesto of Jesus himself would be the guiding star of his ministry. His ministry would be grounded in a spirituality of good news, solidarity with the poor, healing and liberation. In Beukes' interpretation (2020, interview), there had been an understanding with Appies that any manifestation of injustice posed a threat to human dignity and the realisation of people's full potential.

### *3.11.5. An Afrikaans translation of the Kairos Document*

In his capacity as leader in the WCCC, Appies had the Kairos Document (KD) of 1985/86 translated into Afrikaans at great cost. For a number of reasons, this had been a significant step. First, nowhere else in the history of church and theology, except perhaps in Black Theology at the time, was the hermeneutic of mediation spelt out as clearly as in the KD. In the Prophetic Theology developed in the KD, social analytical mediation as well as mediation through action are paramount. Beukes (2020) makes the observation that the translation of the KD is a clear sign that for Appies theology and theological discourse could never be only privy to the 'academia', but that 'the people' needed to be challenged and equipped to be active partners in the quest for justice. Retrospectively, instances like these also show that to claim that Afrikaans was very much called into service in the struggle against apartheid is not at all opportunistic. There is

of course a brilliant strategic perspective in the KD on the relationship between the oppressed and the government. If a government has become so intransigent that it would no longer listen to people or pay attention to their petitions, then the people should stop trying to interact with such government and rather mobilise amongst themselves.

### *3.11.6. Capita Selecta*

An amazing aspect of the responses to the question on Appies' theological reflection or his reading of the Bible is how some (Du Plessis, 2020; Newman, 2020) recall specific portions from Scripture that he used as basis for his sermons. They do not elaborate on content, but the fragments of information provided are helpful in seeing the contours of the hermeneutic of integration between text and context or the circular movement from the context to the text and back. It is not a linear movement as if a direct line could be drawn between the text and the context. In the new post-apartheid context, where people were unfortunately still trapped in poverty and unemployment with no real access to the economy, texts like Isaiah 43, Ezekiel 37 and Psalm 46:2-4 were preached on by Appies. The selection of texts from the Bible was aimed not at pacifying congregants, but to inspire hope and trust in God and to hold on to his promises. Significantly, the text from Micah 6:6-8 which tells people what God is looking for – namely humility before God and to do justice – had been preached on in April 2004 with the celebration of 10 years of democracy in South Africa. Earlier in the study, there is an allusion to Appies' fine liturgical sense. Newman (2020) draws attention to the fact that the text from Micah, one could say, instead of the usual Exodus 20 or Matthew 22, was used in the liturgy. Another interesting example from Newman is the use of 1 Corinthians 12:26 which is translated by Petersen (2005) in *The Message* as, "If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt". With the rise of the trade union federation, COSATU, the text was made famous with the coining of the slogan, "An injury to one is an injury to all". Not much speculation is needed to suggest that Appies' use of the text would be very contextual in the light of his own connection with the local trade union which had its offices right on the premises of the Saldanha Bay church.



Van Schalkwyk (2020), in responding to the question on theological reflection or the reading of the Bible, identifies themes running through the ministry of Appies rather than recalling the use of specific texts. He remembers a strong focus on the poor, the kingdom or reign of God that is to happen, the Fatherhood of God with reference to 'Abba Father', church unity and the witness of the church in a broken world where believers should be salt and light. These are hardly themes that could be projected in an otherworldly or depoliticised fashion. Neither could they be preached or presented on in an individualised manner. On the contrary, they all point to collectivity and community. On the anecdotal side, once again, there is a recollection of Appies speaking to a group of young people at the church in Vanrhynsdorp in 1979, challenging them on their responsibility as young Christians in the South African context of the late-1970s with an emphasis on 'not doing it alone'. This accentuation of the collective and of acting together became a hallmark of his ministry.

### 3.12. CONCLUSION: SPIRITUALITY

#### *3.12.1. Beyond a bourgeois individualism*

Is there a way in which the agency, context analysis, theological reflection and strategic planning of Appies can be consolidated? Is there a heart and a soul to all of his involvement on different levels in church and society, his reading of the signs of the times, the reading of the Bible and strategic action? At the heart of the praxis cycle that has been called into service for determining what data is needed for the study and for the logical and coherent structuring of it is *spirituality*. When it comes to spirituality, the typologies suggested by Cannon (1994) and Foster (1998) are creative, but perhaps still too technical and consequently slightly too modernistic. Since their types are similar, it would be safe to say that they differentiate between spiritualities that are strongly grounded in the sacrament, the Word, prayer or meditation, the empowerment by the Holy Spirit, virtue and compassion. An important disclaimer with Cannon and Foster is that they do not see these spiritualities as mutually exclusive and that believers can embody more than one simultaneously. As far as the spirituality of compassion is concerned, they both locate it in the social justice tradition

and in acts or deeds of justice. It would be safe to suggest that Appies mainly embodies a spirituality of compassion. However, the trajectory unfolding in the study and the profile emerging point to the reality that there had been overlapping with other spiritualities. As a Reformed theologian, both sacrament and Word would be equally important. His very trial sermon, based on a portion from Luke 4, shows his fundamental understanding that a mission aimed at proclaiming good news, healing and liberation is to be energised by the Spirit: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...”

### *3.12.2. A spirituality of compassion*

The identification of Appies’ spirituality as compassion with reference to his participation in the struggle for justice is corroborated by Beukes’ (2020) observation, in so many words:

Appies embodied a spirituality of compassion and justice. He was deeply touched by the hurt and struggle of others, especially those who fell victim to the injustices of institutionalized apartheid. His personality, as well as his ministry, embodied a genuine empathy turned into action in order to change the human condition for the better.

Beukes goes on to make the connection between his assertion that Appies embodied a spirituality of compassion and justice and the Confession of Belhar. With reference to article 4 of the Confession, Beukes speaks of God’s self-revelation as the One who wishes to bring justice and true peace between people by siding in a special way with the destitute, the poor and all those who suffer injustice. Based on a spirituality grounded in how God reveals Himself Appies as a student leader, congregational pastor, national church leader, ecumenical figure and community activist has proven himself to be an obedient servant leader. In all areas of involvement and agency, he stood where God stands and followed where Jesus leads. Once again, he was doing all of this not as a lone wolf, but by mobilising the student body, the congregation, the church and the community at large.

The reference to the self-revelation of God appears to be extremely important. God reveals Himself in his Word. Not in a fundamentalist way, he stood firmly on the authority of God's Word. Imperatives for the diverse insertions into society came from the Word. Even in the post-apartheid situation, one would encounter opposition for trying to stick to the Word and not simply toe the line (Respondent L, 2020). It is fascinating how the respondent connects the dwelling in the Word by Appies with issues like care and solidarity. Care seems to be understood as care for and of people, but also being careful about what has been entrusted to him in the form of documentation. He would carefully and meticulously attend to sources, activities and involvements. Further issues are that of solidarity and accountability which were important to him.

### *3.12.3. Conclusion*

Appies' spirituality is what pulled it all together. Indeed, his spirituality is a way of being in the world – a way of living, of knowing, of seeing and hearing. It is wholistic in the sense that it involves our whole persons – our conscious intellectual life and also our subconscious and non-rational life as well, and it involves our physical and sensual existence as well as our mental world. Because our spirituality is our way of being in the world, it is also relational and political. It involves the nature of our relationships with others, with God, with the created world, and with ourselves. It is thus not individualistic, but corporate, not private, but engaged (Procter-Smith, 1990:164).

Readers of this book may think that there is an oversight or an omission pertaining to the strategies applied by Appies in his efforts to bring about change in church and society. However, in the unfolding of the narrative on his insertion or agency, context analysis or reading of the signs of the times and theological reflection or reading of the Bible, a radical integration is shown between theory and practice or action and reflection. This has rendered a separate treatment of strategies for transformation unnecessary. The lasting legacy of Appies might ultimately be his inductive rather than a deductive theological and ministerial approach. In a remarkable way, the ontological and epistemological are fused. His being with poor and oppressed people, working class people, grassroots church people and his learning from them and articulating what he found in the world of these

categories of people are pulled together in his life and work. In simple terms, one could say that the inductive approach makes clear that being and knowing, saying and doing do not have to be juxtaposed. This is what distinguishes Appies from some of his contemporaries who might have been able to analyse and formulate correctly, but remained in their comfort zone. The praxis is what makes the difference, if praxis is the technical term for integration between theory and practice.

Is there anything to be drawn from this in a context that has changed quite dramatically? The answer to the question is both yes and no. To start with the no first and to answer in the negative, it is obvious since apartheid as a political system is no longer in existence. The after effects or legacy of apartheid are, however, alive and killing. No stretch of the imagination is required to objectively notice that the poor are still poor, the destitute still destitute and the marginalised still suffering in the periphery of society. A new round of solidarity with them and a reaffirmation of the option for the poor is called for.



## CHAPTER 4

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# SAM BUTI: FROM CONTROVERSY TO PROPHECY: A NAME WRITTEN IN THE HEARTS OF PEOPLE

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

In celebrating 25 years of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), the name of Sam Buti surfaced time and again. Not at all surprising though, because he has contributed greatly to the church's struggle for unity and justice and emerged as a member of the constituting moderation of the URCSA, which came into being on 14 April 1994 as a fusion between the *NG Kerk in Afrika* (NGKA) and the *NG Sendingkerk*

(NGSK). None will forget his prophetic words to Mandela at the constituting synod of URCSA shortly before the first ever democratic elections in South Africa. Mandela graced the synod in session at Belhar in the Cape about two weeks before the elections. In a clear prophetic statement, Buti warned Mandela that if the new ANC-led government would do to people what the apartheid regime had done, URCSA would speak out against the regime as a manifestation of its prophetic calling. It is interesting to note that Mandela would later say something similar with reference to the ruling party – the ANC. It is notable how often both have been cited in the attempts of the church to manoeuvre out of the periphery into the public arena and to fulfil its prophetic role in post-apartheid South Africa.

The study is an attempt at tracing the role of Sam Buti in the church's struggle against apartheid in church and society or, stated positively, his contribution to the quest for unity and justice. The study is organised around the praxis cycle, both as it originated with Holland and Henriot (1983) and the adaptations effected by Kritzinger (2008:764-790). In its original form, the cycle consists of four steps, namely insertion, context analysis, theological reflection and planning. Kritzinger has opted for the term 'agency' rather than 'insertion' and has added the dimensions of ecclesial analysis, spirituality and reflexivity. These dimensions serve as organising and structuring principles for the article. First, as far as insertion or agency is concerned, the question to be answered is: Who was Sam Buti? An investigation is conducted into his levels of involvement in church and society, not in a generalising fashion but specifically his commitment to the struggle for unity and justice in church and society. Of importance in the process are the unearthing of the choices he made and the values he espoused. Second, what was his reading of the signs of the times? This is a theological way of asking questions about his context analysis. What did he see? What was his understanding of the situation in which he was called to minister to people? Third, what was his interpretation of the situation in the church in general in South Africa and the Dutch Reformed family of Churches in particular? This is what Kritzinger calls an ecclesial analysis. Fourth, how did Buti read the Bible or what was the nature of his theological reflection? A very pertinent question to ask is whether his theological reflection was in any way informed by

the dimensions of agency and context and ecclesial analysis? Fifth, was he following specific strategies in working towards unity and justice in church or society or did he operate haphazardly? Sixth, what kind of spirituality did he embrace? Seventh, a brief reflection is offered on continuity and discontinuity. In looking at the profile that is emerging in the study, what is there that is entirely discontinuous with the contemporary situation in church and society and what is there that is continuous? In simpler terms, the question is about lessons to be learnt from the life and work of Buti.



**Figure 19: Wife of Sam Buti**

#### **4.2. INSERTION OR AGENCY**

For Buti, the ministry of the gospel ran in his blood. In an interview with Meiring (1975:2), he proudly alluded to the fact that he comes from a family of ministers. His grandfather was an evangelist in the Dutch Reformed Church in the Old Western Transvaal and his father, who worked as a mining clerk, decided to become a minister and went for theological training at Stofberg Memorial School. The relocation with the whole family to Stofberg must have triggered something in Buti who, after completing a Teacher's Diploma, also decided to follow in the footsteps of his father, also training at Stofberg. On the question of the congregations served, he



was quick to say that Alexandra was the only one, jokingly referring to the anecdote of people suggesting that someone who is not called to another congregation is perceived to be a *'sukkelaar'*: "I am an old *'sukkelaar'*" [sucker]. This is alluded to in trying from the onset to show that despite the challenges, trials and tribulations he had to face in life, there had always been a healthy sense of humour particularly in poking fun at himself. In the early-'90s, not long before the establishment of URCSA and indeed also the dawn of democracy in the country, I happened to be with Buti at a Consultation between some European Reformed Churches and the black sections of the Dutch Reformed family of churches. His position at the Consultation was more official than mine and that of Mokgoebo since he was representing the DRCA and the two of us, the *Belydende Kring*. Let us refer to anecdotes. The one is where Nico Botha (2020) recalls:

I remember falling quite ill with asthma at night since this was January and extremely cold in Europe. The small tablet Buti gave me worked wonders. I also remember being on the train with him as we were travelling from the city of Utrecht to Kampen where we were to visit colleagues from the DRCA and the DRMC who were furthering their studies at the renowned Theological Hogeschool Kampen. He was then already limping and the appreciation he expressed for the help with his suitcase was indeed quite a humbling experience. On the train I could drink deep from a remarkable well of experience and knowledge and found great affirmation of my own thinking on issues of church unity, justice and the struggle for national liberation. The one incident never to forget is arriving in Kampen and sitting down for a meal or something in the apartment of a South African family. The Dutch news came on with Boesak who had then already become an "accidental politician" almost as if out of the blue appeared on the screen, understandably uttering pure political statements. Those in the room watched in amazement as Buti jumped up shouting "he lies, he lies!" In hesitatingly trying to get a response from him on why he would say that, his answer was quick and clear: "I am trying to say that his role is in the church not in politics".

### 4.3. CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY

As minister of the Alexandra congregation of the DRCA, Buti had a pretty busy schedule. In the interview with Meiring (1975:4-5), he elaborated on the question of what the daily program of a black pastor in a township like Alexandra looked like. The morning program consisted of starting at one of the many schools in the city and the pastoral care of the sick and the elderly. In the few hours after lunch, some time was spent in the study for reading, study, the preparation of sermons and the normal administrative tasks which go with the ministry. At five o'clock, room visits at one of the hostels for migrant workers were done for an hour or two, and at night, home visitation was done. On a Sunday, services were to be conducted at eight different places and when he would not cope, his elders would stand in at two or more of these places, but generally, he would be on his own. The hectic nature of Buti's program as a parish minister is borne out by the observation of Hope and Young (1981:179), who were hoping to interview him, that "despite persistent attempts to meet and talk with Buti, we were unable to reach him. He appeared to leave his home in Alexandra every morning before seven, returning home after ten every night".

Not only were the pressures emanating from such a heavy schedule severely felt, but also the mere fact of being looked down upon by colleagues from other denominations for being a minister of the Dutch Reformed or '*Boerekerk*'. There had been a perception that pastors like Buti were, in Buti's own words "*honde van apartheid*" (dogs of apartheid) who had "turned their backs on the real interests of the black community" (Meiring, 1975:5). Buti related that when he arrived in Alexandra in 1960, people would accept him as one of them. With the uprisings of the early-1960s, his church building on the same piece of land as the manse was gutted together with the office of *Bantu Affairs*. For Buti, it was clear that these two were lumped together. Buti lived to tell the story of why his family and he himself were spared. There had been a basic human understanding that he was one of them, and was spared for that reason, although they did not agree with him as "*een van die Boere*" (one of the Boers), working towards promoting their interests. In conjunction with this, he also alluded to the difficulties experienced at Turfloop by students from the DRCA where fellow students would not even talk to them.

Despite all of the challenges and difficulties thrown up by being a minister of the DRCA under apartheid, the following story clearly reveals the compassionate heart of Buti. The story is about a visit to the Potgieter Street Prison in Pretoria where some young men from Alexandra were on death row for having shot and killed a Portuguese shop owner. On the morning of Buti's visit, they were to be executed. On entering the prison, accompanied by a few others, they found the men to be hanged in one room. Buti remembered how, on seeing him, they shouted "Look, there is Moruti Buti! How are things at home?" The young men laughed and waved pleasantly as if the dark cloud was hanging over those who came to say a final farewell instead of the young men themselves who were on the verge of being executed. Buti was asked to say a last prayer and he remembered being filled with fear and trepidation and shivering to the extent that he had to lean against a wall to keep his balance. For him, the most moving part of the encounter was the young men singing for them, because they could not: "God be with you till we meet again". Just as the young men were to be taken to the gallows, a father burst into the room, lamenting, "Kenny my son, my son!" to which one of the young men responded saying, "It is too late now. You should have spoken years ago". They were then led away and, minutes later, the bodies were carried past Buti and the group, leaving him shaken for days to come.

#### 4.4. THE FRATERNITY OF ONE HUNDRED

One of the brightest and profoundly prophetic moments in the interview with Meiring (1975) was the reference to the existence of a Fraternity of One Hundred ministers from the DRCA, since the early-1970s under the leadership of Father Ntoane, as Buti was affectionately calling him. According to Buti, the perceptions of other churches *vis-à-vis* the DRCA had changed dramatically since a press statement in which the Fraternity distanced itself quite emphatically from apartheid. Colleagues were beginning to testify to the fact that they were suddenly more and more acceptable to others. The statement emanated from a long conversation on the conditions in the country and the realisation that there was no way in which the apartheid policy of separate development could be justified in terms of the Bible. Buti was emphatic that the policy could never be deduced from the Bible and could consequently not be interpreted as the will of God.

Meiring (1975:8) responded by saying that he had a good recollection of the statement issued in 1973 since it was splashed in the media with headings like “*skeuring binne die NG Kerk oor rassesake*” (split or division in the Dutch Reformed Church because of race matters). There had been an insinuation at the time that the Christian Institute led by people like the Dutch Reformed Church dissidents, Beyers Naudé and Roelf Meyer, was behind the declaration. The response of Buti to the speculation had been fast and furious:

Ek ontken dit ten sterkste. Dis ‘n leuen om so te sê. Ons is nie kinders dat iemand anders – die Instituut óf wie ookal – vir ons hoef voor te sê hoe ons oor hierdie dinge moet voel nie. Ons is oud genoeg om self te dink. Weet jy wat sit agter die verklaring? Baie jare van harde werk, studente wat oorsee gaan studeer het en hulle visie verbreed het, mense wat ‘n studie gemaak het van die harde werklikheid waarmee ons elke dag te make het. Die direkte oorsaak van die besluit is ‘n konferensie wat ons gereël het om oor swart teologie en swart bewuswording te praat.

Buti’s viewpoint on separate development was crystal clear. One of his classical statements was that it was definitely not a Biblical policy. He went on to say that we cannot claim to be inferring from the pages of the Bible that it is the will of God that South Africa should be divided or fragmented or balkanised into a Transkei, a Lebowa, a Gazankulu and a KwaZulu.

Turning now to the 1973 statement of the Fraternity of One Hundred, the following issues emerge as important. First, in the statement itself, it is conceded that it was issued as a reaction to newspaper reports on the Fraternity’s rejection of apartheid. The allusion of Buti to Black Theology and Black Consciousness is paramount, however. In the wake of the 1973 workers strikes in Durban, which inaugurated the revival of trade unionism in the country, combined with the new consciousness emerging, the radicalisation of the clergy from the DRCA should not have come as a surprise. In a real sense, the Fraternity was the precursor of the *Broederkring* that was birthed in Bloemfontein in 1974 under the very leadership of the likes of Buti and Boesak. Second, apartheid was rejected as not reconcilable with the Bible.

Third, in citing Article 36 of the Netherlands Articles of Faith and, in so doing, displaying respect for the Reformed tradition, the basic position was to keep the following two matters in a creative tension to one another: accepting that anyone, irrespective of capacity, status or standing, was duty bound to submit to the authority of the state in all that does not conflict with the Word of God. However, if the state were to advance anything that was in conflict with the Word of God, the Christian was duty bound to submit to God's Word and God's Will. "We ought to obey God rather than men".

#### 4.5. THE BELYDENDE KRING

It is to be taken as significant that only a year after the dramatic statement by the Fraternity of One Hundred, in 1974, the *Broederkring* (BK) was established in Bloemfontein with none other than Buti as one of its founding members. The fact that the movement started out with this name could be understood on the basis of two issues. First, with its inception, the BK literally consisted of only brothers – males only. Second and more importantly, it reveals, albeit retrospectively, the interesting nature of the evolvment of consciousness. There had been a strong consciousness at the time that the divisions in the church and in society on the basis of race were wrong, but the level of gender consciousness was particularly low. For this to change dramatically within the BK, women had to join the movement.<sup>80</sup> The name was then changed to *Belydende Kring*. The lofty ideals and principles on which the BK was established were:

1. To proclaim the kingship of Jesus Christ over all areas in church and in state, and to witness for this kingly rule.
2. To achieve organic church unity and to express it practically in all areas of life.

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80 The definite shift from *Broederkring* to *Belydende Kring* occurred round about 1976-1979 when more women started joining and forming what became known as the BK Women.

3. To take seriously the prophetic task of the church with regard to the oppressive structures and laws in our land, as well as the priestly task of the church in respect of the victims and fear possessed oppressors who suffer as a result of the unchristian policy and practice in the land.
4. To let the kingly rule of Christ triumph over the ideology of apartheid or any other ideology, so that a more human way of life may be striven for.
5. To promote the evangelical liberation from unrighteousness, dehumanisation, alienation, and lovelessness in church and state, and to work for true reconciliation among people.
6. To support ecumenical movements that promote the kingship of Christ on all levels of life.

Van Rooi (2011:2-3), in showing all of these principles, makes the interesting observation that the foundation and motivation for the resolve of the BK to work towards a truly just society was the proclamation of the reign of Christ. He goes on to assert that such proclamation was set above and against the ideology of apartheid and its effect on the people of South Africa. Retrospectively, there is an almost ironic ring to the fact that the BK has not explicitly identified apartheid as an empire. Bosch (1991:304), in the context of a discussion on Mission and Colonialism, argues that although South Africa was not a colonial power in the classical sense of the word, or one could say, not an empire in the classical sense of the word, the language used in propagating the policy of separate development points to that. He cites a cabinet minister, MDC de W Nel, who in the very year of Buti's entry into the ministry (1958), said: "One of the reasons why so many people are still indifferent to mission" was their inability to grasp "the political significance of mission work". Nel (1958:7-8) is on record as having suggested that the only hope for the future for white people and other nations was the incorporation of blacks into the Protestant churches. And, therefore, "every boy and girl who loves South Africa, should commit

him- and herself to active mission work, because *mission work is not only God's work, it is also work for the sake of the nation*" (emphasis in the original).

Without fear of too much speculation, it could be said, however, that in its analysis of the political, cultural, ideological, military and economic power of the apartheid regime, it was implicitly understood to be a type of 'new Rome'. In such context, the accentuation of the rule of Christ which features in two of the six tenets makes good theological sense. Whatever the analyses might have been, Van Rooi (2011:1) is correct in his observation that the BK had been an important contributor to anti-apartheid arguments within the Dutch Reformed family of Churches.

## 4.6. BUTI'S RISE WITHIN THE ECCLESIAL STRUCTURES

### *4.6.1. A renowned ecumenical figure: From controversy to community activism*

One-sided or reductionist interpretations on the life and work of Buti will always be in danger of missing the point that he was someone deeply in touch with himself. Reactionary figures tend to shy away from any form of self-criticism, even in the face of glaring shortcomings and mistakes. Not Buti – not at all. He is cited as having said of himself: "I started life as an Uncle Tom, who became a fence sitter, who became an activist" (Hope & Young, 1981:179). A statement like this makes his contribution to struggles in the church and in society for justice all the more remarkable. His gravitation from, as perceived by some, a collaborator to a revolutionary priest, prophetically taking on the Dutch Reformed Church for its theological and moral justification of apartheid and its racist practices, as well as struggling against apartheid, was quite dramatic. And, of course, another danger is the attempt at dividing his years of perceived collaboration, neutrality and radicalisation into watertight categories. All indications are that this is not possible with a life that has been so brilliant and so complex. The seeds of radicalisation had been sown in the 1960s and 1970s already, as shown, for example, by the interview with Meiring.

The interview with Meiring (1975:2-21) shows a number of areas where, in the mid-1970s, i.e. before the classical and epoch-making 1976, Buti was distinctly clear in his viewpoint. Of note here is that the questions posed by the interviewer and the responses formulated by Buti were not focussed only on the political situation in the country *anno* 1975, but reveal a diversity of matters. First, in the context of the relationship between the Dutch Reformed Church and the DRCA, the issue of church unity came up almost out of necessity. An interesting point raised by Buti is that as much as there were friends in the DRC on an individual basis who understood and were sympathetic to the issues suffered by the DRCA, that was not enough. The challenge for Buti was to reach the entire DRC. In looking at his take on reconciliation, it is almost as if he was making those profound statements not 45 years ago, but in 2020. Buti exposed a contradiction in the claim to be reconciled with God and fellow human beings and yet the doors being kept closed. Your reconciliation would then be hypocritical and meaningless. The unity we speak about can only be credible if it takes on the shape of peace within their own ranks. Second, Buti was clear in his critique of the paternalistic attitude of the white missionaries working in the DRCA. A specific example here are his comments on the situation in the *Federale Raad van NG Kerke*, a body constituted with the aim of bringing the white DRC and the black DRCs in Southern Africa together. Buti's complaint was that the black members of the Council were quite often bulldozed and not allowed to express their opinions on issues, but only to listen. There was a need for the black members to speak clearly on the situation in the country so that particularly the DRC could hear and understand what was said. Third, strong opinions have been expressed on what later on became known as Africanisation. His response on this came in the context of the question whether the Confessions of the DRCA were not too European, rendering the task of enlightening a young black person in the catechism class in Soweto on the Canons of Dordt, for example, virtually impossible. The answer from Buti was quite emphatic, that the quest for material that would facilitate a contextual appropriation of faith was on. The challenge according to him was to bring the Lordship or reign of Christ into conversation with real-life African matters. Fourth, the intellectual prowess of Buti shines forth in the manner he answered the very controversial question on the support of the Dutch churches



for the Program to Combat Racism of the World Council of Churches. The specific issue here was the relationship between the DRC and the Dutch churches with pressure mounting in the DRC to sever ties. The response was not direct, but formulated in a very sophisticated fashion. He found it strange that conversations on modernistic trends in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands around a theologian like Kuitert and his cohort and, one supposes, someone like Wiersinga also, but that there never was any suggestion on the severing of ties. Yet now that the issue was about humanitarian support to the liberation movements, the severance of ties was seriously considered. Buti called for speaking with the head rather than the heart. Fifth, earlier in the study, the point is made that based on his sense of humour and self-criticism he was very much in touch with himself. With reference to his standpoint on Sunday Sports, in particular, the matches being played in Alexandra on a Sunday, he was adamant: "No, as far as that is concerned I am conservative. Why should the day of the Lord be dishonoured? Let them come together for Bible study. Let them make music and sing church songs" (Meiring, 1975:16). He was, however, quick to point out that this did not amount to an imposition, but that he was rather trying to persuade them on what the right path was.

#### *4.6.2. A dialectical relationship with the DRC*

To suggest that there had been a dialectical relationship between Buti and the Dutch Reformed Church is to say that it was characterised by an interpenetration of opposites. The love-hate equation would never fit. Based on his utterances and actions, there had never been hatred for the DRC. It might also make sense to rather speak of a movement of paradoxes in the attempt of interpreting the relationship. This movement of paradoxes is shown here on the basis of concrete examples. On the one hand, there is his critique of the DRC in its paternalistic and manipulative manoeuvres and its theological and moral justification of apartheid. On the other hand, there is his empathetic embrace of the DRC. As far as his criticism of the DRC is concerned, three examples are called into service and pertaining to his embrace of the DRC an equal number is concerned.

#### 4.6.3. *Critique of the DRC*

First, Buti heavily criticised what he understood to be the dichotomous thinking of the DRC with their overemphasis on conversion of the soul and a serious neglect of the body. At the time, Buti tried to explain that the understanding of the DRCA was that people should not only be prepared for heaven, but equally taken care of as far as their material needs were concerned. He alluded to the fact that, more and more, there was a concern in the DRCA about involvement in the world. The serious nature of the dichotomous construct then was that the separation of soul and body found application only to the people in Buti's church and not the DRC. A disclaimer was that he did not want to create the impression that he only had politics on his mind, but that the matter of overcoming the dichotomy was of great importance (Meiring, 1975:13). Second, from an incident at a meeting of the *Federale Raad van NG Kerke* it is clear that he did not only criticise the DRC verbally, but was prepared to take serious action without considering the consequences. Typically, the arrogant and paternalistic attitude prevailing in the DRC at the time was demonstrated at the meeting in an infallible fashion. There had been a friendly request from Buti, supported by Boesak, for a reordering of the agenda with a report on the challenges in church and society under apartheid preceding a more general discussion on the life and work of the different member churches. Some of the pertinent issues Buti and Boesak thought should be discussed were detention without trial, the Confession of Belhar speaking to the questions of unity, reconciliation and justice, the Kairos Document and the tent making ministry. A motion by Boesak and Nico Smith to change the procedure slightly to make this possible was turned down.

The chairperson of the meeting, Smith, refused point blankly on the pretext that there had previously been a feeling that the issue of the life and work of churches was neglected. Buti and the DRCA delegates staged a walk out, followed by Boesak and Nick Apollis from the DRMC delegation. The other two members of the DRMC, Andries Botha and Sakkie Mentor, remained in the meeting. This occurred after an attempt at swaying the meeting after lunch time failed. The walk out put the cat amongst the pigeons and indications were that during the tea break, the DRC delegation appeared quite perplexed, rattled by the unexpected move (The Star, 17 March 1988).

The demonstration was the culmination of a growing militancy in the ranks of the black Dutch Reformed Churches. Statements by Buti and Boesak on reconsidering membership of the *Federale Raad* of their respective churches showed signs that they were on the verge of a break in the Dutch Reformed family of churches. When the DRMC decided at its 1990 synodical meeting to sever ties with the *Federale Raad*, it came as no surprise. Third, Buti constantly being wary of the strategic manoeuvres of the DRC to derail and, by so doing, to delay the unification process, responded vehemently to an August 1981 inter-church meeting organised by the DRC. Hailed by some as the most significant meeting of its nature since the Cottesloe gathering of 1960, Buti held an opinion diametrically opposed to this. He accused the DRC of only being interested in these kinds of meetings if they could call the shots and rule the roost, but withdraw from ecumenical bodies to avoid scrutiny. His main theological objection to the meeting was that only churches with the same confessional basis were invited. A further objection was that an open conversation on agreements and differences was not entertained.

Around the same time as the criticism of Buti against the inter-church meeting, he issued a statement relating to the withdrawal of Tutu's passport by the South African government. Tutu was then General Secretary to the SACC and Buti was President. His statement, issued as an open letter to Tutu, was indeed quite scathing. The open letter bears testimony to the rapid radicalisation of Buti in the decade between the Soweto uprisings of 1976 and the time of the State of Emergency in 1985. The language used by Buti reveals someone who has made up his mind and, in a strongly worded piece and in displaying his sharpness of mind, he subverts the accusation that Tutu was acting dangerously into a powerful prophetic 'It is they' statement. Not Tutu, but the apartheid regime was acting dangerously. According to Buti, the regime was acting dangerously in constantly confronting the most non-violent protesting and petitioning by black people with teargas, dogs and guns (Ecunews, September 1981).

#### ***4.6.4. Embrace of the DRC***

The interview with Meiring, alluded to a few times already, happened in the dining room of the Buti family where the interviewer noticed the photo of a certain Thys Heyneke and his wife. He commented that he remembered the

couple well from the time when his father was a minister in Johannesburg East and how they had visited them quite often. Buti responded by saying that he regarded them as his white father and mother. They would welcome Buti at their home on their little farm as a young minister and would counsel him on issues as well as contributing generously to his ministry in Alexandra. The farm was also always available for camps and conferences. On top of it all, the Heyneke's had a little church constructed for the use of the Alexandra congregation. Quite often, Buti would thank God on his knees for the couple (Meiring, 1975:3). Stories like these are a clear indication that Buti was never a hater of white people and that the opposition to the apartheid system could never be seen as an anti-white struggle. The few examples shown on his critique of the DRC could not be construed as a blind hatred for all white people.

There are also instances where Buti expressed great admiration for the DRC. To a question by Meiring (1975:11) on what would be unique about the DRC amongst black people, Buti gave an interesting response. According to him, there was great admiration for the DRC, because during the time of humiliation and suffering of the Afrikaner people, the DRC was a hundred percent in solidarity with the people, identifying with their plight. Buti went on to say that in the years after the war, and particularly during the depression when Afrikaners were poor as well as culturally and politically deprived, the DRC took care of them. At the time, Buti was thinking that this was the exact role the DRCA was supposed to play *vis-à-vis* black people in their struggle for recognition. A third example showing quite clearly and profoundly that he had never harboured any hatred against the DRC, was his proposal at the 1995 SACC conference that the DRC should be allowed back into the fold by granting them observer status. In the media, this has been described as historically the light of Buti's fierce criticism in the past. In his motivation of the proposal, he said that the DRC was a church that had previously justified apartheid theologically, but now had mustered the courage to say: "Brothers and sisters, we were wrong. Forgive us. We want to be part" (*Beeld*, 6 July 1995). However, any interpretation to the effect that this would mean an end to any further prophetic critique of the DRC by Buti, would have been wrong. In 2001, at a celebration in honour of Beyers Naudé at the old age home where he and his wife, Ilse,

resided, Buti was as scathing as ever in his criticism of the DRC, accusing the church of contributing to racism. He identified racism as a satanic and demonic force and challenged the DRC seriously by saying: “If you do not want to unite, you are racists” (*Beeld*, 6 August 2001).

#### 4.7. CONTEXT ANALYSIS: READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The study up to this point has shown implicit and explicit instances of Buti’s understanding of context. In general terms, it would be safe to suggest that he interpreted the divisions within the Dutch Reformed family of churches from an ecclesial perspective resulting in alienation, hatred and enmity between people as contributing to apartheid. As alluded to already, as late as 2001, he was still criticising the DRC of being racist for not wanting to unite the URCSA and for still failing the acid test of coming together with their black sisters and brothers in a united, non-racist, non-sexist Reformed Church. Part of how he understood church and society at the time is revealed in the interview with Meiring (1975:2-21). What stands out are his thoughts on church unity, a rejection of the policy of separate development and the homeland policy of the apartheid regime.

What is offered here, as far as Buti’s reading of the signs of the times or his prophetic discernment were concerned, it is more of a construction based on inference or deduction than on what he explicitly said or wrote. Some slight reference has been made to two elements in the social analysis of the BK, namely race and gender, as well as showing the tenets of the BK. This will now be elaborated upon in pointing out the intricacies around the race analysis and, in addition, to look at gender and class. An important disclaimer here is that this is not intended to be an in-depth theoretical reflection, but to show in broad terms what could be seen as the analytical thinking or social analysis of the BK. There had been a clear understanding of the racial oppression to be overcome. It has to be borne in mind continuously that the BK came into being in the wake of a very strong re-emergence of trade unionism in South Africa and the rise of Black Consciousness (BC). Undoubtedly, there had been a strong BC presence in the BK. Concomitant to this was a strong element of non-

racialism, because the BK from its inception included white members. The impression had never been that the two, BC and non-racialism, were mutually exclusive, but in the BK, it would be fair to suggest that they reinforced one another. The growing presence of women in the BK forced upon members a greater sensitivity about gender. Men in the BK had to begin to deal with the reality of patriarchy and their own complicity in it. Then, of course, there was the issue of class. Some members of the BK clearly understood that the system of apartheid was not only virulent in its racial oppression, but also in its economic exploitation.

Another example which reveals in clear terms how he read the signs of the times is his involvement in a commission of the DRCA that was reporting on a consultation of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in 1979. The commission included heavy weights like Mabusela, Moatshe and Tema who happened to be BK members. The consultation was divided into different workshops. For the purposes of this study, the focus is on the workshop dealing with “The Church and Political Structures”. An interesting characteristic of the report is its inductive nature which renders it more of a theological analysis than merely a social analysis. There seemed to have been a sharp difference of opinion between delegates at the consultation who held that the only task of the church was to proclaim the gospel and perform acts of charity and those who were convinced that, as defined by the message of the Bible, the church is supposed to be involved in all aspects of human life. An integrated participation in the totality of life was required. Such involvement would require the church to execute its prophetic ministry by reminding the government and church member of their calling to establish justice in all spheres of life. The consultation singled out South Africa as a country where such justice was not adequately present for all of its citizens. Central to these statements was the notion of the Kingdom or reign of God. The prophetic ministry of the church was *inter alia* to make clear that every political order falls short of the requirements of the reign of God. Based on the interpretation of the consultation, Psalm 103:6 speaks to justice as a gift of God which is extended to the oppressed. Such justice is bestowed upon people to the glory of God and the liberation and wholeness of people. There was a special focus on draconian detention without trial legislation on

the basis of which people were hauled out of their beds in the middle of the night and shut away for months or even years without trial (WARC, 1979).

#### *4.7.1. Not a hard core ideologue: On the embodiment of analysis*

Calling into service instances where Buti participated in the drafting of documents of a prophetic nature serves to illustrate that perhaps he was not so much of an ideologue, but more an embodiment of analysis. In the period before and after his run as mayor of Alexandra, there had never been uncertainty on what he was against and what he stood for. The interview with Meiring (1975) showed a clear aversion to white supremacy, white paternalism and the policy of separate development. He was dead set against apartheid in church and society. He stood for church unity and social justice. He stood for the dismantling of apartheid, reconciliation and peace with justice. That explains why he would belong to a movement like the BK with its rejection of apartheid and its struggle for unity and justice. That is why, at particular junctures, he would participate in the drafting of documents like the statement of the hundred clergy from the DRCA and the declaration of the WARC on “Church and Political Structures”. And that is why he would embrace the Confession of Belhar with its clear prophetic manifestations on unity, reconciliation and justice. One would look in vain for drawn out theoretical analyses or speculations on context from Buti. As much as he was more than anyone else capable of producing such on the basis of his sharpness of intellect, he embodied what he was against and what he struggled for.

#### *4.7.2. Community activist*

Buti’s involvement in the community shows a diversity of forms. His very pastoral involvement with hostel dwellers migrating from the Bantustans to the city of Johannesburg for work could be seen as more than just pastoral work, but as a distinct form of community activism. The time dedicated to these visits was perhaps not only aimed at providing spiritual guidance, but could be construed as a political act or, more concretely, a protest against the virulence of migrant labour. Buti understood very well that the real sting of migrant labour was that the Bantustans were consciously created as labour reservoirs in such a manner that the impoverished ‘homeland’ itself was responsible for the reproduction of labour.

The more concrete examples of direct community involvement were the roles played in the education crisis and in the “Save Alexandra” campaign. Before dealing with these specifically, a further note needs to be made on Buti’s conversion or transformation from being perceived as a collaborator to being a community activist. Once again, as alluded to earlier, Buti was very much in touch with himself and could consequently tell the story himself of the process of change from an Uncle Tom to a position of neutrality to activism. An anecdote comes to mind, set in the Cape during the heyday of apartheid and the formation of the United Democratic Front as a strategic manoeuvre against the system. When surprise was expressed about Buti’s sudden conversion to the struggle against apartheid, his only response was, “Well, if you do not want to make up your mind, they will make up your mind for you”. In a profound manner, this had been applicable to Buti. He changed from flirting with the system by accepting his controversial election as mayor of Alexandra, to radical involvement in the struggle against the very system. He had of course had a little help from his wife who threatened to divorce him and his children who threatened to burn him. The decision to quit politics was sealed when he sought advice from the imprisoned Mandela who told him to resign.

#### ***4.7.3. Saving Alexandra***

The real community activism of Buti is nowhere else revealed as clearly as in his leadership in the “Save Alexandra” campaign. This was not a blind act of bravado based on populist tendencies, but a calculated strategic move. When it became clear that no manner of protest and petition would stop the apartheid regime from closing down Alexandra and deporting its residents somewhere else, Buti, in a tactical manoeuvre, fell back on his friendship with Piet Koornhof, an apartheid cabinet minister. The story goes that Buti’s father, himself a minister of religion, befriended Koornhof’s father and, in the process, the two sons became friends themselves (Meiring, 1975). Obviously, this had not been a friendship in the normal human sense of the word, but still quite remarkable in a context of forced separation between people on the basis of race and skin colour. It is this friendship that had saved the day for Alexandra. The news came through at nine o’clock at night when all had assumed that the days of the township were numbered.



It is only in retrospect that the iconic status of a township turning 108 years old in 2020, could be grasped somewhat. Initially, Alexandra carried the Dutch name Zandfontein since it was actually earmarked as a residential area for white working-class people who had to be removed from the Johannesburg City centre. In 1912, however, plots were sold to black people with freehold rights. The dialectic of township is nowhere else illustrated as clearly as with Alexandra. Arguably, the situation about to be described can only be found in a country like South Africa. On the one hand, typically, Alexandra thus far into our democracy is characterised by squalor, dilapidated infrastructure, unemployment, poverty and all the concomitant issues. On the other hand, it could be identified as a place where life flourishes. It is a place of arts and culture, tourism, small enterprises, where prestige projects like the Alexandra Tourism Development Project and the Alexandra Heritage Centre emerged. In 2001, the township saw an investment of R1.2 billion. All of the attempts at uplifting and upgrading the township are, however, too thin a varnish to camouflage or conceal the glaring discrepancies with the bourgeoisie of upmarket Sandton City close by. There is indeed also a dialectic to Buti's 'saving grace', rescuing the residents of Alexandra at the time from being violently deported. Yet, the pertinent question to be answered by democratic South Africa is how different the Alexandra of today is from the time that Buti stepped in to save it.

On top of it all, Alexandra had some iconic figures residing there over the years. The late President Mandela lived there in the 1940s. Other well-known figures gracing the streets of Alexandra over the years were the writer, Wally Serote, the musician, Hugh Masekela, Zanele Mbeki and of course, Moruti Sam Buti.

#### **4.8. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: ON READING THE BIBLE**

An investigation into sermons delivered and theological pieces drafted by Buti may in themselves be interesting and insightful. This will, however, require a study on its own. This section is aimed at broadly looking at theological flows and trends that have influenced him. Consequently, the issue here is not so much what his favourite texts and beloved portions from

Scripture were, but more how his theological leanings were informed by his agency on diverse levels and his understanding of context or the reading of the signs of the times.

Some of the examples on the theological understandings that have impacted upon him have been alluded to already, but will be reiterated here very briefly. There are a few new ones which will be dealt with equally briefly. First, in the interview with Meiring (1975:8), very clear theological thoughts emerged on the unbiblical nature of apartheid or separate development and a theological interpretation of the unity of the church. Second, the 1973 statement of the Fraternity of One Hundred speaks in reasonably clear theological language by centralising the 'kingly rule' or Lordship of Jesus Christ in diametrical opposition to the ideology of apartheid. The prophetic ministry of the church is defined as opposition to oppressive structures and its priestly task as solidarity with the victims of the system. Third, studies by Kritzinger (2019) and van Rooi (2011) have shown that the Hammanskraal declaration of the *Belydende Kring* was a precursor to the Confession of Belhar. In the declaration, the image of God as zealously struggling for his own justice emerged. The metaphor of God standing on the side of the oppressed and the downtrodden is particularly highlighted by Kritzinger, which he interprets as a precursor to Article 4 of the Confession of Belhar, where God is identified as the One who chooses in a special way for the needy, the poor, the oppressed, the downtrodden, the widow, the orphan and the stranger. These are the categories of people in whose hearts Buti (2019) was hoping his name would be engraved. Fourth, if taken in chronological order, the concept of the Confession of Belhar was drafted during the synod of the DRMC in 1982, then came the Kairos Document (1985) and, thereafter, *Evangelical Witness in South Africa Today* (1985). The Confession of Belhar was adopted as part of the body of Confessions of the DRMC in 1986 and the Kairos Document was revised in 1986. Significantly, all of these emerged during the exact time that Buti served as mayor of Alexandra. It was, however, clear how theological ideas developed by Buti in the 1970s already, were similar to those contained in the Confession of Belhar and the other two documents mentioned. Without fear of contradiction, it could be submitted that his progressive radicalisation in the period after his resignation as

mayor was attributable to the influence and impact of the very profound theological notions of unity, reconciliation, justice, prophetic theology and evangelical witness against apartheid featuring in the documents. What is to be noted particularly is the method developed in the Prophetic Theology of the Kairos Document, highlighting the mediations of social analysis, theological reflection and action. Typically, this is the see-judge-act or action-reflection theological method. By his own admission, Buti (2019) espoused Liberation theology. In an interview, he was quick to say that his understanding was that this was not a theology for black people only, but for people and, therefore, black and white. Of course, a statement like this would constantly have to be unpacked and deconstructed to avoid any form of concealment of the inequalities between black and white. Having said this, one should hurry to point out that if Latin America Liberation theology is in question here, its class analysis does not identify people in terms of race categories, but based on the material condition. Fifth, the consistency in theological thinking with Buti is illustrated by a statement in which his ecclesiological understanding comes to the fore. For him, the church should never exist for itself, but should rather be ‘a church for others’. Ideas on the ‘church for others’ emerged strongly in the 1960s in the circles of the WCC. These notions were made famous by the Dutch Missiologist, Hoekendijk, who developed profound ideas on the church as inside out, arguing that the only reason for the existence of the church was its calling as an instrument in God’s mission. Bosch (1991:368) has deconstructed the modernist understanding of the church as a ‘church for others’ and transformed it into a ‘church with others’. Buti would probably come up with the following two arguments in response to the mutation. First, by asking the rhetorical question “what is in a metaphor?”, he might argue that, logically, the Church can only really be with others if it is authentically for others. A further argument might be that his identification and radical solidarity with particular categories of people would, in itself, be an indication of how he was ‘with’ them. For example, the serious trouble taken with visiting hostel dwellers who were bearing the brunt of the migratory labour system under apartheid, was perhaps the clearest evidence to this effect.

#### 4.9. A PROPHET HONOURED IN HIS OWN LAND

The one issue that is hinted strongly at in constructing a profile of Buti based on his agency, context analysis and theological reflection, is the change from a perceived collaboration with the system of apartheid to a radical stance against the system. Once again, such evolvment, or perhaps more pertinently, revolutionary change cannot be mapped in terms of specific years. It could be asserted though that the years in the 'wilderness' were roughly between the late-1970s and 1986. What has been pointed out already is that in the 1960s and early-1970s already there had been a very clear consciousness of the sinfulness of apartheid and the need for a struggle against it. The declaration of the Fraternity of 1973, the extensive interview with Meiring with some very clear viewpoints formulated, and the founding of the *Broederkring* (*Belydende Kring*) bear testimony to this. A very interesting area of research might be an investigation into how the apartheid regime succeeded in luring quite a few charismatic leaders from the churches into its structures. Well-known examples from the Dutch Reformed family of Churches are April from the former DRMC and Manikam from the RCA. From the United Congregational Church of South Africa, there were Hendricks and Julies, *inter alia*. Even from inside the system, some of these leaders made statements and took actions which were clearly in opposition to the very system they were administering. Some of these have broken radically with the system at some stage, whether in an opportunistic fashion for purposes of political expedience or out of conviction could be an important objective of such investigation.

In the case of Buti, the break seemed to have been decisive and radical. Once again, his family and a very dramatic occurrence helped trigger the break. As far as the dramatic incident is concerned, Buti's prophetic spirit of discernment saw a clear sign in the fact that 'out of the ashes' after his place was burnt down, three items in particular were rescued: a wedding picture, his dress suit and his wife's church dress. He could have callously shrugged his shoulders and reacted in bitterness, but based on his true Godly and prophetic character, he saw in it the hand of God. From then on, he never looked back, but courageously joined the masses of people in the battle against racial oppression and economic exploitation.

This is presented here as a preamble to the brief excursion into how the prophet was ultimately accepted and honoured in his own land. The accolades bestowed upon him and the tributes take on diverse forms. A selection has been made of the different ways in which his prophetic role in the struggle for church unity and the end of apartheid has been acknowledged. For the purposes of the book, the following examples are explored briefly: acknowledgement and honour from his church in Alexandra, colleagues in the ministry of URCSA, the Honorary Doctorate from Unisa, and tributes at the Alexandra Centenary Celebrations.

#### 4.10. A NAME WRITTEN IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE

The clearest indications that Buti would ultimately come full circle are the ways in which both his congregation in Alexandra and the Alexandra community at large honoured him. There is clear evidence that the controversies of the 1980s which complicated the lives of the Buti family were something of the past. His role as minister of the Alexandra congregation, founding member of the BK, Moderator of the DRCA, Assessor of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), Assessor of URCSA and his sterling work as a community activist – in particular, the stopping of the demolition of Alexandra – were now to be acknowledged and celebrated. Buti himself related the story of someone who had hoped that he would be remembered if his name were written on the mountain and other natural sites. Unfortunately, he did not reckon with nature and through heavy storms and natural disasters the name was washed away. Buti's only desire was that his name would be imprinted in the hearts of people. To quickly return to his involvement in the RES, it is not at all surprising that he would play a prophetic role in RES and later developed a measure of disillusionment with the body for not condemning apartheid decisively enough and for not acting against the DRC for its support of the system. Buti's father before him was also actively participating in RES. In the recollection of some who were enrolled in the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Western Cape at the time, there had been an interesting and significant encounter with the Rev. Ernest Buti, father to Sam Buti. The RES met at the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church

in Bellville South as theological students were distributing pamphlets to delegates. The content of the piece was to call upon delegates not to be hoodwinked into thinking that all was right in South Africa when they would be taken to tourist sites, such as Table Mountain and the sea. When the pamphlet was handed to Buti senior, his only response was to say repeatedly in Afrikaans: “*Praat die papier?*” [Is the paper talking?]



**Figure 20: Unveiling of Buti’s plate during Fun Walk at Alex Mall**

His wish was indeed fulfilled after his death with the inauguration of the Alexandra Fun Walk. The Fun Walk is an initiative of the Alexandra URCSA congregation where Buti had served for five decades, in collaboration with the Athletics Club of Alexandra. The idea of a fun walk is quite symbolic as a tribute to Buti. Towards the end of his life, Buti could only walk with great difficulty and ultimately landed in a wheelchair. There is the moving picture of him attending the funeral service for Nico Smith in a wheelchair. The two had walked side by side in the DRCA’s struggle for church unity and against apartheid. A further very symbolic issue as far as the fun walk is concerned is that it is a brilliant fundraising opportunity, not to swell the coffers of the church, but for charity. With the solid basis laid by Buti’s ministry in Alexandra and his shining example in community involvement, it may not be too farfetched to suggest that with the fun walk, a new understanding of the church as walking hand-in-hand with the community is emerging.

#### 4.11. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FROM COLLEAGUES

A full-blown ethnographic investigation into anecdotes, stories and testimonies among peers of Buti who may still be alive, and younger colleagues in the ministry, such as church councillors, congregants in Alexandra and community members may warrant another book or two. A fascinating book might also be written on the relationship between Buti and Beyers Naudé who served with him in the Alexandra congregation. In a University of Pretoria thesis, Masuku (2010) illustrates the role Naudé played in Alexandra and the manner in which this was facilitated by Buti. It is also beyond the scope of this study to undertake such research. The piece on Buti is almost exclusively based on archival research. A further issue is that the acknowledgement by colleagues is more illustrative than exhaustive.

One of the earliest attempts at profiling Buti is that of Mokgoebo (1983) who, in a study on the BK, traced Buti's role in the founding of the organisation as well as his role in the Alexandra congregation of the DRCA and the community. In an interview on the life and work of Naudé, Mokgoebo (2015:100-101) acknowledges the fact, "I was mentored by Elia Tema and Sam Buti at the time when Oom Bey came to Alexandra". Mokgoebo (2015) goes on to say that the two mentored him into what one can call a hermeneutic of suspicion. He explains that the issue in question was trust. There had been a difference of opinion between Buti and Tema pertaining to trusting Naudé. With Buti, there was an almost unconditional and wholehearted trust, whereas with Tema, the issue was that one could not trust a white person. Mokgoebo (2015) further explains that in terms of Naudé's awareness and consciousness, he understood this and knew that the issue was not about what you say, but what you do. Like Buti, Mokgoebo is a proponent of Liberation theology and understands that, in a real sense, the praxis is more important than what you profess. The close relationship between Buti and Mokgoebo had been shown also in the instance where they went together to Ventersburg in the Free State to meet with two 250 disgruntled and protesting URCSA members who were aggrieved by a court decision in favour of the DRCA in church property matters. One infers from this that Buti's mentoring of Mokgoebo also covered the issue of solidarity with the people in moments of distress.

Both of them would know that black people were suffering from suspended trauma due to the debilitating effects of the system of apartheid.

The following two tributes by Kgatla and Nel were done after Buti's death in August 2010.

In his tribute to Buti, Kgatla focusses particularly on Buti's role in the struggle for church unity. It had indeed been a struggle that could have easily been derailed by the 'difficult moments' and 'major incidents' thrown up by the evil system of apartheid (Kuys, 9 September 2020). According to Kuys, it was Buti who prophetically gave guidance by suggesting that the church cannot respect the rules of apartheid, but had to fight the system and its oppressive laws. In returning to Kgatla for a moment, he emphasises the fact that Buti brought a new dimension to the unification process and, except for God, one could say, the ultimate unification between the DRCA and the DRMC is attributable to the courage and prophetic leadership of Buti. None other has faced the white DRC as squarely as Buti. Buti was fond of metaphors and likened the unity talks between the white and black DRCs to a car without an engine which would never start. Fifty years down the line and a decade after the passing of Buti, a very fair and valid question would be whether the engine had been fixed and the car started at all. With respect to people like Buti who were prepared to lay down their lives in the struggle for church unity, the only answer that could be given with some integrity is NO.

The tribute by Nel (2016) contains a few important pointers to issues that can quite easily be overlooked in telling the story of Buti. Some of these examples are his studies in the Netherlands in 1971 which, according to Nel, sharpened his mind and increased his resolve to oppose ecclesial and social apartheid, being a founding member of the Alexandra Liaison Committee that resisted the demolition of Alexandra, being the chairperson of the Black Renaissance Convention and obtaining a Master's in Theology from Princeton Theological Seminary. Nel also highlights the fact that Buti did not shy away from taking action. So, for example, he boycotted in protest a session of the RES to demonstrate opposition to the participation of the white DRC. Perhaps one of the greatest acknowledgements of Buti's role in church and society is described by Nel in the following manner:



His relentless commitment to the struggles of the poor and the oppressed was acknowledged on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2008, when Selbourne Street in Alexandra was renamed Reverend Sam Buti Street.

Apart from the pieces of literature in which Buti is honoured by colleagues, there were two interviews conducted that might add value to the reflection. Of great significance here is the profound tribute offered by Frantz (2020) who first met him when she started her ministry in Edenpark in Gauteng. In her own words, she was very excited to meet ‘the legendary leader’. A moving tribute is her surprise at his humility and the manner in which he welcomed and embraced her in the Presbytery of Johannesburg, not only as a colleague, but as his daughter. She remembers him as a liberation theologian who spoke passionately in favour of justice for the poor and the marginalised. A further issue is how he imagined and envisioned what we could become as South Africans if we focused more on our similarities than our differences. She also remembers him as a very fine preacher who would deliver well thought out and well prepared sermons on transformation, unity, forgiveness and reconciliation. All of these he embodied in his own person as minister, ecumenical figure and community leader. She remembers his love for the community of Alexandra which he regarded as a lifelong commitment. In a moving way, Frantz describes how Buti would affectionately insist on Presbytery members to speak Afrikaans in order that ‘last born’, as he called her, could understand. Alternatively, he would ask for translation. He mentored her by teaching her the interpretation of Church Order stipulations, but how he would never treat her as inferior on the basis of gender.

The other interview was conducted with Meyer (2020) who rubbed shoulders with Buti in the context of the *Christelike Instituut* as well as the Alexandra congregation of the DRCA and later URCSA. In reflecting on what he sees as some striking characteristics portraying Buti’s life and struggle in church and society, he highlights the following. First, that the basis of his concern for liberation and the fullness of life, as John 10:10 says, was his faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and his commitment to mission grounded in the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Second, that Buti was convinced

about a mission in reverse. Meyer sees as one of his innovations the idea that black people should now do mission to white people who brought the gospel to them and assisted them in putting up churches and a Christian presence in the black community. Buti's understanding was that there was something lacking in the manner in which white people proclaimed the gospel, i.e. that it was reductionist in not addressing itself to issues of a social, political and economic nature.



**Figure 21: Buti honoured with Street name in Alexandria**

#### **4.12. DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA**

In acknowledging Buti's role in the struggle for church unity and his commitment to the community of Alexandra in their struggle against apartheid, the University of South Africa (Unisa) awarded him an Honorary Doctorate in 2010. A remarkable feature of this is that the submission to the Unisa Committee dealing with Honorary degrees

had been made by colleagues like Boitumelo Senokoane (2009), from a generation much younger than Buti. That in itself is a testimony to the reverence for Buti and appreciation of the marvellous role played in the fight against racial oppression and economic exploitation. Significantly also is the fact that a big part of the commendation read at the graduation ceremony came from the Master's dissertation of Mokgoebo (1983) which he obtained from the University of New Brunswick in the United States of America. As alluded to earlier, Mokgoebo honours Buti in the dissertation perhaps more than anything else by showing understanding for the dialectic of Buti's ascendancy as mayor of Alexandra under apartheid, on the one hand, and being involved in the struggles of church and community in Alexandra. Mokgoebo asserts that this must have led to a critical awareness and an involvement from which he would not retreat (Mokgoebo 1983:134).

#### 4.13. CONCLUSION: SPIRITUALITY

In bringing the chapter to a conclusion, there is yet one outstanding question to address. How best could the spirituality of Buti be described? In the chapter on Appies, spirituality is understood in terms of what it is that brings everything together. Indeed, what is it that brought everything together for Buti? Based on the very rich and complex narrative about his life and work, the following dimensions are called into service. First, there had been a strong spirituality of being in touch with himself and owning up to mistakes. This was quite remarkable then and now in a context where the spirit of untouchability and exceptionalism is rife among leaders in the church and in society. In his own words, once again, Buti described his transformation from being an Uncle Tom to neutrality to activism. Second, emanating from this was a spirituality of penitence and humility. When he came under tremendous pressure from the community and his own family, he was introspective and humble enough to change and to take a completely different direction than the administration of apartheid. Third, there is ample evidence to the fact that he was passionate about unity. He embodied a deep spirituality of unity in a double sense, the unity of the church and the unity of humankind. The chapter shows in a few very distinct instances how he felt about unity and to what lengths he would

go in pursuit of such unity. His buying into Black Consciousness was not a denial of the humanity of anyone else, but a positive affirmation of the humanity of black people. However, his continued struggle for church unity within the racially divided and ethnically separated Dutch Reformed family of churches is a testimony to his deep understanding of the unity of humankind. Fourth, Buti's spirituality was, by definition, a spirituality of liberation. His relentless involvement in the ongoing struggle of the oppressed in their quest for liberty bore testimony to that. One would like to suggest that what brought it all together for him ultimately were the tenets of the Confession of Belhar, namely unity, reconciliation, justice and the often neglected obedience.



## CHAPTER 5

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# JAMES BUYS: A FAITHFUL AND COURAGEOUS VISIONARY TO RESTORE JUSTICE AND HUMAN DIGNITY

### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

The struggle for economic justice, equality, human dignity, and to build a human rights culture in post-apartheid South Africa was also tangible within the Dutch Reformed Church family. It was within this context that this chapter discusses the role played by Jameson Don (James) Buys and his contribution to the transformation of the church and South African society. This chapter also underlines the sentiments of his wife, Angela – hailing

him as “a man of faith”.<sup>81</sup> His faith, as this chapter will showcase, was not meant to be a ‘pie-in-the-sky’ and ‘hope-for-the best’ kind of faith but one that was translated into actions, facilitation, processes and discussions in the quest to better the lives of *all* South Africans.

This chapter focuses on his life during his childhood, followed by his move to the University of the Western Cape (UWC) where he started with his theological studies. It then discusses his contribution during his tenure as minister in the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC), ordained in the congregation of Calitzdorp in 1979 at the age of 25. This was where he demonstrated to be an organic intellectual that engaged the societal challenges through his theological interpretations, most of which were acquired during his theological training at the ‘bush’ university.<sup>82</sup> It focuses on his time at the URCSA congregation of Wynberg, when he also became involved in the DRMC moderation, and later, the Moderator of URCSA. This chapter followed the praxis cycle used in missiology for the structuring of this chapter: James’ agency, his analysis of what was going on in the church and society, his theological approach to the issues and challenges in church and society, and then also the particular strategies that he employed to facilitate transformative action(s). The chapter will conclude with an analysis of his spirituality that has been showcased through his life within the church and as a South African.

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81 This is one of the characteristics that his wife, Angela Buys, honoured her late husband for during the memorial service (April 2008). He also resigned as Actuaris of the DRMC GS moderation before the founding Synod in 1994, because he argued it was a matter of his faith. The minutes of 11 March state in point 3, “*Ds. Buys volstaan met sy bedanking aangesien dit nie maar net om praktiese redes geskied nie, maar by hom ‘n geloofsoortuiging is*” (NGSK, 1992a:2).

82 This was the infamous name used to refer to the University of the Western Cape (UWC), that was mostly reserved for ‘black’ and ‘coloured’ students during the years of apartheid. This was not the only bush university, as there were others such as Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa and others.

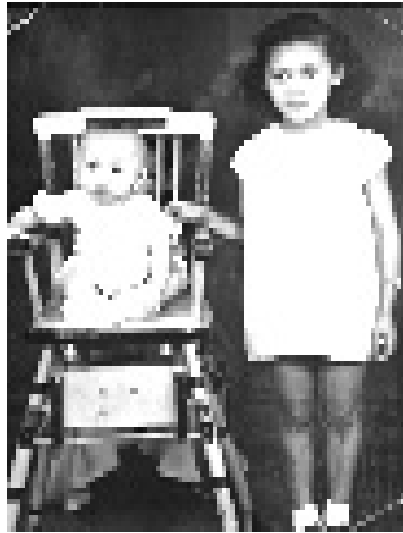


Figure 22: James Buys with his elder sister, Marinda on the right

## 5.2. CHILDHOOD AND TEENAGE SNIPPETS<sup>83</sup>

Jameson (James) Buys was born on 11 July 1954 in Johannesburg. He was the son of Andrew Buys and Elizabeth Jackson. His father, Andrew Buys, was born in Buysdorp which is a farm that is nestled among the *Soutpansberge*, which is currently known as Polokwane Machado district. His father started his primary schooling in Northern Transvaal and later attended High School in Johannesburg. His mother, Elizabeth Jackson (known as Elza), was from *Suid-Wes Afrika* (Namibia). James Buys had an elder sister Miranda, who was six years older than him and the eldest, in addition to their three brothers, Herbert, Gideon and Averil. He grew-up in Riverlea, south of Johannesburg, and attended Langlaagte Primary School. He matriculated in 1971 at Riverlea High school.

The father of James (Andrew Buys) made a public commitment to God during a '*straatkerk*' [street church] in Fordsburg, Johannesburg. His life changed dramatically in such a way that he also came to host such services

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83 This section is mostly based on an Interview held in April 2020 with Miranda Scheepers, James Buys' elder sister, partly during an online conversation, as well as a personal reflection and document submitted by her to the researchers.



on the pavements of the streets and encouraged people to have a personal commitment with God. As a child, his son James was part of these services. In his childhood years, he was exposed to prayer and home altar services where all the children were singing and praying and listening to their father preaching the Word of God. When his father became involved in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) of Riverlea with the *'bazaars'* and other fundraising events, the children, including James, were part of those activities. James followed in the footsteps of his family, and his elder sister (Miranda) who, during her teenage years, was also involved in presenting Sunday school 'on the wayside' and reaching out to the community through various evangelistic activities.

James grew up in a small, two-bedroom rented house in Riverlea, but as siblings, they were sensitised by their parents to be aware of those who would struggle to make ends meet (the poor among them) and revert back to their parents so that they could make plans to support those households in their neighbourhood. Their small home was made spacious enough to accommodate the needy in the community – though their family themselves were also not affluent. James was, therefore, exposed to the diaconate as a teenager in his own family home. Their family home in Riverlea became a home for many missionaries, particularly those of the Dorethea Mission. James Buys became known to be an 'evangelical' in the positive sense of the word. It should therefore not come as a surprise that he was able to share Jesus Christ to many people during his adulthood.

Miranda reminisces about his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party – when he came in a mini-bus taxi from Varsity (UWC) with his fellow *'tokolokke'*<sup>84</sup> to Riverlea (Johannesburg) to celebrate his birthday. However, she remembers vividly that when James Buys came back from the University of the Western Cape (UWC), he was a different person than he used to be before he left for studies. First, his hairstyle with his 'Afro'<sup>85</sup> that irritated and irked his father

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84 This is what they named theological students that were studying at UWC at the time.

85 This is a popular hairstyle among many 'coloured' people, and fashionable during the 1960-1970s and left to grow and then maintained and combed with a wide-toothed comb. This was the style mostly from African-Americans that were shown on the television screens.

and led to fierce reprimand to cut and trim it because it does not fit a '*dominee*'.<sup>86</sup> Interestingly so, his father as an elder in his home congregation at the time, would then make arrangements for him to do his practical work in a different congregation than his hometown (Mafikeng), so that his 'Afro' would not embarrass them. Secondly, his conversations and his interest in the politics of the day was a concern to his father. Though his father was also briefly involved in the politics of the day, he believed that one could easily become so quickly embroiled in political issues that one might lose focus. It could subsequently hamper one's spiritual growth. However, it seems that James was able (as will be shown later in the chapter) to keep his relationship with God as intrinsic to his witness in the church and society.

On a lighter moment during the interview with Miranda Scheepers, she reflects on the moments when he came from the University (UWC) and how he would tease her with his 'political' conversations, knowing quite well that she would rather refrain from such discussions and focus on her relationship with God than with burdening herself with the intricate political matters of the day. Her reflection on what transpired between their conversations also demonstrates the ambivalence within the apartheid society in terms of how a Christian would manage their spirituality and the politics of the day. Would it be to become pietistic and keep one's distance from politics, or would it be to engage the politics of the day driven by a biblical, Christian ethos and our Christian witness in the world? This was not uncommon in the 'coloured' communities – that people wanted to hear only the Word of God and not to combine it with the political problems in the country. His commitment to addressing the political challenges in light of the Scriptures should therefore be understood against many people within the congregations that were still not ready to engage the brutal system of apartheid. Jan Thyse, a former minister of the Word in Grassy Park, argued that the Synod prohibited those who want to associate with

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86 This is also one of the things that the members of the congregation in Calitzdorp remember when he was being inducted in the congregation in the coloured community of Bergsig.

the United Democratic Front (UDF) not to do so (Ewing, 2018:195).<sup>87</sup> James and his family, as Miranda would recall, would feel the impact of apartheid in their own daily lives. They would resolve that, though they were constantly living in fear, they would rather not pay too much attention to the brutal apartheid system and how it dehumanises you because it could lead to more anger and frustration and also to deep hatred against white people. Therefore, spirituality was, in a way, a manner of escaping the realities around you. Miranda recalls that, in their time, they could not take trams or busses and, therefore, this and other policies made it extremely difficult for them who were subjected to apartheid.<sup>88</sup>

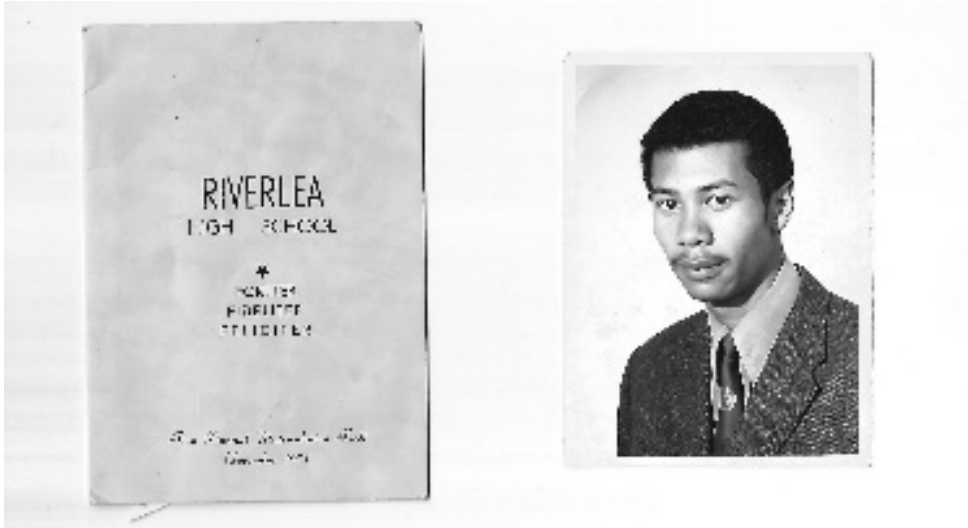
James Buys, on the other hand, would keep that in creative tension: his involvement in the apartheid politics of the day as well as evolving into a Christian who is known by his family as one that would have the ability to expound the Scriptures significantly. One would understand this because he was already exposed to street preaching by his father during his childhood. Miranda recalls how he would stand on two *'blikkies'* [cans] to preach the Word of God to his friends in the streets. Therefore, he did not imagine any other way than to become a preacher of the Word, even when he was approached during his matric year to embark on studies abroad and follow a career in law. However, in retrospect, one marvels at the fact that he would later in his ministerial career become the legal expert of the church (Actuarius). The turning of events was that he eventually ended up in the courts, steering litigation processes between the DRCA and URCSA soon after the establishment of URCSA. It is here where the two streams converge

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87 See, for instance, one of the ministers, Jan Thyse during the 1960s who mentions his challenges in the 'coloured community' of Grassy Park, "People in our churches wanted to hear the Word and the Word alone, and when we started preaching we combined the Word with the community problems, and that was hard. As a presbytery of Wynberg, we affiliated to the UDF, and we were criticised across the spectrum. White ministers believed that the church could not link up with a political party but it was not a party but a forum for the people. It was discussed by the Synod of the then *Sending kerk* [later to become the Uniting Reformed Church] and they set up a commission to decide what to do about us – they said we must not do it again!" (cf. Ewing, 2018:195).

88 She remembers vividly, "*Toe ek grootgeword het was dit baie, baie moeilike apartheids-stelsel, sal ek sê ... ons kon nie in die busse klim nie, ons kon nie in die trams klim nie ... van dai kant af het ek altyd gevoel ek wil nie betrokke raak nie want dit maak jou hart so hard teenoor die volgende, vorige nasie of taal of wat ook al, dat ek gevoel het, man, die beste is, as die Here almal kan vergewe, en hy kan my vergewe, moet ek hulle vergewe, verdra, want ons moet vir hulle bid, maar ons moet ook vir hulle die regte pad wys ...*" (Miranda, 2020).

in his life: his legal and political expertise and involvement and his fondness for theology.



**Figure 23: James Buys' invitation to the High School matric ball**

His tenacious commitment towards God and the expansion of his kingdom could also be because of an incident that happened during his primary school years where he became hospitalised for approximately three and a half years, and doctors predicted that he would not be able to walk again because of broken vertebrae. One day, he was pushing the wheelbarrow at home, and suddenly he felt extreme pain in his back and was rushed to the hospital. The doctors were frank with the family and his father and mother, and told them that the chances that he would be able to walk again were almost zero. However, Miranda recalls that her father decided to “fast and pray” and when the doctors would examine him again, they would find that there is no sign of any broken vertebrae. She remarks gratefully, “It was amazing to see him after that, participating in Judo – which was a sign of his complete recovery!”<sup>89</sup>

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89 During his time at UWC, he would also give judo lessons to some of the students (Schreiner, 2020).



**Figure 24: James Buys (on the right) during one of the Judo performances.**

In his final matric year, affluent guests came to pay his parents a visit and offered to fund his studies should he choose a career in Law, with the intention to study abroad. James decided to reject the noble offer, and in no uncertain terms decided to be faithful to his calling to enter into the ministry and become a Minister of the Word in the DRMC. Because of his ordeal, he was deeply conscious that God had placed a special calling on his life.<sup>90</sup>

### 5.3. LIFE AND MINISTRY IN DRMC AND URCSA

James was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Mission church (DRMC), which later became known as the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). In 1978, he obtained his licentiate in Theology at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and passed his degree *cum laude*. He married Angela Buys (née Europa), and from their marriage, three daughters were born, namely Abayomi, Asha and Mishca (Jassiem, 2008:2).

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90 Marinda (2020), his elder sister, shares, “*James het hulle meegedeel wat met hom gebeur het toe hy jonger was, en hierdie voorbeeld gebruik en gese “n wiel het baie speke maar dit nodig die middelste kolk om die wiel te laat rol, so het die Here hom nodig om sy woord te verkondig”*”.



**Figure 25: James Buys and wife Angela Buys' engagement and the day of their wedding**

His first congregation was the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) of Calitzdorp in which he was ordained in 1979. Though he was not the first minister of colour that the congregation would welcome (but the second), they would regard him as one of their own, especially in the light of the long history in which only white ministers would serve the DRMC congregation of Calitzdorp. He served the congregation for 15 years. James Buys would erect the church office with a permanent office lady, which was something that most of the congregations in a 'city' congregation did not have. He also started a crèche in the church building for children from the community belonging to different churches, and co-opted people from different churches to manage the crèche that would occupy the building during the weekdays.



**Figure 26: James and his church council in Calitzdorp, and working at the parsonage**

Nevertheless, during his ministry in Calitzdorp, he received several callings that included calls to congregations in the Witwatersrand, Albertinia, Vredenburg, Kuboes and Potchefstroom. However, he declined all these calls. Then, on 10 December 1994, he was called to the URCSA Wynberg congregation and accepted the call. The URCSA Wynberg congregation was also his last congregation at which he practised his ministry before his passing on 1 March 2008, aged fifty-four (Fourie, 2008:149-150).



**Figure 27: The ordination of James Buys at the DRMC Calitzdorp congregation**



**Figure 28: James Buys with Rev Dr Pitikoe**



James was actively involved in Synodical activities of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and later the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). Since 1990, he became the Actuarium of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) (cf. Die Burger, 2008b:4; Jackson, 2008:2). In 1992, Buys resigned as the Actuarium of DRMC General Synod (Buys, 1992) and was replaced by Anton Doyer. After 1994 and the establishment of URCSA, he became the first Actuarium of URCSA and from 1997-2001, he was elected as the Moderator of URCSA (Jackson, 1999b:5).<sup>91</sup> He was elected for a second term in 2001 and served as the Moderator of URCSA to the Synod of Pietermaritzburg in 2008.

He was instrumental in the negotiations and the establishment and unification of two 'sister' churches (DRMC and DRCA) of the Dutch Reformed Church family (Botha, 1980). James was instrumental in the submission of URCSA's report to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa on 19 October 1997 (Meiring, 2019:1). He was active not only on General Synodical level but also on Presbytery level and other church-related activities. For instance, his involvement in the opening of the new building of the Oudtshoorn DRMC congregation in 1990, in the capacity as the chairperson of the Zoar Presbytery (DRMC, 1990), as well as his visitation to the theological students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in 1986, discussing his insights on justice, reconciliation and human dignity (Koopman, 2008:14).<sup>92</sup> He went to the Netherlands in 1983 as a grantee of the Christian Fellowship Trust of Beyers Naudé and Tannie Ilse Naudé (Van Maanen, 2020). Other synodical committees in which he served were the Judicial Commission, the Administration Commission, as well as the Belhar Pension Fund. He was also involved in the VCS (Association for Christian Students).

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91 On 11 September 1996, James Buys was the Actuarium of the GS of URCSA, Nick Apollis the moderator, and Leonardo Appies the Scribe of the synodii (Boshoff, 1996:3).

92 Other moments also include Buys' contribution during the '*konvent*' 24-25 July 2001, in Hawekwa, Wellington with representatives from the DRC and URCSA.

## 5.4. BLURRING THE LINES BETWEEN THE GRASSROOTS AND EXECUTIVE STRUCTURES

James Buys was tenacious in his pursuit for unity within the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) family. His actions and participation in events that promote unity and reconciliation demonstrated his commitment to the Belhar Confession. This is well illustrated at an event on Wednesday 17 July 1991 where Buys was seated at the Holy Communion table served by a white minister, Dr Beyers Naudé, with other African blacks of the moderation of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (URCSA News, 1991). Significantly, two 'sister' churches (DRMC and DRCA) would participate and allow a 'white' minister to serve the Holy Communion, that served as the symbolic place of exclusion for years.<sup>93</sup> This speaks volumes in terms of Buys' commitment for being part of a multicultural and multi-ethnic liturgical service. It speaks volumes about someone that was supposed to hold grudges against white people but was willing to imagine himself with his fellow brothers and sisters practising unity. This, in essence, shows that Buys did not view South African society through the lenses of the apartheid government (racial classification), it was for him a matter of 'black consciousness' – the suffering of the poor and the downtrodden and the marginalised.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, Beyers Naudé would be classified as a black theologian in terms of his context analysis of society (as will be shown later in the chapter).

### 5.4.1. *Convent between DRC and URCSA in Wynberg*

His commitment towards non-racialism was also demonstrated when he gave form to it through the realisation of two congregations, the white Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Wynberg, and a so-called 'coloured'

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93 Nick Apollis attested to this when he was interviewed directly after the establishment of URCSA, "*Die geleidelike proses van kleurskeiding in die kerk van gereformeerde belydenis aan die kaap het helaas begin by die nagmaalstafel, daar waar die eenheid van die liggaam van Christus op sy duidelikste tot uitdrukking moes kom*" (Apollis, 1994:5). Botman recalls the event, "*Toe ons die brood en wyne neem en die tranes in ons oë opswel, het ons een ding gewet: Die kinders van die Here behoort bymekaar aan een tafel*" (Botman, 1991:8).

94 The is ample reason to believe that most students at the 'black' universities were exposed to the 'black consciousness' movement and its most prominent figure and activist, Steve Biko. This was attested to also by one of the interviewees on the exposure of James Buys, "Remember that the Black Consciousness Movement and its focus on our identity as Black people dominated during the 1970s. These were pivotal years in the student life of James and many others at the UWC and its Faculty of Theology" (Edwin Makue, 1 May 2020).

congregation, URCSA Wynberg, that would operate as one congregation. His congregation was one of the first URCSA congregations that were willing to take the leap of faith and work together with a ‘white’ DRC congregation that became a beacon of hope towards emotional healing and reconciliation (Von Meck, 2007:2).<sup>95</sup> The arrangement commenced through his discernment and listening to the voices of congregants in these respective ethnic congregations who felt the impulses of church unity. Buys’ feet were walking in the halls of those whom he, with other ministers, accused of unjust actions and ‘heresy’. The arrangement between the DRC Wynberg and URCSA Wynberg did not last too long when there came a schism between the two congregations not long after Buys’ death in 2008. These two congregations had an arrangement: one Sunday the services would take place in the building of the DRC Wynberg and the next Sunday, in the building of URCSA Wynberg. This arrangement reached a dead-end not long after the death of James, despite the continuous effort of Danie Nel – the minister at the DRC Wynberg.<sup>96</sup>

Although people regarded his congregation in Wynberg and the adjacent white DRC congregation in Wynberg as one congregation, Buys argued that it was incorrect (Jackson, 2008:2). This might have been because their church did not yet accept the Belhar Confession as part of their confessions of faith. This should not be read as his animosity towards white people, but his obedience to Scripture that he argued at the General Synod’s decision in 2005 that the confession should remain compulsory for unity. He believed and then made it known to the synod that to make the Belhar Confession optional was to place people’s conscience over Scripture (Buys, 2007:1).

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95 The national Afrikaans newspaper on 24 June 2007 reported on the hope that James Buys had for the collective effort and arrangement between the DRC Wynberg and URCSA Wynberg, “*In 1829, toe die NG Kerk Wynberg van die Grootte Kerk afgestig het, was sommige van die stigterslede bruin lidmate. By daaropvolgende sinodes is dié gemeente voorgebou as ’n voorbeeld van waar wit en bruin in harmonie hul godsdiens beoefen. In 1881 het gedwonge vervreemding tussen wit en bruin gemeentelede ingetree met die afstigting van die NG Sendingkerk. En heelwat later het die Groepsgebiedewet gelowige bruin mense se lewens, geloof en vriendskappe in puin gelê. Dit is hoekom ons wil sien dat mense mekaar op emosionele vlak mekaar leer ken deur gesamentelike doelwitte te hê, sê Buys*” (Von Meck, 2007).

96 This information was obtained through an interview with a member at the URCSA Wynberg congregation on 12 April 2020.

This is well reflected in his approach with the DRC Wynberg and URCSA Wynberg. The members recall that, in the vestry before the service at the DRC Wynberg building, it was only the URCSA church council, and in the service, it was also 98% of the URCSA congregation that were present, and this caused them to lose trust in the convent established between the two churches. However, during the time of James Buys, when they would raise their concerns and frustrations with their discomfort with the reaction they received from the white DRC members, he would encourage them that *they* should just be faithful and obedient to the Lord and that everything will eventually fall in place. When they arranged for cell groups in the ‘combined’ church, he encouraged them to have mixed-race groups so that it would help the two racial groups to grow together and start to get to know each other. He believed this was a moment of growth beyond racial prejudices.

His commitment towards non-racialism is also apparent in his sentiments on the church newspaper’s language use, especially after the amalgamation of the two black churches (DRCA and DRMC). Makue (2020:3) reminisces on a conversation between him and James Buys on the issue, “We concurred that using two languages holds significant advantages. The two considered options were either English or Afrikaans. In the final plan, neither were considered as either would alienate readers who are unfamiliar with the other”. Buys would only concede when the language, which is still today an extremely contentious issue, would become a unifying medium and not cause further friction, which shows his sensitivity toward various cultures and ethnic groups in church and society.

Buys was committed to unity, justice and reconciliation and was astonished at the way the DRC handled the Belhar Confession. He was concerned that the DRC did not embrace black agency – especially because the confession was given life in the cradle of a synod of a ‘black’ church in 1986. He questioned their faith in the agency of black people (Jackson, 1998). This shows Buys’ commitment to non-racialism.

His commitment to justice was showcased through various incidents and occasions. One was, for instance, when the DRCA was not willing to accept ministers of URCSA – and myriad reasons were provided – but

for Buys, as seen in his response to the matter, it was in essence not only a matter of unreasonableness but an injustice. This was because he argued that in other cases, where other churches within the DRC family were involved with the ‘DRCA’,<sup>97</sup> concessions were made. Another incident that comes to mind is his address at a workshop in Mamelodi, Pretoria, where Buys proposed a conceptual framework and a gender policy to deal with this challenge within the new church (Buys, 2005:1). Buys (2005:1) argued that, within URCSA, there is a “need to build through [our] catechism and training, Bible study and Christian education the capacity of leaders to model patterns of ministry that foster partnership based on principles of justice and the promotion and advancement of women”. He was therefore convinced that women were also not treated fairly and equally to their counterparts. Therefore, in the light of many other sentiments raised by Buys, it is evident that his justice was modelled through ‘fairness’ and ‘equality’<sup>98</sup> for *all*, irrespective of class and race.<sup>99</sup>

In terms of reconciliation, Buys was continuously searching for opportunities to reconcile even when the other parties (DRCA and DRC) would cast various stumbling blocks in the way that would hamper or delay the unity process. For instance, after the unification in 1994, when the Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA), Rev. Mochubi Lebone, and other members of the DRCA refused to become part of URCSA because they argued that the Belhar Confession could not be part of the new church as it belongs to the DRMC, Buys would put a moratorium on such a conversation – though for a moment – if the Belhar Confession has

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97 DRCA is here placed between quotation marks because, at that time, the URCSA did not consider them to be DRCA – a continuation of the former DRCA.

98 He was also part of the DRMC’s decision that the founding synod should elect its new moderation that should be equally represented, as well as ensure that both churches (DRMC and DRCA) are representative on the new moderation (NGSK, 1991:5).

99 James Buys stated in his moderator’s address in 2002: “The unification of the DRCA and the DRMC has brought the issues of race and class into sharp focus. This is true of the lack of progress in uniting the church, not merely in a structural way, but an organic sense. While we may allude to the impact of the legacy of apartheid in the racial identity of congregations and presbyteries, we find no comfort or pride in the extent of continued division in the church ... We must direct our attention and energy at our strategic goal of promoting internal unity beyond denominational conformity but by effectively facing the challenges related to race, language, and culture and class distinction as identifying characteristics of URCSA” (Akta VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland, 2002:258).

been regarded as a stumbling block towards unity, and to allow the two black churches to work together in the interim (Jackson, 2003:6). Allan Boesak attests to such a concession during the meeting of the DRMC and DRCA leadership on 4 May 1990 in Bloemfontein (NGSK/NGKA, 1990:7).<sup>100</sup> This also explains, perhaps, why they (URCSA Wynberg and DRC Wynberg) and other URCSA congregations facilitated working agreements with DRC congregations in their respective regions and presbyteries. What should be important to state at this stage is that it should, on the other hand, be of paramount importance to keep in mind that James Buys was also adamant that the Belhar Confession should not be made optional for the new church. His postponement of such a conversation did not mean his concession of the principle of Belhar as part of the new church. What we should also understand in the context of the statement of James Buys is that his argument was not *per se* on whether the Belhar Confession should be part of the new church, but that the matter in principle was a request for courtesy, to accept ministers from URCSA, as is the practice with other 'sister' churches (e.g. RCA). However, despite Buys' request, Lebone argued that DRCA congregations could not accept ministers from URCSA because they were signatories of the Belhar Confession.<sup>101</sup>

It should also be stated unequivocally that James Buys' commitment to unity and reconciliation did not exclude matters of justice. Therefore, he was known as a person who would, during contentious debates and litigation processes about the church's properties between the DRCA and URCSA, regard it as his duty to ensure that 'justice' was served as part of the quest for unity and reconciliation between the two 'churches'.<sup>102</sup>

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100 When there were doubts about the reception of Belhar by the members within the DRCA, Dr Boesak responded during the combined meeting of the DRCA and DRMC, "*Eindelik deel Dr Boesak die vergadering mee dat die afvaardiging van die NG Sendingkerk reeds aan die NG Kerk gese het dat die Belydenis van Belhar nie in die pad van eenwording moet staan nie. Dit se ons nou ook aan die NG Kerk in Afrika. Die getroue uitvoering van die Belydenis van Belhar impliseer reeds eenwording en daarom sal eenheid juis die Belydenis van Belhar getrou wees*" (NGSK/NGKA, 1990).

101 "*Hulle [NGKA] beskou die VGK se aanvaarding van die Belydenis van Belhar as n ernstige probleem en kan daarom nie predikante van die kerk beroep nie. Buys het die argument verwerp omdat die NG Kerk en die RCA die VGK se legitimasie erken terwyl hulle ook nie die Belydenis van Belhar aanvaar het nie*" (2003:7).

102 'Churches' is placed between quotation marks because, in the context, URCSA did not recognise the formation of DRCA ministers and congregations in the Free State as a continuation of the former DRCA. See the article "*Ontmoeting met 'NGK-groep' slaag nie*" (URCSA, 1995b:6).

### 5.4.2. *An ecumenical leader*

James was also known as an ecumenical leader through his participation in events of such nature. He engaged with colleagues beyond his ecclesial tradition and was participating in various ecumenical forums.<sup>103</sup> This has also been attested by Gert van Maanen from the Netherlands who hosted James and his wife during Angela's studies, and delivered the James Buys memorial lecture as one that worked closely with him in an ecumenical forum (URCSA, 2012:8). The former South African Council of Churches (SACC) chairperson mentions James and Angela Buys' role in the SACC as follows:

Considering the role Rev Buys performed in the South African Council of Churches (SACC), his ability to engage in national analysis and contextualisation was enhanced. Very early in their ministry both Angela and James Buys actively partnered with the SACC. Rev. Buys was elected as an executive member of the SACC in Southern Cape. Mrs Angela Buys was elected as an executive member of the SACC's National Women's Desk. This engagement enriched them in as much as it enriched the SACC (Makue, 2020:4).

Allan Boesak, the elected Moderator of the Cape Synod in 2007, mentions after he received the news of James' passing (2008), that within a very contentious time of the South African political landscape, James Buys played a critical role as a church leader and an astute international ecumenical figure.<sup>104</sup> As an international ecumenical leader, there are certain events that are publicly known, for instance, his representation of the DRMC at the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Australia on 7-20 Feb 1991 (Buys, 1991), but also the crucial role he played, both in drafting the text of the Accra Declaration (in Ghana) and in actively being part of the process

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103 For instance, James Buys as the Actuaris of the DRMC, attended the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991, and in the same year, he represented the church at the General Synod of the "*Gereformeerde Kerk*" in the Netherlands (NGSK, 1991b:1).

104 Allan Boesak stated, "[Buys het] in 'n moeilike oorgangstyd in Suid-Afrika 'n deurslaggewende rol as kerkleier en internasionale ekumeniese figuur gespeel" (Lamprecht, 2008:2).

of the then World Alliance of Reformed Churches (URCSA, 2012:8).<sup>105</sup> Van Maanen (2012:5) refers to James Buys' extraordinary contribution to the ACCRA confession, as follows:

That was a masterpiece on an extraordinary complex chessboard, with participants from the South who wanted a clear *status confessionis* rejection of the 'empire' controlling the international economy and participants from the North who had significant problems with – what they saw as – sweeping statements. The Dutch, who were part of the last group, however, returned home and declared that at the end of the day, they had accepted the declaration because it was – in particular in its confession part – an authentic *cri de Coeur* of the South. The question, therefore, was not whether they would have chosen the same words, but whether they were prepared to recognise that this was the voice of the South and therefore of vital importance for our understanding. In retrospect, it was an unusual and extraordinary achievement that – despite all kind of differences – the consensus was reached because the participants were united in their wish to close their ranks around this African viewpoint. James played a vital role in achieving that, both as a prophet and as Richter.

James Buys was convinced that the Accra Confession should be promoted in his own church and society as the viable model for economic emancipation for the poorest of the poor. Therefore, he used his moderator's address in 2005 in Pietermaritzburg, with a focus on Isaiah 43, to reflect on the *newness* for the vulnerable in South Africa. He reiterated to the synod the World Alliance of Reformed Churches' (WARC) adoption of the Accra Declaration, which he also participated in the drafting of, which exposed the lies that are rampant in African societies:

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105 See Ewing's (2018:297) note, "This *processus confessionis* [initiated by Russel Botman] resulted in the WARC at its 2004 General Council meeting in Ghana issuing the Accra Confession (2004), calling the Reformed Christians to respond to the economic and environmental injustices of the global economy. This time, James Buys played a major role in drafting that document and steering the council towards its acceptance."



Neo-liberal ideology claims that the global market will bring about a world which is free of hunger and disease. It uses a theological and ideological framework to justify its messianic role by claiming: economic sovereignty, absolute power and authority beyond regulation, the right to act above national and international law, the right to act beyond ethical and moral rules, that God has blessed prosperity and poverty and disease are the results of God's disfavour due to disobedience and laziness (Buys, 2005b:217).

In quoting this, he affirms his agreement with WARC and other reformed theologians that the economic system – neoliberalism – is a sin and that the 'newsness', as his interpretation of the prophet Isaiah's reference in chapter 43, will not break through in the new South Africa if such an economic system (neoliberalism) does not become a thing of the past. He quotes the statement of WARC and the system that is entrenched in the South African economic policy "We are convinced that the neo-liberal model cannot be transformed or adjusted. Globalised neo-liberalism is in complete contradiction to the central tenets of the Christian faith".

Irrespective of his fierce critique on the economic system in South Africa, he was embraced in the DRC family as a formidable leader because of his sound-minded character, a calm leadership style, a commitment towards justice, as well as a wholehearted commitment to the church (Lamprecht, 2008:2).<sup>106</sup> This was crucial and apparent in the context of delicate discussions on church unity (*Die Burger*, 2008b:12). His wife, Angela, would recall that during "situations of extreme student anger, protest and confrontation with the police, he exuded calm and firm leadership. His greatest weapon was his mental dexterity which allowed him to remain courageous for the cause". However, his calmness should not be equated with "concession at the expense of justice" (Buys, 2012:2), because he was also known for his 'critical' voice, especially during negotiations and re-unification talks with the

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106 "Sy rustige denke, rustige leiding, strewe to geregtigheid en algebele toewyding tot die kerk het hom 'n leier van formaat gemaak" (Lamprecht, 2008:2).

DRC.<sup>107</sup> His deep involvement in the unity processes, was also attributed to his passing in 2008,<sup>108</sup> especially because the Belhar Confession as an official confession to be adopted by the DRC as part of their confessional basis, became a non-negotiable issue for him for a united church. His persistence on the acceptance of the Belhar Confession by the DRC was in contrast to the decision in the 1987 synod meeting where it was decided that the Belhar Confession would be made optional for the DRCA and the DRC, although they should embrace the content of the confession (NGSK, 1990a:815).<sup>109</sup> However, one could understand that although the DRC and the DRCA did not acknowledge the Belhar Confession as a part of their confessions in 1987, the DRCA accepted the confession during the amalgamation of the DRMC and DRCA. This was therefore not ‘rocket science’ for James Buys for the DRC to also pull it off.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, a decision was made at the 25<sup>th</sup> synod of the DRMC that before the two churches become unified, both should decide for the inclusion of the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession.<sup>111</sup> James Buys also made it unambiguous that for church unity, there would be no unity without the acceptance of the Belhar Confession. Therefore, for URCSA to later make some concessions, as probable in 1987, was contested by Buys.<sup>112</sup>

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- 107 JJ Gerber, the General Secretary of the DRC, regarded Buys as a critical, “*opbouend-kritiese stem*” (Lamprecht, 2008:2).
- 108 Russel Botman (former Rector of the University of Stellenbosch) stated on the role of Buys, “*Ek dink nie 'n mens moet die druk wat met kerkeenheid gepaardgaan, anderskat nie*” (Lamprecht, 2008:2).
- 109 The DRMC states as follows on the matter, “*Reeds op 13 Mei 1987 is daarom deur die NGSK aan die NGK gestel dat die feit van die Belydenis van Belhar nie in die weg van die eenheidstrewer hoef te staan nie, alhoewel die inhoud van die Belydenis van Belhar wel vir die NGSK van deurslaggewende belang is en dat dit die basis is waarop die eenheidsgesprek gevoer word*” (NGSK, 1990a:815).
- 110 “*In 'n poging om die weg vir eenheid tussen die verskillende kerke so oop moontlik te hou het die gesprekskommissie te staan gekom voor die feit dat die NGK en die NGKA nie amptelik as kerke die Belydenis van Belhar van die NGSK as 'n verdere belydenis erken nie ... Wat die NGKA betref sou 'n prosedure probleem oor die byvoeging van die Belydenis van Belhar kon ontstaan wat gevolglik die eenwordingsproses aansienlik kon vertraag, terwyl daar oor die saak en die inhoud van die Belydenis van Belhar binne die NGKA wesenlik geen probleme bestaan nie. Niks staan egter kerkregtelik in die pad van 'n nuwe verenigde kerk om na eenwording self die Belydenis van Belhar by te voeg tot die reeds bestaande drie belydenisskrifte nie*” (NGSK, 1990a:815).
- 111 The task team of the two churches resolved, “*Indien een van die twee Sinodes (kerke?) nie genoemde besluite aanvaar nie, daar nie oorgegaan sal kan word tot kerkeenheid nie*” (NGSK, 1990a:816).
- 112 The task team made it clear that emanating from their meeting, the Belhar Confession was non-negotiable, “*As die belydenis van Belhar nie aanvaarbaar word as Belydenisskrif van die verenigde kerk nie, sal daar nie met kerkeenwording voortgegaan word nie. Die NGKA is hiervan bewus*” (NGSK, 1990a:816). Therefore, why would the URCSA now after a decade make compromises for the DRC?

Nevertheless, he was more than this, he was an activist – or as the author of the local newspaper would describe Buys’ contribution – a “*voorvegter*” [camp-fighter] for unification in the DRC family (Die Burger, 2008b:12). He would, in some way or the other, win over the hearts of his DRC colleagues, like Coenie Burger (former Moderator of the DRC), who would praise him for his role in the unification between the DRCA and the DRMC (Lamprecht, 2008:2).<sup>113</sup> His valuable contribution within the church was also fully acknowledged within society – as a witness to the world – when the local newspaper also commended him for his contribution to church unification processes. The placement and increased font size of a rubric within the regional newspaper, *Die Burger*, read, “*Buys het sleutelrol in kerkeenheid gespeel*” [Buys played a key role in church unification], which proves the affinity he would have in the South African society. This also indicates the importance of such (unity) events, moments, and processes in the post-apartheid context that would complement the Truth and Reconciliation process in South Africa.

He was regarded as a central figure in the unification process between URCSA and the DRC family and he placed such processes within the context of national reconciliation in South Africa (cf. Buys, 1999:5). Therefore, the role that Buys played in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) process cannot be isolated from the South African context which is still grappling with its apartheid past and which was also still undergoing transition at the time. Buys’ commitment towards unity within the church, has to be placed against the backdrop of the separation between white and black people in South Africa, but also the fact that these churches were one of the largest mainline churches that most South Africans belonged to during apartheid (Jackson, 2008:2).<sup>114</sup>

Therefore, it is noteworthy that he took upon himself such a huge responsibility to build bridges between different racial groups in the church. This was a task he took seriously and had been entrusted with by Beyers Naudé, “There is a seemingly wide gap in the understanding and the trust between

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113 “*Buys was ‘n skitterende leier en ‘n baie talentvolle persoon*” (Lamprecht, 2008:2).

114 Interestingly, the newspaper reports one of the reasons for his death, as possibly the messy and dragged out process of unity between the URCSA and DRC (*Die Burger*, 2008b:12).

the *NG Sending kerk* and the African section. I don't know what can be done in this regard but James Buys and the others must look into this very carefully to get bigger participation of Africans in black DRC and URCSA" (Ewing, 2018:290). It was evident that the issue of authentic unity was looming large in the 1990-1994 period,<sup>115</sup> however, quite recently during the Cape Synod meeting in the Eastern Cape in 2019, it came to the fore as unfinished business. However, James Buys took this task quite seriously during his ministry in the church, so much so that an African Black minister in URCSA, Rev. Mbenenge (the preacher at his funeral), and his wife would attest that he was always seeking for ways that the church could be culturally inclusive. James Buys' constant effort for unification could also be traced back to his own experience and that of his family of segregation policies in the schools he attended, especially the one in Newtown Johannesburg where his elder sister remembers how children from different racial groups, all blacks, were attending one school – Indians, Coloured, Chinese ... But this would not last long when the apartheid government would further entrench their implementation of the 'separated development' ideology of apartheid, and move these children to mono-racial schools in their own race-based community, *et cetera*.<sup>116</sup> Though he was in primary school at the time, it is most likely in grade three or four that he might have had some memories of such multi-racial contact, and that they were more and more deprived of such interaction. The extent to which such experiences can influence one's worldview should not be underestimated.

Therefore, it is not surprising that even after his passing, the memorial service was conducted by a white minister of the DRC Wynberg, Danie Nel (5 March 2008),<sup>117</sup> and the sermon was delivered at the

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115 Botman, during his tenure as the Moderator of the Cape Synod between 1990-1994, states, "Racial differences in salaries and some other important issues have been dealt with but there is the problem of some of the DRC churches deciding they don't want to go with the unity and joining the white DRC. The way forward is to involve the white DRC in unity" (cf. Ewing, 2018:290).

116 Interview with Miranda Buys, 22 April 2020.

117 Danie Nel's sermon was from Rom. 8:31-39 with the theme: "*Meer as oorwinnaars deur sy liefde!*" [More than winners through his love].

funeral by an ‘African’<sup>118</sup> black minister from the former DRCA church, Rev. Mbenenge. The significance of his non-racial vision could be further observed in the location where his funeral took place – one of the DRC congregations (DRC Wynberg) where there were distinguished guests, politicians and international guests present (Jassiem, 2008:2) – and an African black minister became the ‘voice’ of God during such a memorable occasion with the attendance of people from various racial groups in South Africa. This might have been more acceptable for the post-1994 generation (the *born free’s*), but for those who were suffering the brunt of apartheid, this would indeed be impossible to have imagined becoming a reality during the apartheid years. However, this resembled his life and future vision for society – well captured in the unfolding of the events and role players at his funeral in 2008. Who would have, in the heydays of apartheid, dreamt that this would be possible in the future! In this instance, his wife, Angela, was assisting him in this vision, focussing on the women across ethnic lines, dealing with issues of diversity over a huge region, covering the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, as well as the Northern Cape. She articulated her endeavour as follows:

Our unity is still in its infant stages and there are a lot of things we haven’t accepted within us that are preventing us from uniting. Within the church there are still the Afrikaans-speakers who are predominantly Coloured seeing themselves as better than Xhosa-speakers (predominantly black African) – who they see as having “joined our church”. This is hindering us in terms of becoming fully one within ourselves (Ewing, 2018:290).

Buyts continued to facilitate unity, even after the establishment of URCSA, and imagined unity, beyond denominational conformity but by effectively facing the challenges related to race, language, culture and class distinctions (*Akta VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland*, 2002:258). He was a person that was committed towards reconciliation, as Meiring underscores:

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118 The authors uses this classification at least to prove that this act of Buys’ was intentional protest in moving beyond the apartheid racial segregation, and the continuous ethnic nationalism being perpetuated by the post-apartheid government in legislation, policies, and practice.

Contrary to the expectation of some, Buys, who authored the submission, did not start by pointing the finger at the DRC, listing all the indignities and injustices meted out by the ‘mother church’ towards the ‘daughter churches’ in the DRC family over many years—albeit that he had every reason to do so. Instead, in the spirit of the truth and reconciliation process, the Moderator of URCSA chose in humility and with integrity, to take his place in front of the mirror of history, reporting on the painful road URCSA had travelled during the years (Meiring, 2019:3).

#### ***5.4.3. James Buys before the TRC***

Buys’ presentation to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) reflects his willingness and openness to reflect on the complicity of URCSA for “its failure to do enough to oppose human rights violations by acts of commission or omission; for its subtle recognition of the illegitimate apartheid regime through liaison, representation and negotiation; for its silence and conscious and unconscious lack of clarity in Word and deed, URCSA confess[es] unreservedly its and, vicariously, its members’ guilt”. His agency in the process of reconciliation is captured by his plea, “We herewith plead for forgiveness of our fellow citizens and the Supreme Triune God” (URCSA, 1997:11). This act by Buys is almost similar to that of the Confessing Church in Germany of which the great influential theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was its founder. It is this church that would, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, make a similar confession of guilt and their complicit role in the mass murder of millions of Jews during the Holocaust. Buys states in his report to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: “We do not boast, neither are we haughty in presenting our actions for scrutiny. Even while we confess gratitude to the Lord for some of our decisions and actions, we simultaneously acknowledge our weakness in this part of our submission” (cf. Meiring, 2019:6) (URCSA, 1997:11).

Buys’ contributions towards justice, reconciliation and unity, went beyond the ecclesial context of the DRC family, but there were also signs of him being a threat to the apartheid government for the kind of reconciliation and justice he sought. Therefore, Meiring reminds us of the near-death experience of Buys when he had a chemical substance injected into

his car in Oudtshoorn for his fight against the apartheid government (Meiring, 2019:10). This kind of reconciliation (advocated by Buys) was indeed a repudiation of racially based churches – which was inherited from the white DRC. For James Buys, this was more than a structural change that was needed to restore the credibility of the church, but a change in consciousness as well. In his report to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1999, this became apparent when he argued that the difficulty with the black, so-called ‘daughter’ churches during apartheid was that specifically the “influence of a specifically dominated leadership of the [white] missionaries within these churches” (Buys, 1999:1) that should be attended to. Therefore, James Buys’ concern was that the functions and the operations within these churches were modelled after the white DRC church and often the relationship between the black ministers, congregants and the white missionaries was one of ‘servant and master’. The mention of this before the TRC reflects the intricacies of the process of reconciliation in South Africa and the church. However, this also reveals why Buys would mobilise and engage with the communities at the ‘grassroots’ to inform and educate them through his own sermons on the biblical notions of unity, justice and reconciliation.<sup>119</sup> Buys’ appeal to a change that requires more than structural unity is salient when he refers to a change in the black DRC to be one that would engage the ‘legacy of apartheid’ that is still lingering after divorcing themselves theoretically from apartheid.

James Buys’ report at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) reflects his analysis of the South African context, and that he was deeply aware of the relationship between the church and society and the current social divisions (racial and ethnic) in the country. In Buys’ report, he also implicates URCSA as contributors and accomplices to the violations of Human Rights before the TRC, for instance, their chaplains to prepare the soldiers ‘spiritually’ for ‘holy war’ against ‘terrorists, communists’, *et cetera*, and clergy who participated in the tricameral parliament, and the Coloured

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119 One of the interviewers who was a member of the DRC Wynberg congregation recalls that most of his sermons were on unity, but also another interviewee states, “James had a unique leadership style, informed by his theological commitment to servanthood. He believed in the importance of leading from the front, but never dragging anyone along. As a leader it was imperative to convince others and to serve one another – as equals. Training for transformation demanded that ordinary people are respected and allowed to develop to their full (God given) potential” (Makue, 2020:1).

Representative Council (Buys, 1997:9). This is to argue that they could have done more to stop the brutal system. Therefore, this should not be equated with guilt for the ‘system’, but guilt in the sense that the Black Reformed churches did not do enough to fight against the apartheid system, and allowed its reign of terror to continue for years. He understood the complexities around reconciliation between different ethnicities. However, Buys read the apartheid context in a similar vein as Stephen Bantu Biko (2005:58) when he states that human rights abuses were also sustained by its “moral and spiritual undergirding” in which he was implicitly referring to various white churches and chaplains that provided theological justification for those heinous crimes.<sup>120</sup>

An analysis of his TRC hearing showcases the deep-seated reformed theology that made him confess his guilt,<sup>121</sup> which can easily become misconstrued by proponents of the apartheid government who often praise the emphasis of anti-apartheid activists (as Buys) and their confessions of ‘complicity’ and then easily escape their own *full* responsibility for the heinous crimes committed.<sup>122</sup> They actually celebrate Buys and others as ‘good’ reformed Christians who would first and foremost be conscious of their inherited sinful nature. This was what Biko addressed and which is captured in the book *I write what I like* (1978) when he refers to the guilt that Christianity placed on black people through their doctrine of personal sin (Biko, 2005:61). Therefore, Buys, quite skilfully addresses to the TRC the personal guilt but also the sin that operated within the structures of apartheid.

Buys indeed understood his ministry beyond the church and ecumenical platform, but also as crucial within the context of a racially and ethnically

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120 See Biko’s address “The church as seen by a Young Layman” in the book *I Write what I like* (1978), pp. 58.

121 This is well demonstrated when Buys talks about guilt and sin in his hearing at the South African Reconciliation Commission in 1997. See the full testimony in this regard online at: [http://www.religion.uct.ac.za/religion/institutes/ricsa\\_irhap/ricsa/archive/trc\\_submissions](http://www.religion.uct.ac.za/religion/institutes/ricsa_irhap/ricsa/archive/trc_submissions)

122 On the other hand, some Christians easily allow the other ‘reformed’ culprits who enforced the apartheid legislation to escape without any remorse of repentance. See the full article of Baron “Remorse and Repentance stripped of its validity. Amnesty granted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” (Baron, 2015).



divided South Africa.<sup>123</sup> He was so deeply involved in the challenges that the masses in South Africa experienced, that it was no secret that the former Premier of the Western Cape, Ebrahim Rasool, who was a practising adherent to Islam also attended his funeral (Jassiem, 2008:2). This also demonstrates that he made a significant contribution to South African politics during apartheid through his inter-religious affiliation. His continuous effort to contribute to social transformation processes is captured in his own words after his return from a short sabbatical in the Netherlands:

Immediately following the CFT trip, I was looking at how one extends the vision of a transformed South Africa and the commitment of people beyond my denomination. And from that came the thinking within the Southern Cape that there was a need for a provincial council of churches. The idea of ecumenism came from the need to involve local congregations, which was different from other councils. It was about enabling people to take responsibility for their own lives, broadening the scope of the church from beyond welfare (cf. Van Maanen, 2012:11).

Further, it should be said that his agency in South Africa was characterised by his willingness to work collaboratively with the masses. This is attested by James' own words:

We got the prophetic counsel from Beyers Naudé and Wolfram Kistner that it could only be the members of the church who could challenge the church. This has been proven. The values that drove our faith community are the values that were espoused for a new South Africa. I always tried to be sensitive to where people were at. My motto was always, as a leader, you shouldn't move too far for the people – otherwise, you may run while they are still falling. What helped I think

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123 This is evident in his presentation to the TRC, "The amalgamation of the two churches represents a watershed in the history of the DRMC and the DRCA. This union represents a *Kairos* moment in the life of the church in which it departs from the apartheid and contradicts the justification of racially divided churches. The event of unification furthermore had great symbolic value given the historical context in which it took place, namely ten days before the first free and democratic elections in South Africa" (Meiring, 2019:3) (URCSA 1997:2).

was that the leadership was not dependent on ‘this learned priest’ (cf. Ewing, 2018:76-77).

#### ***5.4.4. The dominee built a mortuary!***

James was known by many as a ‘person’s person’.<sup>124</sup> One particular incident and situation that showed his compassion for people’s struggles in Calitzdorp is particularly important to mention. Angela (2020:1) states:

When we arrived in Calitzdorp in February 1979, James was shocked when he conducted his first funeral and found the following: there was only one mortuary in Calitzdorp, owned by a white person and only for white bodies. For the ‘coloured’ people there was no other cold place in Calitzdorp for the bodies of their loved ones up until the funeral. The only other option was to half-bury their loved one till the day of the funeral. With the heat in the Klein-karoo during the summer months, this was so undignified because on the day of the funeral there was no viewing of the body and also worms would already be seeping through the sand.

This, she states, “was so traumatising and dehumanising to the family and everyone who attended the funeral”. However, “James then secured funding and was actively involved in the building of the mortuary”. She states further, “The church council was involved in the management thereof and community members paid a minimal fee – basically just to cover the electricity costs. This might also attest to his extended ministry in a rural community in the Klein Karoo (Calitzdorp), which did not nearly resemble the facilities that other towns might have had that he was called to as Minister of the Word during his ministry far away from the cities – especially being a city-born (Johannesburg) child himself”. He is known for his motor mechanical skills, fixing his own vehicles with his neighbours assisting him, and therefore the construction of the building could not be described as merely an oversight function that he

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124 This is reiterated by most of his colleagues, and stated by one of the interviewees on 1 May 2020 (Makue, 2020:1).

fulfilled, but physically assisting with his own skills to construct these structures, *et cetera* – laying some bricks himself on a Saturday (Murphy, 2020). James Buys obtained funds from the Southern Cape Council of Churches (*Suid-Kaap Raad van Kerke*), and would himself be involved in the construction of the building. After James Buys' departure from the congregation and community of Bergsig, Calitzdorp the church had to take responsibility for the building but never received the title deed of the property on which the mortuary was built. It is poignant that this mortuary has not been taken care of and renovated by the Calitzdorp municipality and, even after one of the authors paid the coloured township of Calitzdorp (Bergsig) a visit in 2020, the building was still the only one, with place for only a few (five or so) deceased bodies, and the conditions were still unchanged, but even worse than James Buys had left it (Murphy, 2020).<sup>125</sup> This being said, it would mean that without a Minister of the Word like James Buys who went beyond his ministerial duties to attend to the inhumane conditions, no initiative or rescue plan would have been in place for the coloured township in Calitzdorp.

#### 5.4.5. *His critique against the 'dopstelsel'*

In a similar vein, Makue (2020:2) asserts, "A ... very painful experience is related to the *dop-stelsel* that reigned on Western Cape farms. It is important to say something about the *dopstelsel* and its negative effect in order to appreciate James Buys' role in this regard:

The dop system is one in which employers pay their labourers with cheap wine, or dops. Today, the dop system is no longer legal in South Africa, but alcoholism remains one of the major challenges facing the health services in the Western Cape. A number of farms in the region continue to provide workers with alcohol as part of their conditions of service without repercussions from the government. Estimates of the current prevalence of the dop system range from less than 2% to 20% of labour payments in the Western Cape. Even after the banishment of the dop system,

alcohol dependency among farm workers continued to play a major role in trapping the farm workers in a cycle of poverty and dependence. The adverse health and developmental impacts of the dop system and related alcohol abuse are prevalent among rural farming communities.<sup>126</sup>

One evening, a young man residing in Calitzdorp downed a bottle of alcohol and dropped dead. When James shared this terrible incident, it was as if he (James) was responsible for this death. This indeed showed his life as being compassionate towards people in his ministry. This relates also to his own *Intreepreek* [inaugural sermon] in Calitzdorp, which was well attended by some of the white farmers and the *Sending Raad* (all white ministers of the DRC) who contributed also the budget of the DRMC in the district. Buys would then request them to please also make some raisins not only wine”.<sup>127</sup> Whether it could be attributed to his good sense of humour, he would think also of the welfare of the poor and as a result of the *dopstelsel* on the farms where workers became alcoholics, and he felt called to ensure that their circumstances were improved. Therefore, he established the *Ouer Onderwyser Maatskaplike Vereniging* [Parents Education and Social Welfare Organisation] that brought a drastic change in the conduct of school children, and the teachers and principals could see a change and decline in criminal activities and the discontinuation of the ‘*dopstelsel*’ on the farms.

#### ***5.4.6. His love for people, and not the apartheid system***

He was against the system (apartheid) – not all white people, but everyone that supported the system of apartheid. Poem Mooney of Oudtshoorn and his wife remember how James Buys would be willing to go with them to visit their family member who was a soldier in the army and based at the Military base in Voortrekker Hoogte, Pretoria. They were very appreciative of such a gesture because of his strong feelings against the army which, to him, was an apparatus of the security police and the apartheid government. They were not sure – as his friends – how he would accept their family

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126 See <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/ramifications-south-african-dop-system-alexandra-larkin>

127 Interview held on 17 September 2020.

member, but also afraid that he would become unkind to him and make him feel uncomfortable and out of place because of his strong stance against apartheid. However, the opposite actually happened. James assured them that, for him, the issue was never the person, but the uniform, and therefore his love was for them, and that the issue he was fighting against was the apartheid system.<sup>128</sup> One of James' hostel roommates also vividly recalls, around 1976, that one colleague would come from the Bellville train station to the hostel. However, on his way, he would find a white woman who had mechanical problems. He was tempted to assist, but then came to the hostel room of James instead and articulated his anger at the time, having to assist a white woman who, for him, represented the system that was oppressing and making the lives of black people, including himself, unbearable in the country. And so, he asked himself, "why should I help you as a white woman?"<sup>129</sup> Posing this challenge to James Buys, James responded quite calmly, "You are a follower of Jesus Christ, a crossbearer [*"Jy is n kruisgesant"*]. We should love the [white] people – it is the system which we are against, not them". Therefore it is clear that their pigmentation was not the issue, but anyone that would support the brutal system of apartheid would be the problem.

He knew his people by name and 'by car', as one church council members of URCSA Wynberg would quite gigglingly say, "*Dominee het gesê, 'ek het gehoor jy kom [by die kerk aan] toe ek jou kar se 'gebrul' hoor*" [Reverend said, "I knew it was you because I heard the 'roaring sound' of your car"]. Although this might be a menial matter for a 'middle-class' congregation, for the person who was sharing this, it made him feel human – a person, like *all* other persons – dignified! As with James Buys' long stay in a rural town such as Calitzdorp (Bergsig), his congregants also remember his interest in the people residing on the adjacent farms within Constantia, where some of his congregants resided. And when they hosted open air services on Sunday afternoons, he would often attend those events, which they confirm made them feel that he embraced them as people and left them

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128 Interview held on 17 September 2020.

129 What the colleague can remember is that the person that visited James said that he asked himself, "*Jy is die oorsaak dat daar 'n las op my rus ... hoekom moet ek jou (as n wit vrou) help?*"

feeling dignified through his presence. During the time of James Buys, the URCSA Wynberg congregation had mainly two classes of people in the congregation – those residing in the farm areas, and those residing in town. As with many congregations where this situation exists, the congregants on the farms always felt inferior by default to those who were residing in the city centre or adjacent to it, and the latter would mostly be occupying the executive positions in their workplaces and be affluent, while the former would occupy menial employment positions, mainly belonging to the working class in society. It is often the case that the Ministers of the Word, being themselves regarded as part of the middle-class, would show their affinity within those circles (of people in the city), where a few made it a priority to allow those in the rural areas to feel dignified through how they related to them. James Buys was the latter species of minister, and congregants in URCSA Wynberg on the farm areas of Constantia would feel his embrace and felt he was giving their dignity back in the way he treated them.<sup>130</sup> In Calitzdorp, one of his neighbours attest to how he went to ‘bazaars’ on the farm areas and ate from each table, irrespective of who baked the products, and they were astonished at his outlook and attitude to treat everyone as a ‘person’.

James supported events and organisations in his community that would help restore the dignity of the black people in South Africa. This was also the case in the late 1980s when two people from Oudtshoorn started a school on one of the adjacent farms and called the school, *Kairos*. For them, this school would create a specific opportunity for the brown, disabled children who could not go to the white schools in Oudtshoorn at the time. However, not long thereafter, the couple received resistance from the army. The army paid them a visit at the newly established school. James Buys would quickly pick up the telephone and give them advice. He requested that they should not provide their details to the army as this was part of the strategy of the security police that used the army to solicit information from them. Because at times people like him who spoke against the apartheid government would have their phones tapped, he used code words to bring his message to them

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130 One of the interviewees states, concerning the constantia farm areas, “*Ek kon ontbou by het ons behoefte baie gou raak gesien ...*” (Interview, September 2020).

and warn them in advance, and advised that they should refuse to provide such information. He showed his further involvement by driving to the school when the security police were there and walking around fearlessly, questioning their motives for being at the school. In such a way, he went beyond his ‘church duties’, supporting those who were suffering as a result of apartheid machinery. This school had raised ire from the apartheid government because of its name, *Kairos*, which was linked with another resistance movement, The Kairos Movement, and therefore any sign that there was some link to resistance movements caused such institutions to be targeted by the apartheid government.<sup>131</sup> In this situation, James Buys played a key role in solidarity with the people during a volatile and turbulent political climate in Oudtshoorn and Calitzdorp.

Then there was his involvement at a primary school in Calitzdorp. He served the following schools on outside posts of Calitzdorp when he was the school manager: Warmbad, Gamka-Oos, Gamka-Wes, Matjiesfontein, Groenfontein, Rietfontein, and Excelsior Primary (Bergsig). He established the *Ouer Onderwyser Maatskaplike Vereniging* [Parents Education and Social Welfare Organisation]. This body was created because crime was on the rise among the school children, and the absenteeism of children, and parents who would neglect their children. However, this body was a multi-professional and expert body with various stakeholders – health, social work, Ministers of the Word, teachers, and the magistrate of Calitzdorp *et cetera* – who strategized and addressed the social ills among school children. James Buys was directing this organisation, and made himself known as a leader of the community of Calitzdorp. The farmers in the region also worked together to supply transport for parents to attend the meetings.<sup>132</sup> He believed in a multi-disciplinary approach to address issues in the town of Calitzdorp.

However, in the relatively authoritative positions that he occupied, from Minister of the Word, Actuarium, and Moderator of URCSA for two consecutive terms, one would immediately wonder, how did he relate to

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131 Interview held on 17 September 2020.

132 Interview held on 17 September 2020.

people? Therefore, one incident captures this quite well, as one URCSA Wynberg congregant would remember. She had a problem with her daughter who had pierced her bellybutton, which would mean that her belly would be exposed. This was worrying for her mother, therefore she requested *Dominee* James Buys to come and reprimand her daughter. Upon arrival, he sat with them and, for a long time he was quiet, not speaking a word. This made her a bit uncomfortable and she asked him to please reprimand her daughter! It was then that he responded: “How can I reprimand her if I also have a daughter that did the same! I also don’t have an answer!” That closed the matter – whether he had an answer after that is not certain, but that he was open to make known his own ‘humanness’ and vulnerability was well illustrated in her articulation of his visit at her home!

#### *5.4.7. When the apartheid police arrested the dominee!*

One last event should be told about his own sacrifices and commitment towards the plight of the oppressed people during apartheid. James Buys’ obedience to God was shown in his willingness to suffer for the people while contesting against the brutal system of apartheid. This always made his family scared, because all who became too outspoken like James Buys about the unjust policies of apartheid were monitored and being targeted.<sup>133</sup> There was a rumour in the Calitzdorp congregation that there were three members in the church who were suspected of working with the security police and would therefore be informing them of his whereabouts. This might also be why he was surrounded by security police at his house during the morning hours in 1985. While one was blocking the front door, the other went through the back door and was in the house for approximately two hours. There was an open bakkie outside with about eight to ten soldiers parked in front of his house. One of the neighbours opposite James Buys’ house remembers the day and recalls that he was peeping out of the window and recognised one of the men who was a member of the security police. He then had difficulty in phoning his adjacent neighbour so that

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133 Miranda, his elder sister, also reveals a little bit about the fears of their family in Johannesburg (back home) because he was too vocal and active in the politics at UWC, that they were also concerned about his safety, “*Gedurende die moeilike tye wat James op UWK was het daar ander leerlesse James gesluit en het hy nie gekroom om sy mening te lig nie. Dit het ons bang gemaak omdat gerigte die ronde gedoen het van die polisie en die optogte op UWK*”.



they could deliberate. It was then that Angela Buys made a phone call to their neighbour and told him that James was requesting him to come over to their house (while the security police were still questioning and searching his house). James proceeded to hand him his sermon for the forthcoming Sunday and requested that he should continue and conduct the service on the forthcoming Sunday, while James was taken by the security police, arrested and detained for six weeks at the Van Wyksdorp police station. It was a small station with visiting hours up until 16:00 in the afternoon. Only his wife could come and visit him. His Mother, Elsa, came from Johannesburg to support him and his wife during those painful days of separation and humiliation. We should remember that Angela, his wife, was still a teacher at the Excelsior Primary School and also had two children to take care of. The security police took some documents with them – about two full bags of documents – but at the end, they could not find anything to nail him with, and he was therefore released after spending an extended period in detention. During this time, the congregations were earnestly praying for his release, that they would not hurt their pastor and torture him.<sup>134</sup>

### 5.5. THE 'STRUGGLE OF THE PEOPLE', ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND RACISM

It is one of James Buys' colleagues who reminds us of his commitment towards justice for the poor, and that even though he tenaciously sought reconciliation and unity between different ethnic groups, the most important issue was the human dignity of the vulnerable and the poor. This attests to his deep commitment in a country where the poor were often exploited, marginalised and disempowered. Therefore, in his actions as part of the moderation, but also as the Actuarium of the DRMC, a decision was made to keep the expenditure of the agenda as affordable as possible to accommodate everyone, because this was part of his analysis of society. He therefore possessed

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134 This information was gathered during an interview held on 17 September 2020.

a sensitivity for the poor among him and his colleagues.<sup>135</sup> Buys was aware of the social and economic inequalities that had an impact on the church and society. This is evident in his motivation as the Moderator of URCSA to participate with the ‘*Koalisie 2000*’ [‘Coalition 2000’] that motivated and encouraged developed nations to cancel the debt of developing countries (Buys, 2000:1-2). He was therefore also directly involved in the drafting of the ACRRA Declaration, which was a confession against economic injustice and the unequal distribution of resources in Africa and other developing countries.

Van Maanen (2012) mentions:

In Europe, he was struck by the extent the church had become alienated from the working classes. For example, ‘unemployment support groups’ in the UK ‘appeared to put more energy into moral support for the unemployed rather than in structurally countering unemployment. So, James came back to counter everything structurally in Calitzdorp.

Koopman (2008:14) recalls that Buys accentuated reconciliation that would not undermine the issue of justice that should be integral to the process and quest for reconciliation. James Buys himself stated in this regard that “up to the 1980s the church was not an efficient instrument of justice and care. When local resistance in the country emerged, for instance, when the United Democratic Front (UDF) in South Africa during the banning of other liberation movements, some presbyteries did come out in support of such protest and rallying behind those like Allan Boesak, but the synods missed the opportunity to give positive guidance” (Buys, 1999:11). Buys emphasised that the church should seek a kind of reconciliation that undergirds human dignity for all, because he argued that often in

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135 In 3.10 of the minutes of the DRMC moderation meeting, it states about the printing of the Church Order: “*In die lig van die vooraanstaande kerkeenheid, sal die kerkorde nie soos in die verlede gedruk word nie. In plaas daarvan sal die Actuarius [James Buys] dit so goedkoop moontlik dupliseer*” (NGSK, 1991b:3).

conversations of transformation and unity, the dignity of the most vulnerable was compromised.<sup>136</sup>

Buy's (2000:2) was not naïve in his analyses of the burden of the poor but drew attention in his analysis of the immense economic burden on South Africa in which the poor were the most affected. He argues that the apartheid government was not innocent but had contributed to the situation of the poor in South Africa and the socio-economic realities.<sup>137</sup>

Van Maanen (2012) refers to the words of Buys during his keynote address at the James Buys Memorial Lecture (9 September 2012) to showcase Buys' analysis of the South African context:

The idea that we needed an integrated understanding of what's happening in society implied a civic association, which became the vehicle of allowing people to voice their understanding of their context and experiences and pose questions about what ought to happen. What started as a civic in a village setting then became a vehicle for interaction with people far more isolated, in farm settings – whose experiences were hidden (cf. Ewing, 2018:76-77).

Van Maanen (2020) reports on James Buys' great social analytical ability and his keen interest in the transformation of the segregated society in South Africa that started his own process of reflecting and drafting the 'transition' process in South Africa.<sup>138</sup> He reminisces:

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136 Buys said, "*Werk aan versoening, maar onthou versoening en geregtigheid is 'n tweeling, soek kerkeenheid op plaaslike en internasionale vlak, maar laat dit n 'eenheid wees wat almal se menswaardigheid dien; moenie in transformasie kontekste en in verenigingsprosesse kompromie maak ten koste van menswaardigheid en die mees weerloses nie*".

137 "*Wat hierdie probleem erger maak is dat hierdie skuld in hoofsaak deur die apartheids-regering aangegaan is om die apartheidsmasjienerie aan die gang te hou*" (Buys, 2000:2). "*Die Dagbestuur van die Algemene sinode het juis binne die raamwerk van die strategiese proses besluit dat die bekamping van armoede een van die strategiese doelwitte is. In hierdie verband moet armoede nie alleen in die erge sin verstaan word nie, maar ook wat betref die effek van die apartheidskuldilas op die ekonomiese potensiaal van ons land het*" (Buys, 2000:2).

138 The draft was never published but remained the thoughts on paper (Buys, 1990).

On 11 February 1990, Mandela walked out of Victor Verster and changed South Africa (and the world at large). At that time James and Angela had a sabbatical in the UK where Angela studied for six months, and James concentrated on the Zimbabwe and Namibia transition processes and the lessons to be learned for South Africa. [He] finished [the paper] in March 1990, a *Sendingkerk* minister from Calitzdorp, in the middle of nowhere, a theologian/church minister who was able to write such a quality paper on the transition process before Madiba was released.

### 5.6. JAMES BUYS AND HIS DOCUMENT ON 'TRANSITIONAL' JUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

James Buys' analysis of society in the 1990s before CODESA had even taken momentum will briefly be discussed. This document can be seen as a 'prophetic' document, because it speaks against the apartheid government, but also captures precisely the issues that have become more and more contentious and are taken up by radical political parties. This document remains remarkable as Buys' own analysis told him that pandemonium and anarchy would erupt, should the conditions he outlined in the paper not be taken into consideration. The poignant part is that, as a minister in the rural town of Calitzdorp, his views to make the structural and systemic reforms that were desperately needed for the *shalom* (well-being) of God to manifest in South Africa were not taken too seriously. Let us, therefore, take a look at his phenomenal and on-point analysis.

His analysis reflects a deep commitment toward what was known within black campuses at the time as the Black Consciousness ideology in which he captures the struggle of majority oppressed and marginalised South Africans (Buys, 1990:103). Buys was not vague in terms of what the issues were in society – it was an issue of economic inequality and racism<sup>139</sup> which he fought against and challenged during his lifetime.

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139 In Buys' report to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), he made this point at the start of his hearing at the TRC – that the issue of racism was one created within his church family (DRC) since 1881 when the church was divided long 'racial' lines (Buys, 1999:1). See also his Moderator address at the Pietermaritzburg Synod in which he reflects on the issue of racism (Buys, 2005b:217).

Therefore, when it came to the announcement of De Klerk in 1990, that the government would enter into negotiations with liberation movements in the country, Buys argued that those that would represent the majority of South Africans should not naïvely approach their oppressors, but should propose that certain preconditions should be met first. For instance, the “repeal of all apartheid legislation” and the “withdrawal of troops from the townships”, among others. He cautioned that liberation movements should ensure that they are not part of the apartheid government’s strategy to soften, debilitate, and weaken the momentum of the majority people of South Africa towards their own freedom.

One might perhaps say that, as a minister of the Word, he should have trusted the apartheid government on their word, *per se*, but for James Buys, words could only genuinely be tested through the demonstration thereof (Buys, 1990:111). What James Buys was prophetic about was indeed that members of liberation movements that were going to the negotiation table should be mindful of the corrupt strategies of the apartheid government and their supporters. They should not only agree to meet the above conditions that he deems imperative, ‘partially’ and use the remaining (conditions) as a “concessionary fodder” (Buys, 1990:113). His analysis of the apartheid government told him that they were broadening their support networks through approaching some of the opposition, which included some homeland leaders, and those blacks who were keen on entering the free market. He cautioned that there might have been concessions made, promises made, and guarantees given by the apartheid government, that would hamper the process of a settlement that would benefit the whole of society (Buys, 1990:116). He was also concerned about the media’s role in the process that was, at the time, the propaganda instrument of the apartheid government. Therefore, he stated that democratic forces should ensure that there are also journalists and media practitioners from their (masses in South Africa) side that form part of the media to ensure it does not serve as a propaganda tool of the apartheid government, especially during the time of formal negotiations (CODESA). He cautions against the ‘diversionary tactic’ of the apartheid government, like the tri-camera system that would weaken the opposition forces. In all of this, James Buys regarded him as part

of the majority South African populace and as a minister that would not distantly watch how injustice prevails.

James Buys (1990:126) states unequivocally in his analysis that the issue in South Africa was not only about racism but also against economic exploitation. Therefore, he cautions that those that sit around the negotiation table for a democratic South Africa should not think it is a replacement of 'skin colour politics'. It was about the struggles and victories of the masses. He states, "Negotiation means the continued struggle for the right not only to end apartheid but also to fundamentally change the economic system in an effort to eradicate the inequities of apartheid" (Buys, 1990:126). He addresses the land question, even before the commencement of negotiations which has recently (26 years into democracy) become the bone of contention, "Lessons need to be learned from Zimbabwe where the struggle for fundamental economic changes and land redistribution was defeated at negotiations by the inclusion of the freedom of deprivation of property and compensation clause into a Bill of Rights" (Buys, 1990:127). He argues that, in retrospect of the Zimbabwean transition process, democratic forces should not settle for political power at the expense of economic revolution and agree to achieve the latter at a later stage (Buys, 1990:128). Buys was convinced that this should be agreed upon concurrently. Therefore, it is not uncommon that he would also require the DRC to first accept the Belhar Confession as an integral part of their confessional basis – that stands firmly on the issue of justice before the establishment of a new church (Buys, 2007:1).

James Buys also states in his document for transitional justice that the "purpose of the war on the part of the opponents of apartheid" was not only a matter of 'defeating the enemy' but a "long-held conviction and commitment to attain conditions conducive to a peaceful settlement of the dispute" (Buys, 1990:106). Therefore, it is evident that Buys and others within the struggle did not believe in violence *per se*, but in 'peaceful settlement'. He made this point explicit in repeating the issue in his paper, and to deconstruct the narrative of violence for the sake of violence itself, that was constructed by the apartheid government to vilify opposition parties. Buys believed that the emphasis was misplaced, and should be rectified

because, within context, this means this kind of resistance (violence) was necessary for the transformation of society and to “secure a negotiated settlement” (Buys, 1990:106). Buys argues that the racist, violent forces of the apartheid government and its policies should be taken into account when the government would sit at the negotiation table with the people of South Africa. In view of this, we are marvelling and reflecting on his address during the TRC hearing in 1997 in East London, in which he mentions that the guilt of URCSA in Human Rights violations and abuses during apartheid was that it did not do enough to bring an end to it – this is URCSA’s guilt! (Buys, 1999:4).

It is known that various political commentators would criticise the deals that were made at CODESA. The acceptance of the ‘neoliberal’ economic system is one of the concessions which James Buys cautioned the liberation movements against even before sitting down with the apartheid government. However, he did not relinquish his fight for economic justice, but still raises the same analysis more than a decade after the negotiated settlement in his reflections as Moderator of URCSA on Isaiah 43 to the Pietermaritzburg synod, “The same principle applies to our consideration of the neo-liberal globalisation of the economy. We often accept what we believe to be the inevitable. We believe that the absence of historical models means the absence of viable models” (Buys, 2005b:217).

### 5.7. A THEOLOGY OF ECONOMIC JUSTICE, DIGNITY AND SHALOM FOR THE VULNERABLE

James Buys’ reliance on the Belhar Confession demonstrates his reading of the Bible in the context of injustice, and structural divisions in church and society.<sup>140</sup> The Belhar Confession, which responded biblically to the issues of the day, also indicates Buys’ hermeneutics of church and society in South Africa. He understood and read the Bible in light of the injustices that permeate the church and society. It also demonstrates why he was

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140 “*Ds. James Buys lewer vervolgens ’n inset in hierdie verband. Hy gee kortliks sy mening oor die belangrike waarde van ’n belydenisskrif vir ’n kerk en oor die redes waarom die Belydenis van Belhar ’n struikelblok geword het in die strewing na eenwording. Hy gee ook bepaalde perspektiewe oor die pad vorentoe*” (Julie, 2001:7).

concerned with the DRC's attitude towards the Belhar Confession because, for him, scriptures have relevance for the contextual challenges at hand (Jackson, 1998). His theology was, therefore, emerging from the trenches of apartheid. It is Koopman that reminisces on Buys' hermeneutics and the contextual nature of the theology he espoused. This, Koopman (2008:14) argues, was inspiring and contagious. In his theology, human beings, their well-being (*shalom*) and their agency in God's mission was non-negotiable – especially the reactions of the DRC towards the confession raises questions for James Buys in terms of their trust in a confession produced by one of the black churches (Jackson, 1998). Buys' activism was not only focused on racism,<sup>141</sup> but also sexism<sup>142</sup> and economic injustice.<sup>143</sup>

Buys reported on the reunification of the DRCA and the DRMC in April 1994:

The amalgamation of the two churches represents a watershed in the history of the DRMC and the DRCA. This union represents a *Kairos* moment in the life of the church in which it departs from apartheid and contradicts the justification of racially divided churches. The event of unification furthermore had great symbolic value given the historical context in which it took place, namely ten days before the first free and democratic elections in South Africa (Meiring, 2019:3) (URCSA 1997:2).

However, it seems that Buys made a close connection between the division in church and society, and the biblical mandate for unity. He went as far as accusing the church of 'disobedience' when the synod would 'halt' the

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141 See particularly his emphasis on the ongoing racism in the new South Africa in his moderator's address in Pietermaritzburg in 2005 which he argues is prevalent in church and society, "Even so we are sorely pressed to find the means to deal with continued class and race dimensions of church and society" (Buys, 2005b:217).

142 James Buys' address as the Moderator of the General Synod to the Gender Policy Workshop of the URCSA held at Mamelodi on 10–11 June 2005.

143 Van Maanen hailed Rev. Buys' crucial role, both in drafting the text of the Accra Declaration (2004) and in the process of the then World Alliance of Reformed Churches (URCSA, 2012:8).



process at some point and based their reasons on financial constraints.<sup>144</sup> The postponement of the founding Synod, he directly related to disobedience to the Word of God, which requires the obedience of the church.<sup>145</sup> He subsequently argued that by undermining the Word of God, and Jesus Christ as Lord, the integrity of the church had been compromised. At the TRC hearing in 1997, he also referred to URCSA's rootedness in the reformed tradition, and its sole reliance on the Scriptures to provide them with the norms of living (Buys, 1999:4).

For Buys, the situation of poverty in South Africa was deeply rooted in people's biblical hermeneutics. Buys' hermeneutic is informed by the conditions of the poor. However, experiencing first-hand the dire poverty which the coloured community in Bergsig (Calitzdorp) had to experience informed his reading of the Bible. He therefore motivated URCSA members, as the Moderator of URCSA, to subscribe to the biblical notion of Jubilee (Buys, 2000:2). He places the cancellation of the debt of developing countries like South Africa within the context of the biblical mandate of the 'year of Jubilee' and encourages URCSA to act on the burden of the poor because of their biblical mandate.<sup>146</sup> It is also apparent in his appeal to URCSA congregations that the outcome of the matter – the cancellation of debt – should be used to the benefit of the poor. Whether it be communities or individuals, it is his biblical mandate on the notion of Jubilee which inspired him to encourage URCSA to act on such a calling and ministry to the poor. It is not a 'pie in the sky bye-bye' kind of transformation, but it is to change and transform the current realities of the poor. The poor were inherently part of his transformation strategies for the church and South Africa.

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144 *"Dit lyk na my oortuiging dat die kerk vanwee praktiese oorwegings, waarvan geld 'n belangrike een is, besluit het dat die saak van eenheid uitgestel kan word. Hierdeur word geld en ander oorwegings na waarde en verpligtinge hoër geag as die skrifopdrag en ons gehoorsaamheid aan Jesus die Heer. Ek oordeel dat die NG Sendingkerk deur hierdie stemming haar boodskap en die geloofwaardigheid van ons daad van belydenis onberekenbaar skade aandoen"* (Buys, 1992).

145 Therefore it is not strange that former Regional Moderator of URCSA Cape synod hailed him as a "disciple of Christ" (Plaatjie, 2012:4).

146 *"Die standpunte van die VGKSA bou ten naaste verband met die begrip dat die kansellering van skulde wesenlike verligting kan bring vir armlande. Verder is die VGKSA dit eens met die onderliggende skrifuitgangspunte wat leun op die jubeljaar in Deuteronomium 25. Die Skrifgedeelte kan nie anders verstaan word as dat die wurggreep en siklus van die skuldless van verarmde lande as saak van dringendheid verbreek moet word nie. Die Jubeljaar staan dan in die teken van n God-geordende oproep wat dien tot lewe vir alma"* (Buys, 2000:2).

Therefore, he cautioned those at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) to keep in mind the ‘exploitation of the poor’. It is commonly known that economic justice was the compromise at those negotiations at the expense of political concessions. Therefore, a decade after Buys insisted in his draft paper on the economic challenges that should be dealt with at CODESA, he raised those issues with his contributions in the ACCRA Declaration as well as in the church.

The trial sermon is one of the highlights for any theological student in which he or she would be licenced shortly after, and it is noted that even with this sermon, he made the poor and the economically exploited in South Africa a priority. James Buys was fond of Scriptural texts that referred to the poor. His text was from Matt. 26:11 which states, after all, Jesus said, “The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me” (Matt. 26:11). He also focused on Deut. 15:11, “For there will never cease to be poor in the land; that is why I am commanding you to open wide your hand to your brother and to the poor and needy in your land.

However, Buys’ reformed theological interpretation of society also informs him that the State is a servant of God that should be of benefit to its subjects. This he based on Romans chapter 13. However, to act against the state is also biblically justified, especially if they divert from its mandate to protect *all* its citizens. The church is obliged to resist any government that contravenes God’s mandate for his people and violating their right to be treated as people created in the image of God (Buys, 1999:4). However, Buys’ reformed theological analysis also allows him to brand the system of apartheid a sin – not only personal and individual sin but the structural nature thereof. Buys’ reformed theology tells him that an unjust economic system should be challenged (Buys, 2005b). Buys opening the Pietermaritzburg synod in 2005, spoke to the synod in his Moderator address on the newness that God provides as the eternal God (Isaiah 43:1-7 and 18-19), but that we are still confronted with the old, particularly referring to the continuous elusive nature of unity and reconciliation, as well as his core theme of economic injustices. He states, “From our reformed perspective of faith we value that understanding that the whole of our lives, all vocation and every means of ordering society are included in God’s eternal plan for creation. And we

speak of the new taking form and eternal newness coming” Then he refers to the ‘old’ that haunts the church:

As agents of this newness we profess our existence to be exemplary of this newness. We seek to manifest newness in unity, yet it remains our unity is fraught with shortcomings and the greater ideal of unity remains elusive. What is the newness we proclaim, the newness we passionately long for when expressing and discharging our calling in unity and reconciliation? We confess newness in justice. Yet, it becomes old through the absence of just and equitable relations within the church. Even so we are sorely pressed to find the means to deal with continued class and race dimensions of church and society, we remain confronted by poverty and inequality and exclusion (Buys, 2005b:217).

Buys’ reformed theology allows him to articulate the neoliberal economic system that is also prevalent in the South African context as a sin. He therefore went beyond the pietistic articulation of sin as personal and inherited and relational, decrying it as a structural sin. His theological interpretation of the economic system is a rejection of such a system, which corresponds more appropriately with the most charismatic church (prosperity gospel) that endorses God that “...blessed prosperity and poverty and disease are the results of God’s disfavour due to disobedience and laziness” (Buys, 2005b:217).<sup>147</sup>

### 5.8. BUYS’ MOBILISATION FOR JUSTICE, RECONCILIATION AND UNITY THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION

James Buys had the skill of bringing all stakeholders from various professions and races to work together, and he had done this quite early in his career already when he was also involved in the amalgamation of

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<sup>147</sup> This is quoted from the WARC’s statement of the ACCRA Declaration that Buys was participating in during its drafting and that he used to affirm his theological position – repudiating the neoliberalist economic system in South Africa during his Moderator address and biblical analysis of Isaiah 43 in Pietermaritzburg in 2005.

the previous student movements, the Association of Christian Students with the white Christian Students' Association, that became known as the Uniting Christian Students Association (Buys, 2012:2), as well as what was previously referred to as the *Ouer Onderwyser Maatskaplike Vereniging* [Parents Education and Social Welfare Organisation]. But his justice and unity also found concreteness in bringing together different role players and those from different churches and occupations to work together to establishing a crèche on the premises of the church and securing overseas funding (Murphy, 2020). He promoted agency among the people in the rural town – which was mostly dependent on subsistence from white people. But through cooperation and collective partnership, they were able to bring unity through actions on a much smaller scale. Rust and Schreiner (2020) remember that within the Presbytery of Wynberg itself, Buys showed himself as a team player.

James Buys, who was also at the forefront of the fight against apartheid, was in no way expressing any bitterness against the injustices that were done during apartheid in South Africa and his own experiences thereof. This is demonstrated in terms of his reaction when the Theological Seminary at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) was in conversation with the University of Stellenbosch (US) to relocate its students to the Faculty of Stellenbosch. He perceived the move of theological training to the Faculty of Theology of Stellenbosch to be a positive one and argued that the interaction between students of both churches would contribute to the structural unity between URCSA and the DRC. He also did not use the Belhar Confession to strain the process and was therefore quite comfortable to move in the same space as those that did not accept the Confession of Belhar. There would be a few individuals that would regard this as a serious compromise and jeopardising the principles of unification that were previously almost cast in stone (Jackson, 1999b:4). However, the contrary is true – that he argued that a united church is one in which all partners should accept the Belhar Confession as part of their confessional basis, and this was for him non-negotiable.<sup>148</sup> At a

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148 He conveyed his disappointment at a meeting 30 August 2007 at the Cape Synod at SA Gestig of the decision of the GS to allow the congregations to arrange working arrangements and become one congregation (DRC and URCSA) and Belhar as optional in such processes.

conference on church unity, held by the presbytery of SA Gestig (Belhar), he refers to his vehement disagreement with the decision of the General Synodical Commission (GSC) of URCSA in 2005, which decided the Belhar Confession should be made optional for the DRC – in the spirit of unity. This might be because his perspective was that for radical reform, the Belhar Confession, which places justice on equal footing with issues of unity and reconciliation, could then easily be circumvented just as what happened with his dreams of economic justice at CODESA.

The relation between church unity processes of the DRCA and DRMC and social cohesion in South Africa is apparent in Van Maanen's response at the James Buys Memorial Lecture, which is to place Buys among the likes of Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak, but moreover the prophets of the Old Testament of the Bible.<sup>149</sup> It is clear that he refers to the silence on James Buys as a prophetic voice in South Africa (URCSA, 2012:8). This provides evident signs to believe that James Buys was a leader who was sensitive to the concerns of the members, and therefore as a true and loyal, faithful servant, he protected the interest of the church when URCSA was threatened to lose their properties (URCSA, 2012:8). His prophetic voice can be heard in his view on economic exploitation and the inequality in South Africa, on the racial division in church and society, and on his insistence of Belhar that would include justice as a core element of radical transformation. He raised his voice when many of his colleagues within the church would settle for the 'option' of Belhar to the DRC when he remained firm in his faith. His voice would not be discernible as with others on the podiums and the forefronts, but he was always among the people in solidarity with the poor, proclaiming the good news to the poor.

Therefore, in his capacity as the Moderator of URCSA, he intentionally facilitated collective action towards the radical change of the livelihood of the poor. He urges URCSA, rather than to act in an individual capacity, to act as a collective and to participate in the collective effort of the

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149 Van Maanen stated, after the death of Buys, "when we look carefully at who made a difference in bringing about change in this country, and the church had not only prophets like Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak, but also many other that stood in the tradition of other Old Testament change agents" (URCSA, 2012:8).

ecumenical church to address the economic burden of the developing countries (Buys, 2000:2).<sup>150</sup> It is known that the most challenging task that Buys had to deal with after the establishment of URCSA was with some of the congregations of the DRCA in the Phororo region that did not attend the founding Synod in April 1994. When certain URCSA ministers requested clarification on their DRCA ministers' status, he advised those ministers to approach the situation and the ministers in a pastoral manner (URCSA, 1995:4).<sup>151</sup> In fact, he attributed the challenge of DRCA ministers who retracted from the URCSA as an economic issue, stated bluntly, "... DRCA's motivation is economic security [black communities, particularly in those provinces cannot afford to support a *dominee* ...]" (Ewing, 2018:292). Therefore, his strategies towards unification in URCSA were never without good, pastoral conversations and deliberations, but also that of obedience to God as an act of faith.

James Buys used his position as leader of congregations (Calitzdorp and Wynberg), as Actuariarius (as shown), and lastly also as Moderator to mobilise Christians and particularly reformed Christians to challenge the issues of unity, reconciliation and justice. We see this in his last Moderator address at the Pietermaritzburg synod – his biblical reflection on Isaiah 43:1-7 – that God's newsness includes imagining unity, reconciliation and justice that would reflect the purpose of the eternal God for the church and society. In this particular reflection, he refers to the richness of his and delegates' own reformed tradition that allows them to reimage the structures in church and society (Buys, 2005b). Therefore, he took the liberty at the TRC hearing to suggest that the 'democratic' government should draft a "report of a civil audit and social comments on the part of the progress in and the promotion of human rights by the authorities". Buys once again pleaded for 'progress' and concrete ways to assess the abuses of human rights. It was, as also within his own draft document of the transitional

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150 Buys states, "*Die betrokkenheid van die VGKSA moet dan veral verstaan en gemik word op die potensiaal om ons bydrae deel te maak van die gesamentlike pogings rondom die afskryf van die skuldias van armlande*".

151 "*Ds. James Buys, Actuariarius van die Algemene Sinode, het die sinode hieroor leiding gegee. Hy het daarna verwoys dat gemeentes waningelig kan wees. Hy het beklemtoon dat pastoraal met die gemeentes omgegaan moet word. 'voor die tyd is die leraars en gemeentes wat wou verenig bang gemaak dat hulle pensioene en salaris in gedrang sou kom*" (URCSA, 1995:4).

political process in South Africa, more than the change of the political face but a change in the livelihoods of the masses in South Africa – the poor.

The achievement of structural unity between the two black churches in 1994 was a struggle, and as some would say, a ‘miracle’, but eventually it came to pass. The negotiations and journey with the DRC are still a contentious issue. Buys had his own strategy, but was more ‘principled’<sup>152</sup> in his strategic approach on issues of transformation. One of his colleagues, Averell Rust (2020), would attest to his leadership on the University of the Western Cape’s (UWC) campus, which was in a certain sense different from the skills of both Leonardo Appies and Russel Botman, who were the prominent student leaders at the time. While the latter were better orators, Buys would be the one that most of the students and colleagues went to for advice, and in whose hostel room strategic moves and tactics would be discussed in terms of how to approach the system of apartheid, which – some would attest – would be indebted to the wisdom and insight from James Buys.<sup>153</sup>

### 5.9. HIS EMBODIMENT OF BELHAR, OBEDIENCE TO GOD, AND A BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY

Buys was inspired by the Bible and the biblical call for unity. In July 1995, he was ministering on unity in the context of 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, and explained in relation to the biblical text what constitutes genuine unity and the implications of the biblical text for the congregations of URCSA to embody and give shape and form to unity on grassroots level (URCSA, 1995b:5). However, he made it clear that the unity of the church and the Holy Spirit cannot be divorced from each other. This was appropriate during the Pentecost Sunday where the focus was on the Spirit.

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152 A good example is during the moderation meeting 15 June 1991 in which Russell Botman and James Buys had a great difference in opinion with the other two, Nick Apollis and A Botha, and both of the former would resign. However, after a request of Apollis and Botha requested to reconsider, Buys would be adamant that he would not change his mind while Russell Botman later withdrew his resignation (NGSK, 1991a:1-6).

153 Rust (2020) recalls, “*Leonardo, Russell en James was student leiers, maar James was nie so op die voorgrond nie, maar was die meester-brein agter alles ...*”

Buy's demonstrated a spirituality of unity (Boshoff, 1996:7).<sup>154</sup> He was adamant that all congregations of the DRC family should unite and not only URCSA with the DRC. He was not willing to settle with the DRC for reconciliation and unity whilst others like the remnants of the DRCA and the RCA were left 'standing in the cold' (Boshoff, 1996:7).<sup>155</sup> Therefore, when the DRCA was refusing to unite, he did not see the process of unification within the DRC family as the easy way out (Jackson, 2003a:8). He could often be located in the company of black, white, coloured, Indian, and in terms of class, the middle-class as well as the poorest of the poor. His activities showed cooperation with all, without prejudices. Buy's demonstrated signs of hope that the DRC family would unite and reconcile, and therefore became part of a regional initiative (convent) between the two churches to catalyse church unity on a national level (Jackson, 1999b:5).

Furthermore, reconciliation, he argued, is a biblical mandate. If this would not be achieved, it would raise questions on the credibility of the church. He was on a journey in very practical ways with his brothers and sisters from the other 'sister' churches and rooted his commitment towards such a task within the biblical mandate of Scripture.<sup>156</sup> It is apparent that his spirituality towards unity and reconciliation was so strongly rooted that he was willing to sacrifice his position for such a cause (Buy's, 1992).<sup>157</sup> It seems that through his ongoing effort and quest for unity, in particular, his congregation in

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154 Rev. James Buys and Leonardo Appies had a debate with Rev. Fritz Gaum and Rev. Cobus van der Westhuizen on church unity at a student leadership conference with over 80 student leaders in Stellenbosch in December 1995 (Boshoff, 1996:7).

155 Rev. James Buys and Leonardo Appies had a debate with Rev. Fritz Gaum and Rev. Cobus van der Westhuizen on church unity at a student leadership conference with over 80 student leaders in Stellenbosch in December 1995 (Boshoff, 1996:7).

156 *"Dit lyk na my oortuiging dat die kerk vanwee praktiese oorwegings, waarvan geld 'n belangrike een is, besluit het dat die saak van eenheid uitgestel kan word. Hierdeur word geld en ander oorwegings na waarde en verpligtinge hoër geag as die skrifopdrag en ons gehoorsaamheid aan Jesus die Heer. Ek oordeel dat die NG Sendingkerk deur hierdie stemming haar boodskap en die geloofwaardigheid van ons daad van belydenis onberekenbaar skade aandoen"* (Buy's, 1992).

157 This is what James Buys wrote at his resignation as Actuarij of the DRMC, *"Dit lyk na my oortuiging dat die kerk vanwee praktiese oorwegings, waarvan geld 'n belangrike een is, besluit het dat die saak van eenheid uitgestel kan word. Hierdeur word geld en ander oorwegings na waarde en verpligtinge hoër geag as die skrifopdrag en ons gehoorsaamheid aan Jesus die Heer. Ek oordeel dat die NG Sendingkerk deur hierdie stemming haar boodskap en die geloofwaardigheid van ons daad van belydenis onberekenbaar skade aandoen"* (Buy's, 1992).



Wynberg with the DRC Wynberg demonstrates not only his commitment to Belhar but his faith in God who would ultimately make unity a reality. Buys really lived Belhar as embodied through his own action – not as a strategy, but a confession of faith (Boesak, 1986:282).

He had challenges like many other ministers within his ministry (Barnard, 2008:2). Nonetheless, he still held his head high and continued, after his terms on General Synodical level, within his congregation and partnerships with other DRC congregations and sought an authentic unification with church and broader society – as also attested to by his wife, Angela. At the funeral, during the eulogy, she stated that her husband was faithful to his commitment to see the new dawn realising within the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) family (URCSA, 2012:8).<sup>158</sup>

### ***5.9.1. James Buys and the debate around the URCSA founding Synod (1990–1994)***

Buys had his strong sentiments on the unity process and was not reluctant to raise those concerns with his colleagues. He was adamant that there was no reason to delay the establishment of URCSA during a synod meeting scheduled for 17–21 June 1991, and that a move to postpone that founding Synod would strengthen the sentiments of those parties within the two churches that resisted the amalgamation of the two churches (NGSK, 1991a:4).<sup>159</sup> Nevertheless, when the moderamen meeting on 17 February 1992 received the votes from the congregations and there was not a two-thirds majority to continue with the founding Synod for church unity during that year (1992), Buys tendered his resignation (NGSK, 1992:7).<sup>160</sup> In a protest that the moderator, Nick Apollis, did

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158 Angela Buys stated at the Annual memorial lecture of James Buys on 9 September 2012, “I was always amazed at James’ genuine faith, his good analysis of the Bible, and his understanding of what was happening in the church and the world. His belief was: Always give the other person the benefit of the doubt, it saves one from becoming judgemental” (URCSA, 2012:8).

159 Buys stated, “*Die effek van uitstel dieselfde sal wees as die bedoeling van partye wat kerkeenheid teenstaan, aldus dat dit alleen kan geskied wanneer die NGK gereed is om te verenig*” (NGSK, 1991a:4).

160 In point seven, it states the following regarding Buys’ resignation, “*Nou kondig Ds. Buys sy bedanking aan uit die moderatuur en alle ander kommissies waarin hy ampsshalwe dien. Terwyl die voorsitter wag om die bedanking in ontvangs te neem, maak Ds. Botman erg beswaar oor die wyse waarop die voorsitter die bedanking hanteer en verlaat hy uit protes die vergadering*” (NGSK, 1992:7).

not handle his resignation well, Russel Botman, who was also against the postponement of the founding Synod for church unity, left the meeting on 17 February 1992 (NGSK, 1992b). However, Buys was again allowed to state his motivation for his resignation. He could not come to grips with the idea that the founding Synod would be postponed, because he argued that, in that year, it was the most ideal reconcilable (*‘versoenende’*) moment. However, because the two moderation members, Nick Apollis, as well as Andries Botha, were consistent in their views for postponement and the backing of a two-thirds majority, James Buys, when asked to reconsider his resignation during the second meeting 27 February 1992, made a final decision to maintain his resignation and left the meeting of 11 March 1992 (NGSK, 1992b:3).<sup>161</sup>

James Buys was therefore indeed disappointed at the postponement of the founding synod in 1991, which ultimately led to his resignation. His quest to reconcile with his brothers and sisters was a robust and internal urge to break down those structures of separation. These would be issues that he would passionately fight for. His vision materialised that, within the interim of 1991-1994, the anticipation and hope grew between members in the congregations. *Die Ligdraer* reports that, in that interim period, the bond developed between the two churches and representatives from both churches (DRCA and DMC) were able to see each other as family, as brothers and sisters, pray together and sing together (NGSK, 1993). Buys argued that his resignation was not only for ‘practical reasons’ (the finances or logistics) but became a matter of faith (NGSK, 1992a:2).<sup>162</sup> One wonders whether Buys was indeed of the argument that faith should urge the church to adapt its church order and, therefore, when he had to choose, it was indeed ‘faith’

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161 The minutes of the moderation on 27 February 1992 state in point 4.4.4, “*Ds. Buys maak nou bekend dat hy om die redes wat hy reeds verstrek het nie met sy gewete sal kan saamleef as die eenheid verder uitgestel word nie, en hy volstaan met sy bedanking*” (NGSK, 1992b:3).

162 The minutes of 11 March state in point 3, “*Ds. Buys volstaan met sy bedanking aangesien dit nie maar om praktiese redes geskied nie, maar by hom n geloofsoortuiging is*” (NGSK, 1992a:2).

before the ‘church order’. Maybe more clearly stated: ‘obedience’ to God! His faith indeed made him an excellent reformed Christian (NGSK, 1994:6).<sup>163</sup>

## 5.10. CONCLUSION

This chapter underscores James Buys’ faith and his faithfulness to his calling towards God’s mission on earth (*missio Dei*) and to change the church and society through his engagements with the political, ecclesial, and societal (socio-economic) issues of the day. He was a humble and faithful servant who would choose to engage and interact, and journey with the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalised. He chose a faith that would work towards unity with justice as its twin-brother. The chapter also demonstrates his contribution towards a fundamental change in the praxis and confession and culture of the two amalgamated churches (DRMC and DRCA).

The chapter demonstrates his embodiment of Belhar through his participation in the writing of the ACCRA Declaration, and his refusal to succumb to pressure from the apartheid government at the negotiation table, especially in terms of economic justice. Belhar was embodied in his praxis and, therefore, he would agree with the General Synodical Commission (GSC) in 2005 that the DRC should practice the values of Belhar, but that he strongly disagreed that it should be made optional. It is in this regard that James Buys argued that the Belhar Confession needs more than ‘lip-service’. It required obedience and faith. His life attested that as much as he was Actuarial and Moderator, he was deeply involved at the grassroots – a humble person, as many would describe him – but also someone who would have a listening ear for the cry of the masses, the vulnerable and the poor.

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163 The Editorial of *Die Ligdraer* states, faith above church order, “Tydens die komende sinode gaan van ons verwag word om, in die lig van ons belydenis van ons geloof oor die eenheid van die kerk, ons kerke aan te pas”.

This chapter also shows James Buys' visionary leadership and how he would see (faith) the future of the church,<sup>164</sup> irrespective of the current realities and stumbling blocks. He would be calm and strategic – assuring his followers that there should be a way around it. It was his faith that led him to step out of a moderation meeting when he believed that unification would become a 'pipe dream'. Therefore, it was also his faith that made him table a proposal at his own Presbytery of Wynberg for his church and that of the DRC Wynberg to become one structurally united congregation, despite the sentiments of his colleagues that something like that would be impossible. Perhaps the church order challenges on the issue were clear, but also his vision that Unity should come, and that it should be now! This relates to one of his colleagues in the presbytery of Zoar, who would remember him for his visionary leadership, and introduce and expose younger colleagues in the ministry to platforms and engage issues that would transform their worldviews. He was a leading figure in the *Suidkaap Raad van Kerke* that would still have buildings and resources in Oudtshoorn until today (Boezak, 2020).<sup>165</sup> There were certain things that 'coloured' people would not be exposed to, and he was that 'resource' for many (Van Maanen, 2020). For instance, one of his friends would recall how he would guide them in acquiring a firearm which, for them during the apartheid years, was mostly an asset that was reserved for white people, but he allowed them to envisage things differently. He instilled in people a sense of "*Ek kan dit ook doen!*" [I can also do it!] (Boezak, 2020). He allowed them to cross boundaries which were not allowed during the apartheid years, because of his courage, and fearless leadership (even willing to go to prison).<sup>166</sup> As Van Maanen (2020) would attest, "He wanted to empower people by staying close to them and to open doors and prospects for them". Makue (2020) reminisces, "He traversed beyond comfort zones in endeavours to make friends ... lovingly accepted and embraced people who

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164 See also Rev. Plaatjie's memory of Buys, delivered at his memorial lecture, "He had the vision to see things before they happened" (Plaatjie, 2012:4). Averill Rust would attest to his visionary leadership also in the Presbytery of Wynberg, where he spent his last few years of ministry.

165 Interview with Andre Boezak on 17 September 2020.

166 Interview with Andre Boezak and Poem Mooney on 17 September 2020.

live on the margins of society. Even his choice of friends at UWC was informed by the marginalised social status of the incumbent”.

However, the chapter also showcases his prophetic analysis of the South African society in which the issue of economic justice becomes more and more forced on the table of those that benefited from a skewed negotiated settlement in politics at CODESA, which left the poor in the ‘cold’. The contribution of James Buys allows us to reflect on the reasons for the continued suffering of the poor and the emergence of a new black elite that would not take heed of the challenges of the poor. James Buys was never dragged into party-politics but remained a voice for the downtrodden and the marginalised, even when the broader church would be accused of becoming prophetically ‘voiceless’ in a post-apartheid South African context. Therefore, he also remained critical of the new ‘democratic’ government that he calls for the establishment of organisations and institutions that will act as ‘watchdogs’ of the State (Buys, 1999:7). Therefore, it would be fitting to close with his words:

I always tried to be sensitive to where people were at. My motto was always, as a leader, you shouldn’t move too far from the people – otherwise, you may run while they are still falling (cf. Ewing, 2018:76-77).

A luta continua!

CHAPTER 6

THE MISSIONAL LEADERSHIP  
OF URCSA'S CONSTITUTING  
MODERATURE (1994)



Figure 29: First URCSA Moderature members with Dr Beyers Naudé

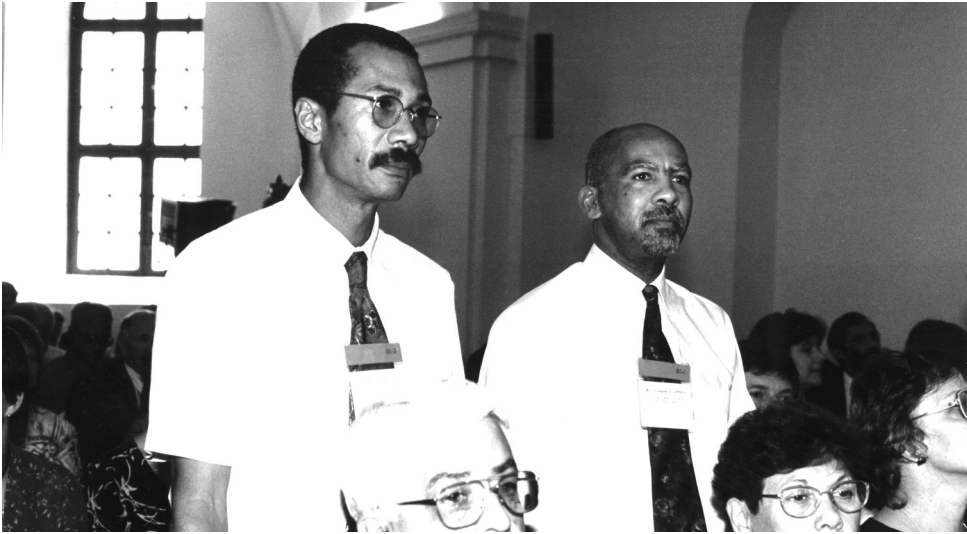
## 6.1. INTRODUCTION

The missional church discourse in South Africa has been adequately documented (see Pillay 2015; Niemandt, 2012). The edited volume of Burger and Mouton (2017) makes a good contribution indeed in terms of the missional church movement and its reception by the Dutch Reformed church in South Africa. However, little has been said about the signs of such a praxis within the process of unification between two black churches (DRMC and DRCA) that were established in April 1994. This chapter therefore reflects on the four moderation members: Nick Apollis (Moderator), Sam Buti (Assessor), James Buys (Actuarius) and Leonardo Appies (Scribe synodii) as the members of the constituting moderation in 1994 and sheds light on how they could be regarded as missional leaders even before missiologists in South Africa would come to embrace such a notion and discourse locally. In this chapter, the authors focus on the themes that emerge through the analysis of all four moderation members and how they negotiated a process of unification between two ethnic, race-based churches, focusing on their agency, their contextual and theological/missiological hermeneutics and their strategies to transform church and society. Though in the previous four chapters the authors of the book dealt in detail with each of the four individually, as a moderation, these personalities' contributions as a whole would provide a holistic and comprehensive reflection of them as part of the first moderation of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) and the praxis of missional leadership. It would also provide their different lenses on society as a more holistic perspective on issues on the table of two black churches. What were their theological lenses, and the kind of spirituality that they espoused that we are able to facilitate change of the church towards unification? In discussing these, the authors will compare their praxis with current theological discourse – in some cases also related to the future of URCSA beyond its 25-year celebration. It would also place their contributions in the context of the 25 years of democracy in South Africa after the first democratic elections that took place in the same month as the establishment of URCSA.

## 6.2. A DEEP ROOTEDNESS IN COMMUNITIES NEEDING ECUMENISM AND LIBERATION

The previous four chapters indeed demonstrate their rootedness in various communities – on university campuses (of the left), in townships, and within rural towns (like Calitzdorp) – these members were identifying and were in solidarity with the plight and cries of their communities. This brings to mind Buys' words, "as a leader, you should not move far from the people", but also Apollis' consultative approach as part of his church leadership style, and Appies' involvement with different forums and boards in the West Coast, as well as Buti's involvement with the concerns and developments of the Alexandra township. These communities were, among others, the congregations in which they served as servant leaders, and communities that have a shared history of oppression and marginalisation (DRCA and other black churches). Still, they had the courage to engage with communities that have a different account from their own (DRC) and that were enforcing the racial ideological position of the national government. These are communities which they sought to work with irrespective of race, ethnicity, class or gender. These members were enculturating the gospel in their context. They were close to their communities in order to understand the struggles that they were faced with. However, these engagements were about more than to understand these communities, but also to engage with them on the critical issues of the day. These communities could also be regarded as 'epistemic' communities, in which knowledge about experiences had been brought within the public domains and was valued by these members. This was why they could mobilise and advocate for the reconstruction of church and society. These members regarded the grassroots communities as being of epistemological value that was needed to deconstruct the dominant narrative of domination and white supremacy that had been deeply entrenched and embedded in policies and practice of both societies but also churches and denominations during the apartheid years.





**Figure 30: James Buys and Leonardo Appies at an Ecumenical Meeting abroad**

Furthermore, these members were demonstrating their ecumenical involvement<sup>167</sup> within the South African context, as well as abroad. Herewith, we think of their participation in the Kairos Movement in South Africa and the participation of one of them in the drafting and discussions on the ACCRA Declaration. Documents of the latter were focused on the economic emancipation of developing countries, including South Africa, and these members were supporting such documents while at the same time seeking unity with the Dutch Reformed Church. Some of these members would subscribe to the Kairos Document, although there were fierce debates on whether the means of achieving liberation (violence) is biblically supported. Therefore, the DRMC synod itself voted against embracing such a document within the church (DRMC, 1987b). However, the colleagues worked with various faith and religious leaders, for instance, Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Anglican), Frank Chikane (Apostolic Faith Mission), Farid Essack (Muslim), *et cetera*. Organisations such as the SACC, the confessing circle on the Christian front, were some of the ecumenical engagements and forums that these members would participate in and support. This could not have been different from Reformed church

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167 All of them were also ecumenically involved: Buys (Accra), Appies (West Coast Council of Churches) Sam Buti (SACC).

leaders who would also be confessed through the Apostolic faith to belong to a 'Holy, Catholic Church'. These members were demonstrating it through cross-dialogue with different faith traditions and persuasions. In fact, for those such as Buys and Appies, the University of the Western Cape had students from various denominations and faiths. Still, they were in conversation with most of them and had shown solidarity with them when mobilising protests and marches against the apartheid laws of the country at the time.

Their ecumenical involvement also stretched beyond the boundaries of South Africa, but with well-established relationships with colleagues and friends of the church in various countries around the world. For instance, James Buys was one of the grantees of the Christian Fellowship Trust (CLF), an organisation that was led by Beyers Naudé and his wife, Ilze, from which many black ministers with the DRCA and DRMC benefited through being exposed to the European context. Some received training, but most of them would become transforming agents of church and society in South Africa. On their arrival back, they would form part of the *Broederkring/Belydende Kring* as a platform and a continuous 'think tank' for reflection on the situation in South Africa as theologians. There were some of them who were offered scholarships to study abroad,<sup>168</sup> and some of them built networks abroad with those that were in solidarity with their plight for the abolishment of apartheid. Colleagues like Gert van Maanen in the Netherlands could be mentioned and various others that supported the course of a non-racial society in South Africa.

These members were also deeply connected with other liberation movements and organisations, like the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the United Democratic Front (UDF). They had some relationships with politicians like Nelson Mandela, Ebrahim Rasool and others that came in leadership positions after 1994. These four had been in conversation

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168 Angela, James Buys' wife, mentioned that he was offered a scholarship in 1979 to study abroad, but turned it down, and rather accepted the call to become a minister in a rural township (Calitzdorp), where people were struggling to make ends meet (Buys, 2012:3). In a similar vein, Appies would also turn down a position to become a lecturer at University – that would bring him to be more in-touch with the people at the grassroots again.

with the former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, and one of them, Apollis, was also invited to open parliament with prayer during the inauguration of cabinet members of the first democratic government in South Africa. The draft paper of Buys (1990) in which he sets out the process of negotiations in South African politics is one of the remarkable means through which he and others, through similar documents, made a substantial contribution to the South African society and politics in South Africa.

This section reflected on their involvement in various communities, and not only the ecclesial or their own denomination or faith tradition, but also the political sphere in which they were connected and in dialogue with different individuals. This has been raised by Bevans and Schroeder (2004:357-360) who argue that Christians should become involved, explore, and be enriched by the context and by the 'other'. This has been well executed by these members who embodied the 'prophetic dialogue' that missiologists like Bevans and Schroeder refer to in their seminal work.

### 6.3. DISCERNMENT OF THE CHALLENGES IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

These members' deep rootedness in various communities exposed them to various contexts, traditions, systems and beliefs and ideological positions that made them discern the times exceptionally well. Their various hermeneutical lenses and the hermeneutical keys that they provided their communities with and whom they engaged, allowed them to respond appropriately to the challenges that the members in the church and society had to confront at the time. These members were able to still hold dear their core beliefs and reformed faith, but at the same time, to be in communion and dialogue with the changing context (cf. Bevans and Schroeder, 2004:357-360). Their context analysis told them that the issues at stake, both during the apartheid years as well as post-apartheid, included issues of economic injustice and exploitation, the devastation of racism in society, and the devastating effects of the apartheid system on the nature of churches in South Africa. Though these moderate members would raise salient issues that would challenge the well-being of society, it is apparent that the Belhar Confession, with its three pillars, served as distinctive hermeneutical keys for them in

their discernment on what was happening in society. Their hermeneutical lenses were primarily based on the Belhar Confession's three pillars, namely unity, justice and reconciliation. In fact, Conradie (2015:2) locates one of the members, Leonardo Appies, as one of the students in 1978 who would respond to Prof. Jaap Du Rand's question: "What is theologically wrong with Apartheid?" This brought about the epistemological insight that "the policy of segregation assumed the fundamental irreconcilability of people". This paved the way for the formulation of the Belhar Confession. Conradie (2015:2) states, "A deputation from the class then submitted a resolution to the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church that was about to meet at that time. This resolution was accepted by the synod, and this prepared the way to the declaration of a status *confessionis* and the acceptance of a concept confession at the Belhar synod in 1982 and the final acceptance of the Confession of Belhar in 1986". Though in many instances the confession is mainly attributed to the DRMC synod, as well as those that wrote it eventually, the UWC class and the discussions on the campus during the 1980s when Appies and Buys also played key roles, cannot be ignored. Mackue also locates James Buys' special interest in the Belhar Confession:

The DRMC had its Synod in Belhar while James was in his final year of study. I jumped for joy when he invited me to accompany him to the Synod. As visitors, we were seated in the 'mother's room'. James' face showed how much he valued the opportunity to be present – even in the background. The idea of the Belhar Confession was first mentioned at this Synod. It didn't mean much to me until James explained its importance. He was obviously excited and prayerfully hopeful that the following Synod would be able to decide on the matter.

These members were concerned about the unity in the church and society. They did not only seek spiritual unity but organic and structural unity. Placing these leaders as the first moderation of the founding synod of URCSA, already attests to their interest in unity and unification of their own denomination, but their efforts in seeking for unity also beyond their own races with the DRC family demonstrates that the effects of segregation and the exclusion of others in church and society was a matter of concern.

Therefore, the issue of greater unity of URCSA was always on the agenda of the church. Working committees were established to understand the issues that were impeding the unification process with all the other churches in the DRC family. This was, for instance, observed in Buys' report of URCSA to the TRC (Buys, 1997), but also the moderator's (Apollis) regular columns in *Die Ligdraer* on the factors that thwart the unification between the DRC and URCSA.<sup>169</sup>

It was their view that the issue of unification in the church is that of radical discipleship. This also has to be initiated and steered by the leaders (cf. Apollis), which these four not only articulated but would demonstrate through their exemplary leadership styles. It is within the context of the slogan during the 1980s, "The Church – The Site of Struggle".<sup>170</sup> Through this, Buys explained that apartheid was felt within the church and, therefore, the burden and responsibility was placed upon them within the black church to re-imagine the nature thereof. Hence, the authors argues that these moderate members were part of re-imagining the church in the South African context (cf. Baron & Maponya, 2020).<sup>171</sup> Therefore, Buys' statement is quite remarkable, "The slogan led to the realisation that the same contradictions that are prevalent in society are present and often reflected in the teaching and life of the church" (Buys, 1999:3). It is evident in their analysis that the situation that was prevalent in society was a mirror of the separation and discrimination within the confines of the church. That the ideologies are embodied by churches and are reflected especially in the policies of the Dutch Reformed church and the 'mission churches' in South Africa, was a heuristic key for understanding the responses of their members to issues within the church and society at the time.

It should also be remembered that these members, being witnesses of the vicious system of apartheid, were keenly aware of the extensive political

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169 The following are some of the references to the moderator's articles before and after the unification in which he addresses the issue of unification in the church (cf. Apollis, 1991c); (cf. Apollis, 1991); (cf. Apollis, 1994b); (cf. Apollis, 1997).

170 See Buys' TRC reporting at the hearing in East London (Buys, 1999:3).

171 See the argument of Baron and Maponya (2020) on the reimagining of the church in the article, "The recovery of the prophetic voice of the church: The adoption of a 'missional church' imagination".

drive of the policy on 'separate development' in South Africa. This was not only a matter of separate development but of racist ideologies and white supremacy (cf. Buys, 1999) which showed its head in the church of Jesus Christ. It is evident in their analysis that they were convinced that the matter of apartheid was a challenge of white racism and white supremacy. These members were not misinformed about the issue of racism, because they experienced it first-hand – all being members of churches that were created as a result of the racist apartheid policies, all studied at institutions established for blacks, as well as their own families who stayed in areas classified as black townships. These members proclaimed the contents of Belhar – unity, reconciliation and justice – as a 'no' to the very racist policies that the apartheid government proclaimed as the 'good news' (of separate development). Whereas the DRC would support the policies and 'separate development' as 'good news', these four were leading the church to repudiate those notions. In these issues, it was also crucial for them as moderation members to reconcile members that were long estranged from each other through the policies of segregation in church and society under the years of apartheid. These members were involved in reconciliation directly after the unification in 1994, when these members decided to handle the situation pastorally with ministers and congregations in the Free State that decided not to become part of URCSA. It was also Apollis who encouraged interaction with congregations from different ethnic backgrounds, and someone like Buys demonstrated it through facilitating an arrangement ('convent') between his congregation (URCSA Wynberg) with another white congregation (DRC Wynberg) which was the first of its kind in the entire Dutch Reformed Church family. Therefore, in this case, Buys was the trailblazer in making small 'reconciliatory events' happen, which was an idea that started with his predecessor (Russel Botman) in the URCSA Wynberg congregation.

Conradie (2013:14-17) argues that the concept of reconciliation in South Africa has lost its 'staying power' as it has become disputed with words such as 'true' and 'authentic' (reconciliation), as if the word on its own does not have power anymore. However, he argues that this contention has in most cases to do with the argument that, within the notion (reconciliation) and processes, there is a lack of justice and that undermines the authenticity

thereof. It is, however, observable in the analysis of these moderation members that the issues of justice should be at the core of reconciliation. Therefore, the notions of ‘fairness’ and ‘equality’ were some of the words that are prevalent in their work and life. The notion of justice was how they approached issues within the church, as well as judging matters within the South African society. In terms of issues of justice, the matters of economic justice (Buys)<sup>172</sup> and social justice (Appies) were particularly emphasised. There are some issues that were crucial for these moderation members in the pursuit of transformation in the church (mainly DRC Family), but also in society. Buys was in agreement with Apollis that ‘reconciliation’ is essential. However, he would accentuate more vehemently than others in support of issues of justice, particularly economic justice and that this was an issue that could not be negotiated, because his solidarity with the masses told him that the poor would again be at the worse end of politics in South Africa (Buys, 1990) if the masses were not the essential interlocutors in charting a new way forward in the ‘new’ democratic South Africa. Buys, for instance, engaged the issue of the neoliberal economic system in which the then-emerging elite class would benefit at the expense of the poor. Appies with his ‘black economic empowerment’ projects was convinced that this was what the new society needed to accelerate as part of its broader focus on levelling inequality in South Africa.

#### 6.4. A REFORMED, MISSIONAL, BLACK, PROPHETIC AND RECONSTRUCTION THEOLOGY

It is evident that there is a strong connection and engagement with their Reformed tradition and theology. This can be observed in their responses to challenges in the church – specifically with the unification process, as well as with the transitional processes in the South African society. The most salient point that most of these members would make is to encourage members to be obedient to scripture and God. Their espousing of the Belhar Confession, and the insistence that it should be part of the new church, reveals their commitment to the Reformed Faith and tradition.

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172 See, for instance, the following documents in which Buys addresses issues of economic justice (Buys, 2000; Buys, 1990).

Their sermons provided a biblical basis for unity, reconciliation and justice in the church and the South African context. Their mere acceptance and promotion of the Belhar Confession show their commitment towards the Bible because the confession was to amplify that apartheid is a sin. In Buys' report to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), he accentuates that the *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) informs their norms for living and URCSA's basis within the reformed tradition (Buys, 1999:4). We also see Buys' reference at the TRC hearing to the Reformed perspective on the role of governments, as has been also argued by Boesak (1984a:93), that though God instituted the government, it should not be followed blindly, but should act *just* and serve as the *legitimate* administration of the world. Therefore, to be God's servant, it should act "as a shepherd of the people" (Ezek. 34) (Boesak, 1984a:92). It is interesting that James Buys had the same arguments as part of URCSA's report to the TRC in 1997 when he delivered it (Buys, 1999).

The role of the Reformed Faith in the struggle for justice is well framed by Allan Boesak during the time of apartheid, specifically his collection of contributions in the book *Black and Reformed* (Boesak, 1984c). As clergy in the DRMC/URCSA himself, and them *all* being ordained ministers at the time, being aware and exposed to these theological and radical reformed positions of Boesak, can vouch for the fact that their reformed tradition also provided them with the necessary means to counter the heinous system of apartheid at the time. Boesak explains what Christians believe who espouse Black Theology:

[Those] black Christians knew that the gospel of Jesus Christ does not deny the struggle for black humanity and it was from this light from God's word that they went into the struggle, both within the church and outside it. And it is this understanding that today inspires many black Christians in their search for authentic humanity and a true Christian church.

The quotation above shows that Boesak himself takes the Bible as a Reformed theologian seriously when engaging the issues of black Christians in South Africa. It is in this sense that one can never divorce Reformed



theology from the situation (context) of black people in South Africa who are reading the bible with the context which can be expected from loyal, faithful reformed Christians as well.

It is these members that would employ the same Reformed tradition to argue and confess unity, reconciliation and justice through a radical engagement with the apartheid and post-apartheid context. It is Boesak (1984a:83-86) that refers to the contradictions within the Reformed tradition in South Africa, for example, the endorsement of apartheid, slavery, and everything that goes with the structuring of an unjust system in South Africa. He argues not that the God of the Bible has changed, but that those reformed Christians at the time have been guilty of proclaiming a pseudo-gospel (Boesak, 1984a:86). This caused him to ask, in 1981, "Does the Reformed tradition have a future in South Africa?" (Boesak, 1984a:87). This could happen when the Word of God, which in the Reformed tradition is regarded as supreme, is being freed from manipulation to "suit culture, prejudices or ideology" (1984a:87). Secondly, to advocate the Lordship of Jesus Christ, over all spheres of life, excludes often those spaces that we regard as the 'world' (economics, politics, social) for most pietistic Christians (1984a:88). Black Reformed Christians should vehemently reject the notion that they should stay out of 'politics'.<sup>173</sup> More importantly, Boesak (1984a:89) argues that Reformed Christians believe that they are human beings that should take responsibility for it. "It is a world made by us, and we are capable of making it different" (Boesak, 1984a:89). He argues that though the Reformed tradition has accepted the 'sinfulness' and institutionalised it, black Christians should not accept it as their fate but should challenge it (Boesak, 1984a:89). Then, he notes, important that the situation of the poor, issues of social justice was of paramount importance for the 'father' of the Calvinist tradition of the Reformed faith, of which these members were proud adherents. He quotes one of Calvin's statements, "The Lord recommends to us ... that we may insofar as everyone's resources admit, afford help to the needy, so that there may not be some in affluence, and others in need" (cf. Boesak, 1984a:89). Then he concludes, "It is tragic that the reformer's (Calvin) concern for social

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173 This has reference to politics in South Africa in general and not be equated with 'party-politics', but the general political landscape and issues and challenges that South Africans were facing.

justice is not reflected in the policies of all those who claim spiritual kinship with him. South African history might have been different if white Reformed Christians in South Africa had taken his word on human solidarity seriously: "The name neighbour extends indiscriminately to every man because the whole human race is united by a sacred bond of fellowship ...". He cites Beyers Naudé as a true representative of the Reformed tradition because he sided with the "poor and the oppressed in South Africa" (Boesak, 1984a:94).

This almost automatically leads us to the four moderation members' embodiment of black theology. However, what Boesak does not adequately address in his work *Black and Reformed*, but is also crucial in Reformed theology is the doctrine of sin. The reformed perspective on sin is based on the argument that all human beings are inherently corrupt (*corruptio totalis*). However, it also articulates sin as systemic and structural. Nevertheless, although both are central to reformed theology, it is the latter – the systemic nature of sin – that has often been a cause of great concern, even noticeable in Boesak's arguments above that the pietistic manner in which the challenges in society, in particular racism, has been dealt with is almost the default response to it from reformed members. However, in terms of these four, one observes an open attack on the heinous system of apartheid, but also in terms of Buys' presentation at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), this could be observed clearly – a critique against the current post-apartheid government of the day. Buys would focus specifically on the 'neoliberal' system in his draft on the 'transition' process in South Africa in 1990-1994, which indeed has become a grave concern for the ecumenical church, and therefore Buys was not only concerned about those in leadership, and addresses personal wrongdoing but also the economic system that would curtail the dream of complete economic liberation for the poor in South Africa.

It is almost natural to concede that these members, adopting the Belhar Confession, argued that more was needed than reconciliation between them, but that the structure of the church needed to be restructured because it perpetuated the sinful ideology of racism in the church at large. Being part of such a move is the clear adoption of the notion that sinful structures and systems would bind members to be bound to the devastating effect of the sin of racism. This would indeed be why someone like Buys in his 'draft of the

transition process' would indeed address the fact that the issue is not that the political faces would replace the previous government but the change in the systemic issues that would benefit the poor. Therefore, he continues to place on the table – more than ten years after the abolishment of apartheid – the proposal that there should be 'checks and balances' for the post-apartheid government in terms of systemic reforms. He argued that society as a whole is responsible and complicit for apartheid and racism.<sup>174</sup>

Moe-Lobeda (2013:258) describes how structural sin operates, "... one might grow in moral goodness in personal life, while yet continue in paths of structural evil because one does not recognise that evil for what it is; structural evil hides". Nolan (1988:89) focuses on the pervasive and structural nature of sin. Therefore, it was more than just bringing perpetrators to account, as has been observed at the Truth and Reconciliation proceedings, but simultaneously destroying the system that keeps it intact.

The system [apartheid] was created by numerous human beings in innumerable ways. There were those who made the policy decisions along the way; there were those who supported and worked for the system; there were those whose greed, arrogance and hypocrisy made them fanatical architects of the system, and there were those who committed the great sins of omission by remaining silent and doing nothing to change the course of events. We can even point to those among the oppressed who did not join in the resistance but became passive accomplices in their oppression. We can look back and see generations of sinners behind this system stretching back beyond South Africa and beyond colonialism into the distant past.

Though their reformed theology was able to assist them in identifying the structural sin, it becomes apparent in the study on the four moderation members that they were exposed to and espoused Black Liberation Theology (BLT). For instance, in Buys' draft on transition processes in South Africa, his articulation that political violence could serve as a means

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174 See Buys' response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

to ensure for complete liberation in South Africa is an interesting case in point (Buys, 1990:106). The (political) cause would therefore justify the means.<sup>175</sup> There is, therefore, a clear association between some of them with the principles and theological undergirding of the Kairos Document (KD). The analysis of the texts of these moderation members makes evident that they were constantly engaging with the biblical texts and the 'situation of blackness' in South Africa (cf. Boesak, 1984a:20). Black Theology, Boesak asserts, engages the "... unavoidable context within which the theological reflection of black Christians takes place" (Boesak, 1984a:20). It is evident in their struggle for the emancipation of the black church through the adoption of the Belhar Confession, as well as becoming an independent church structure (URCSA), and leading (black agency) such a black church demonstrates their adoption of a black agenda. Their identification with the concerns of those communities that they were in, attests to their adoption of a "black messiah" (Boesak, 1984b:10). However, when we argue, as earlier, that they were strong in their reformed theology, we should respond to the dialectic of black theology with the reformed notion of the depravity, and corrupt nature of human beings. One could critically ask how would they deal with the issue of the 'corrupt nature' of human beings, when the twin ideology of black theology – black consciousness – would argue that we should preach the inherent goodness of human beings? This has been a bone of contention for Steve Biko, who would appreciate black theology but would critique the exact same notion. However, without going into Biko's merits on the issue, it might be helpful to see that he was indeed challenging the very issue that reformed theology would address – a focus on the structural nature of sin (2005:61):

In a country teeming with injustice and fanatically committed to the practice of oppression, intolerance and blatant cruelty because of racial bigotry; in a country where all black people are made to feel like the unwanted stepchildren of God whose presence they cannot feel; in a country where father and son, mother and daughter alike develop daily into neurotics through sheer

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175 See Buys' (1990:107) draft that documents his views on the transition process in South Africa during 1990-1994 in the political negotiations.

inability to relate the present to the future because of a completely engulfing sense of destitution, the church further adds to their insecurity by its inward-directed definition of the concept of sin and its encouragement of the *mea culpa* attitude. Stern-faced ministers stand on pulpits every Sunday to heaps loads of blame on black people in townships for their thieving, house-breaking, stabbing, murdering, adultery, etc. No one ever attempts to relate all these vices to poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, lack of schooling and migratory labour. No one wants to completely condone abhorrent behaviour, but it frequently is necessary for us to analyse situations a little bit deeper than the surface suggest.

These members were indeed the opposite of what can be described by Biko as a fixation on personal sin, which he does not oppose entirely as a diagnostical instrument and hermeneutical lens to confront the evil of apartheid. Still, reformed clergy has often made it as its springboard for addressing the 'sin' in society, which caused these members to be well aligned with black consciousness, which is not that clear in their addresses. It could indeed be argued that within their approaches and addressing the challenges (the sin) in terms of the structural nature, corresponds to what Biko (1978: 58) would refer to as the people being "socialised in a corrupt" system.

In their actions and presentations, there is a clear missiological interpretation of the church as God's agent in the world. For instance, when Buys (1999:5) mentions to the TRC chairperson (Archbishop Tutu), "The church clearly needs to be involved in activities that would transform, liberate society as part of God's mission". In this sense, as moderator, Buys stated the church's further action (not only confession) through developing strategies within the church toward "renewal and reconciliation in the country" (1995:5). Other respondents also attest to their missional hermeneutic of the bible and the situation in South Africa and the church. Appies' diaconal projects would, for instance, focus on the needy but also on issues of social justice in society. Buys would work in the same way for unity and, in the others, plead for economic justice in his draft on the transitional processes (CODESA) in South Africa in 1990. In his last address to the URCSA synod in 1997, Bloemfontein, Apollis would refer to the church as a confessional church and

as a witness in the world against “injustice, lies, hatred and discrimination, and disunity” (Apollis, 1997:570).

Moreover, the adoption of Belhar was more than a confession, but it was, as Baron and Maponya (2020) would argue, a ‘missional’ imagination – to re-imagine the church as a united, reconciled and just one – a church which would be in service of God to address the issues, including political, economic, societal issues. The missional church movement that saw its emergence as a concept in academic discourse would be surprised that, in a rural township like Calitzdorp, the church would be responsible for constructing and building a mortuary for people to provide dignified funerals. Also, that a minister such as Sam Buti would be at the forefront of developments outside of his own church denomination and bringing infrastructural changes in his community of Alexandra, from which the tables of the wealthy (Sandton) could be seen from a distance, amplifying the deep abysmal divide between rich and poor that continues to show its head in what often is regarded as ‘post-apartheid’ South Africa. In most instances, it has been notable how they would challenge the structures of the church and break down the power units through their own agency, and the bureaucracy through their active involvement with communities. The notion of ‘missional leadership’ is therefore well captured in their ministerial activities and contributions.

In some of their responses in the post-apartheid context, the theological hermeneutic was related to a ‘post-exilic’ motif of scripture. The focus was, therefore, also on reconstruction instead of only that of ‘liberation’ (exodus motif).<sup>176</sup> Consequently, one could locate their responses and activism within the reconstruction paradigm of Mugambi (2002) but also within the South African context of Villa-Vicencio (1992).<sup>177</sup> It must, however, be said that this could not be equally said for *all* of them. There exists a tension between what could be observed in the addresses and activism after 1994. The process of breaking down prejudices of race, class, and sexism and to

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176 See, for instance, Apollis’ word himself in terms of ‘restructuring’ at the Synod in 1997 with his fellow moderation members present, “We must also think of restructuring ourselves for a mature relationship, a relationship with the whole body rather than one part of the body”.

177 The authors does include a theology of reconstruction not divorcing their agency from a liberative praxis, but that there seems to be synergy between the two in their lives.

build an inclusive South Africa that was absent during apartheid South Africa is what these moderate members were involved in, and most of them played a key role in establishing a church that was based on non-racialism (closing down their racial-based churches). Buys' involvement in the further workshopping of breaking down gender-injustice, but also advocating greater unity through continuously engaging the other white and black churches within the DRC family, and their continued participation in activities and forums that would restore the dignity of *all* South Africans has been shown in the foregoing chapters. James Buys' own draft on 'transition' shows his remarkable insights into the functioning of the economic system and issues related to land redistribution, a good insight into politics to be able to provide a vision for politics in a democratic South Africa, but also an insight into the socio-economic welfare of the poorest of the poor. This document does engage biblical texts such as the Belhar Confession, which he and the others held dearly, but also his extraordinary interdisciplinary insights into the economics, politics, and law, that were necessary for the pursuit of reconstructing society (cf. Villa-Vicencio, 1992:8).

These members could also be situated within the prophetic tradition in terms of their stance against the issues that threatened God's people. It is evident in various church documents, as well as the reference to prophetic theologians, that these names do not necessarily appear among the names of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr Frank Chikane, Dr Beyers Naudé and Dr Allan Boesak. Therefore, the reflection on the actions and agency of these four moderate members demonstrate that these four deserve a place among those and other prophetic theologians in South Africa and the church. These four were also in the front-rows of marches, some at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), in protest against the draconian laws of the apartheid government. Buys' solidarity with the poor was to such an extent that he drafted his own ideas of how the CODESA negotiations should be handled – not to compromise the conditions of the millions of South African that would remain poor, had the negotiators given way to neo-liberalists (Buys, 1990). This draft kept him busy during his sabbatical in the Netherlands. The four had a critical relationship with the state and were not willing to sacrifice their prophetic voice, but critical at the government of the day – which the words of Sam Buti to Nelson Mandela can attest to. In a recent paper, Baron

and Maponya (2020) argue that the missional church movement that was a research 'think tank' of the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) (1990) in North America could be based on at least two processes – a phase of 're-imagination', then re-structuring<sup>178</sup> that would be the forerunner of a process of prophetic praxis. This was evident in the leadership of these four moderature members while serving the church in their respective capacities. These members were casting a new vision of the church for DRMC, DRCA, as well as the Dutch Reformed Church family. This led to the restructuring of these churches in 1994 with the establishment of URCSA, as well as other subsequent renewed structures and networks and relationships that would amplify the prophetic voice of the church in the context of a divided church and society.

However, the Kairos theology was not embraced by the DRMC synod in 1987. Though the document itself refers to various biblical texts to support its content, members of the DRMC synod in 1987 in Umtata believed that it was not doing justice to the overall message of the Bible (NGSK, 1987). However, it is publicly known that some undersigned the Kairos Document (KD). We also observe Apollis' column in *Die Ligdraer* where he often provided a biblical and prophetic interpretation of the 'times' that the church found themselves in and how to respond to it. One instance comes to mind where he encouraged members of the church to participate in the first local, democratic elections, as one of their powerful weapons to change the history of South Africa for the better (Apollis, 1994e). Furthermore, an adoption of a prophetic stance means to understand the context of what these members were constantly doing, through their critique of the challenges that apartheid imposed on the church and society. It is possible to judge them by the rejection of the DRMC synod of the Kairos Document without investigating how similar their own readings of the 'signs of the times' were to the document itself. The Kairos Document (KD) was to proclaim justice for *all* those who were oppressed and marginalised. This was a continuous effort of these four, for instance, the establishing and involvement in the realisation of a multi-cultural church was one of the means in which ethnic differences did not

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178 See, for instance, Apollis' idea of 'restructuring' the church during his retirement out of ministry and URCSA executive in 1997 Synod in Bloemfontein (Apollis, 1997).



matter for a church that proclaims God's good news for all. When there was, however, a re-emergence of ethnic nationalism in South African society (post-apartheid) and some signs within denominations in South Africa of such conflict, we are reminded of their prophetic stand on 'justice for *all*'. Allan Boesak makes reference to the ethnic nationalism which would endanger the fight for non-racialism and justice for *all*. Boesak (2009) lamented this emerging reality:

In January 1983, when I called for the formation of the UDF, I reminded the audience that South Africans' flirtation and fascination with ethnicity is an exercise fraught with danger. Ethnicity, I warned then, does not solve differences, it entrenches them. 'Ethnicity' tends to emphasise group interests, keep alive tendencies towards tribalism, white and black, and fosters narrow, ethnic nationalism that can only aggravate an already volatile situation. Furthermore, ethnicity is inseparable from racism; however subtle it may be. The insidious nature of this evil is a warning that societies such as ours have enough problems without exacerbating their inherent racism by making ethnicity an essential political divisive factor.

What has been demonstrated in the book is indeed their stance for justice for *all* as part of the prophetic stance that the Kairos Movement, as a prophetic movement, encapsulates on *all* forms of oppression. We observe Buys' involvement with a different approach within the prophetic call to advocate for economic liberation, through his own involvement with the drafting of the ACCRA Confession to the inclusion in his Moderator address of 2007 of the biblical grounding for economic emancipation. This was therefore underscored by Mbembe (2007:147) as the new kind of 'black solidarity' that is needed in South Africa, which would be focused on 'class' as the prism to discuss the inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa. This would not mean that a racial lens is no longer necessary, but that it would indeed allow the poorest of the poor not to suffer because of the enrichment of a minority in the new South Africa which has also included the new black elite that would comfortably hide behind the curtain of race.

The prophetic theology calls for an unequivocal and unambiguous voice of the church when it is faced with societal challenges, against governments and those responsible for executing such acts that would endanger the *shalom* and well-being of God for his people. In the two decades after the abolishment of apartheid (from government policies and statues), various theologians – even during the 30<sup>th</sup> celebration of the Kairos Document (KD) in Johannesburg – lamented the silence of the church. Some academic contributions include those of Kritzinger (2012) but also a few years after that, Botha and Makofane (2019) who refer to the ‘false neutrality’ of the church under the new dispensation. It would be more challenging to be in critical solidarity with the new government when issues of injustice flare up early in the new democracy, and when the government exploits the “vulnerability of church leaders” by offering them rewards and incentives (Vellem, 2014:279). We would remember Buti’s famous words, “As long as you seek justice and human dignity, we will support you. But if you don’t, we will oppose you” (Kuys, 2010). In the context of so much critique of the ‘false neutrality’ of the church, it should be noted that the implementation of God’s justice and reconciliation in the world would find more concrete action after the 1994 unification when URCSA would face a schism and various court cases in the Free State, but also during the time of Apollis when the leadership of URCSA would address corruption that surfaced during the Mandela regime and the president himself called for moral regeneration (Apollis, 1995b:1).<sup>179</sup> Apollis would address this and the decline in moral integrity from those in the highest offices of the country. The fact, that the church ‘echoed’ what had been said by the president is appreciated but would also not necessarily attach to their own vigilance of matters of moral concern in society. But before critique might go too far, placing and addressing it, and adding to the voices that address corrupt behaviour is indeed a prophetic stance – given the fact that many churches and religious leaders would have also had close relationships with the state, and therefore in the context of

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179 *Die Ligdraer* reports on Nick Apollis’ stance against corruption in government departments, “*Dinge het in die gemeenskap skeefgeloop, slegte nuus word dag na dag opeengestapel, leuens van mense in gesags-posisies wat in die laaste tyd aan die lig gekom het, het veroorsaak dat die woord van mense op daardie vlak, al meer in twyfel getrek word. Onhullings dat mense in gesags-posisies betrokke is of was by gemene streke en wandade en die daarmee gepaardgaande indruk dat daar n toesmeerdery is laat mense verslae en verbuisterd*” (Apollis, 1995b:1).

1995, this could not be dealt with in a superficial manner but should be seen as an unequivocal stand against state corruption.

## 6.5. MISSION AT THE MARGINS: IN AND FOR GOD'S NAME

These four members are known for their effective strategies towards the transformation of their communities, church and society. Their consultative strategies are well observed. These four were not acting upon issues without engagements with their constituencies. Leonardo Appies, for instance, has been described as fostering a participatory leadership approach, Buys with his grass-roots approach and Apollis with his consultative leadership strategies and empowering his elders in his congregation and the moderature. During the 25-year celebration of URCSA, Baron (2019) critically reflected on the leadership of URCSA and how the members within the congregations are not conscious of their own role in church and society. These four members have shown their commitment through approaches that would allow agency from the members of congregations. The mere identifying with the concerns of the communities whom they serve as a means to open themselves up for a contextual understanding of the scripture and the vision for a good church and society, however, also showcases what Bosch (1991:362) would refer to as an “epistemology of participation”. It is the idea that knowledge and one’s understanding of God has also been developed with one’s involvement with the people of God and listening to the sharing of their experiences. Isn’t this why some would refer to the church back then as more political than spiritual?<sup>180</sup> Is theological discourse less pietistic? These members’ sermons and addresses would relate to the experiences of the people, of their members and of the struggles that they experienced.

It was also important that the journey towards transformation is one that would have to have a biblical and a theological basis. Apollis talks about the “God factor” and his own “dependency on God” (Apollis, 1991a). He urged that the failure of unity is the failure to be obedient to God.

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180 See also Buys’ predominant conversations when returning back from Varsity, to visit his parents and siblings in Riverlea.

Therefore, there is a deep-seated sentiment that obedience to the Scripture will usher God's *shalom* (wholeness) into the world and church. This motivation towards obedience is evident in their calls for unity, justice and reconciliation. The Bible is used to motivate and inspire change and transformation.

Buy's notes the fact that this was an intentional step by the two black churches to depart "from our divided and racial history" (Buy's, 1999:2). It is therefore clear that in all four's practices there were constant efforts – after uniting with the DRCA and other former 'sister' churches – to work together with DRC congregations. There is an opening-up at least in its symbolic emblem and wording ('uniting') for other churches to become part – a concern that only together there is "salvation and survival" (Bosch, 1991:362).

What might be evident is the issue of violence as a direct response to the atrocities of the apartheid government. Though James Buy's was not a signatory of the Kairos Document (KD), he espoused its ideology.<sup>181</sup> It was only Appies whose signature could be found on the original Kairos Document – interestingly so, he was the second signatory on the document after Dr Hannes Adonis (the first signatory). Though the other members' signatures do not appear on the document, the document itself mentions that, because of time constraints, it could not receive the signatures of those that might have wanted to sign. Therefore, the document itself would not suffice in determining whether the other members espoused the ideals thereof. However, we also know that the General Synod's (GS) meeting of the DRMC (which would exclude Buti of the DRCA at the time) did not accept the Kairos Document but was against its emphasis on violence as a means to respond to an oppressive government. *Die Ligdraer* provides the reasons for the synod to reject the Kairos Document (KD) in that the synod argued that it contained a '*vreemde*' [strange] theology, and it incites believers to rebel against the government. And therefore the document calls

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181 He alludes to a section in the KD in his testimony at the TRC, when he also refers to the chaplains that the church appointed to a "very violent and oppressive army".

believers to participate in political action that will eventually lead to violence and revolution!<sup>182</sup>

The issue of violence as a strategy to bring forth change in society was quite a complexed issue. It might be said that within Buys' own draft for transition in South Africa, he regarded political violence as necessary to bring forth a "peaceful' settlement of the dispute" (Buys, 1990:106) and directly in response to the vicious system of apartheid and those who would immediately threaten their well-being. However, this does not mean that violence *per se* was advocated; it was only within life-threatening situations. The document called for a new appropriation of the notion of 'violence' which was tagged predominantly to the protests, the "throwing of stones', 'burning of cars' and buildings and sometimes killing corroborators" but the same is not said about the "structural, institutional and unrepentant violence" of the apartheid state? The signatories of the KD called for a more nuanced articulation of the church of the loaded notion, to articulate the 'violence' of opposition forces of apartheid as 'resistance' or 'defence' (not revenge), the same as in the case of the victim's 'resistance' to a rapist and perpetrator towards his 'violent' behaviour. The KD (1986:19) states, "In other words, there are circumstances when physical force may be used. These are very restrictive circumstances, only as of the very last resort and only as of the lesser of two evils, or, as Bonhoeffer puts it, "the lesser of two guilts".

These four members were all part of making the unification a reality, but also to foster internal unity in URCSA. Therefore, it is perhaps essential to engage even the recommendations of Adonis, that suggested already in 1982 how the DRC family would be able to overcome the divisions. In the last section of his publication, *Die Afgebreekte Skeidsmuur weer opgebou*,<sup>183</sup> he offers a few strategies for the DRMC which would also be for the URCSA (Adonis, 1982:217-220). The first was theological training in the different regions of the four Dutch Reformed Churches. This, he argued,

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182 "Die vergadering van die algemene sinode wat van 10-18 Junie 1987 te Umtata gebou is, het eenparig die Kairos Document verwerp op grond van die vreemde teologie wat daarin vervat is en poging om gelowiges tot opstand teen die regering aan te spoor ... daarteenoor roep die Kairos Document gelowiges op om deel te neem aan politieke aksie wat nie anders kan as om uit te loop op geweld en revolusie nie" (NGSK, 1987:235).

183 This was originally his doctoral thesis.

would be necessary especially to transform the 'South African' theology into a theology that would be relevant in the context of racism, exploitation and oppression. We have witnessed the relocation of the URCSA students based at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) to Stellenbosch, and others in the North and other regions to the University of Pretoria, and some at the University of the Free State (Bloemfontein). We particularly see James Buys encouraging this when the move eventually took place (Jackson, 1999d:4). These members being on the GS moderation *per se* played a crucial part to give form to the amalgamation, or coming together of the training of students of URCSA and DRC. Still, it was long after their retirement, and deaths, that the theology espoused at these faculties went through re-curriculation. However, their curriculation was not because of the pressure of the church, but also the broader #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall protests and movements that also called for decolonisation. It therefore did not only happen at the previous exclusive Reformed theological faculties (Stellenbosch, Bloemfontein, Pretoria), but also other faculties where theology and religion were taught.

Adonis' (1982:218-219) next suggestion already in 1982 was that there is a need for a fourth, joined confession/statement for the DRC family that all would share within the new context. He argued that it would be an act of liberation and reconciliation for all the churches. Though in his illustrations of some confessions that were drafted to speak to the current context, the Belhar did not feature, which is understandable in that it was not yet part of the discussions, but that the suggestion of a confession of such nature was needed for the new church. These members did advocate the Belhar as such a confession – and Buys held it not as an optional confession but, for the DRC, a condition of unification. Then Adonis suggested some grassroots activities on congregational, synod and presbytery level to learn and know each other better, and that the different ministries in the churches could start to work together. This was evident in the call of Nick Apollis during the run-up to the establishment of URCSA in 1994. He argued that this would be a good exercise to become one church. Adonis (1982:219) also suggested the formation of multi-racial congregations, with the initiative of pulpit exchange. This, he argued, would help with 'visible unity'. But then he also suggested that all the congregations should become open for all races

and do away with a mono-racially-based church. This is also evident in Buys' effort in Wynberg URCSA and DRC congregations, which was the first ever to have such a 'convent' in URCSA, and Apollis who could easily join the DRC Audensberg in Worcester. However, sadly this became a small pebble in a big pond, and also quickly dissolved. Finally, Adonis (1982:220) argued that working towards unity in the church should be seen as part of the project of nation-building in South Africa. He argues that the church should play the role to see that different ethnic and religious groups come together in the formation of one state and ensure that all ethnic groups feel embraced, welcomed, and a sense of belonging. All should be able to work together, resolve and embrace each other without the differences. He argues that the DRC family can establish this within their contributions in national ecumenical relationships. The latter was evident in these four's activities, however, how these acts were sustained is beyond the scope of this book.

## 6.6. SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION AND RELOCATION

The event in Pretoria where the representatives from both black churches (DRCA and DRMC) were seated at the Holy Communion table and being served by a white minister demonstrates their spirituality of communion. It was in 1990 already that the church refers to the adoption of an '*ekumeniese spiritualiteit*' [ecumenical spirituality] at the DRMC synod meeting. It therefore confessed that the full height and depth of the knowledge of the love of Christ could only become known in communion with all the saints, when Christians from different persuasions, traditions, experiences and insight, built each other up, critiqued, and inspired each other (NGSK, 1990a:997). It confessed that this spirituality would acknowledge that people from other faiths are not in a different 'track' than one's own tradition but all in the same 'track' that centres around Jesus Christ as the focal point, and therefore it is crucial to focus instead on what we all have in common rather than the matters that keep us apart. Consequently, the church committed itself in 1990, in which all three members of the DRMC (Apollis, Buys, Appies) were present, to seek together for the focal point, which is Jesus Christ (NGSK, 1990a:997). This spirituality is defined as a spirituality of '*ontmoeting*' [contact]. The commission on which Apollis served supported the words of Wainwright (1986) that, "In order to unite

with one another, we must love one another; in order to know one another, we must go and meet one another” (cf. NGSK, 1990a:997).

Boesak (1984a:95) argues that to be Reformed means to “also commit ... to accept in ... worship and at the table of the Lord [welcome] the brothers and sisters who accept and proclaim the Lordship of Christ in all areas of life”. He was talking especially in the context of his own church at the time, DRMC and the DRCA and other black churches that were separated from the white DRC, because of an issue that came up regarding the whites with ‘coloureds’ at the Holy Communion table. It is often reflected in the agency of these four that there was an urge for unification, social cohesion, and to break the former walls of racial separation. These led to other responses that sought for greater inclusion and embrace within the newly established church (URCSA). One of these responses was a discussion at the 2007 Synod in Upington, Northern Cape, where James Buys was the moderator. Klippiess Kritzinger (2005) led the conversation with the paper entitled, “Hungry spectators or unwelcomed guests?”. The paper brings to mind that the spirituality of these moderation members, as well as their vision would translate into structural and doctrinal changes during but also after their terms in office. One of these moments of inclusion, after the presentation of Kritzinger, would be a decision that children, who were formerly excluded from the Holy Communion table, could – though with certain preparations to be put in place to allow such novice practice – be seated at the table of the Lord.

Kritzinger (2005) explains the ‘inclusion’ of the weaker members at the Holy Communion when he underlines Paul’s admonishment of the practice of the Lord’s table to the church in Corinth according to 1 Cor. 11. He states:

In this chapter, the apostle Paul admonishes the Corinthians that they are not eating and drinking the Lord’s Supper if they refuse to wait for one another (I Cor 11:33): “So then my brothers and sisters when you come together to eat, wait for one another.” If some members (probably the richer ones) go ahead with eating and drinking while other members (probably the poorer ones or the slaves, who were working late and couldn’t come earlier)



found nothing to eat or drink when they arrived, then those who ate and drank were drinking judgment against themselves, because they did not discern the body of Christ (I Cor 11:29). “Discerning the body of Christ” in this chapter means not to go ahead with Communion until everyone has arrived for the meal because every member of Christ’s body must be treated equally, but the weaker members should receive greater honour, as Paul explains in the next chapter: The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension in the body, but the members may have the same care for one another (I Cor 12:22-25).

These members could have been complacent with such unity processes that remain incomplete, however, their actions show that they would strive and often participate in uncomfortable conversations with others and were willing to take the risk thereof. These members regarded such a process as one that should be passionately driven. It is apparent that these members were continuously searching for the ‘lost sheep’, the ‘vulnerable’ in society and to integrate, unite with, and embrace them.

This spirit of communion was much needed when the church itself struggled to keep abreast with its internal unity processes up until this point. Therefore, in the following Synod after the unification, Apollis was emphasising in his address on the unity and reconciliation that it is difficult (Apollis, 1997). Quite recently (2019) within the URCSA Cape Synod, there was a contentious debate on the 50/50 principle based on the representativity of both ethnic groups on the executive of the Synod (50% Xhosa-speaking and 50% Afrikaans speaking – mainly ‘coloured’) members to be nominated on the executive. Plaatjies-van Huffel presented a paper at the URCSA 25-year academic conference in Bloemfontein in 2019, where she also reflected on her disappointment in the internal unity

process within URCSA as a “procedure to safeguard positions of power for a certain cultural group”, which led to her resignation as the elected Actuarius of URCSA (Plaatjies-Van Huffel, 2019:8). This was what these moderation members anticipated, but also warned against in their addresses.

Their spirituality of communion is also demonstrated within their missional agency in society. There was deep solidarity with the poor and marginalised and, therefore, whether or not in principle, in practice, these members still embodied the ‘black solidarity’ that was promoted by Steve Biko. However, it would also translate into more than a ‘racial’ expression thereof, but also a class expression (Mbembe, 2007:135-148), which is much needed in a post-apartheid South African situation. This would resemble a “spirituality of communion” which Biko would refer to in his vehement repudiation of the kind of ‘integration’ that has been demonstrated by liberal whites in apartheid South Africa. A kind of integration in which white people become ‘conscious’ of their own complicity (white privilege) that would translate into a more in-depth understanding of the conditions of the oppressed, as well as, a rallying, and a taking-up of an activist stance against the ‘black’ situation at the time (Biko, 2005:21). The church has demonstrated this through the act of Buys himself who was seen sitting at one table with his fellow white and African black ministers which was a symbolic act of breaking down the walls of ethnic separation that were entrenched by the apartheid church, but specifically the decision of the DRC to break away from their brothers and sisters at the Holy Communion table.

Their urge to be rooted in communities and lead from below is echoed by the theologian Emmanuel Katongole (2011) who argues for a theology of relocation. Therefore, in this contribution, we wish to refer to it as their spirituality of relocation. He argues for a church among the people – a different kind of church. This indeed resembles the kind of spirituality of these four moderation members. In the quest to illustrate what is meant by such a theology, Katongole (2011:143) tells the story of a Catholic Priest in Southern Sudan, who would bring together a diverse community (religious and ethnic) during war time, and through training and developing their skills, empower those communities while living among them (like Jesus calling

Zacchaeus from the tree, a powerful place, to a place among the people. Katongole (2011:143) states:

Thus the demonstration in Kuron is not simply a demonstration of peaceful co-existence, or new farming skills and educational possibilities. It is the demonstration of concrete, historical and local salvation; it is the demonstration of the gospel (good news) that the story of Zacchaeus points to: “Today salvation has come to this house”. The good news is the true meaning of the incarnation: “He dwelt among us”. It is the very heart of Jesus’ (and the church’s) mission: “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10).

Something that needs to be questioned in South African churches is how far churches in South Africa have come in adopting a ‘theology of relocation’. Katongole (2011:143) argues:

That is why what Taban is doing in Kuron is not ‘development’ or social work. What Taban is driving at – or better – what is driving Taban – is ecclesiology, a vision of what the church is called to be. That is why relocation is not merely about a change in geography or location but a theological category, and essential ecclesiological mark – indeed, the very mission of the church. The church exists for mission, to be the sign of God’s saving presence among God’s people. This presence is not abstract but is always concrete in a particular locality.

Katongole (2011:89) suggests three things that would be needed to change the narrative within African ‘nation-states’, namely “intellectual clarity, revolutionary madness, and commitment and sacrifice”. This, Katongole (2011:89) argues, was the strategy of President Sankara for the five-year rule of the former French colony in Upper Volta, to change the narrative of the African nation-state. However, this was also the root cause of his assignation on 15 October 1988 by the former president who argued that “... Sankara jeopardised foreign relations with the former colonial power, France, and with neighbouring countries” (Katongole, 2011:89).

However, Katongole makes this conclusion in the context of various African leaders that have sought for radical transformation and do it through what he refers to as 'revolutionary madness'. This, he argues, is to change the policies and colonial system, but because the manner in which change is done – continuing with a 'dislocation' from the masses – it only erupts in violence and does not bring lasting change. These moderation members do not only demonstrate that the church was close to the masses during apartheid, but was showing solidarity with the concerns of the masses through consultations and involvement in communities, and therefore did not seek to divorce them from the experiences of the people whom they served. These moderation members were like Taban – a Catholic Priest who lived in Southern Sudan – in that they continued to live among the people, like Sam Buti who lived and died among his people in Alexandria, through his tenure as Mayor, as well as being the Moruti of the DRCA/URCSA in Alexandria. The repeated call from Apollis during the 1990-1994 period for the various stakeholders to consult with their members, and the opening-up of the church's newspaper for members' concerns to be published indeed shows the value they placed on such deliberations. The spirituality of 'relocation' in the quest for radical transformation has been depicted in their engagements and addresses.

## 6.7. CONCLUSION

The structuring of the chapter in terms of the praxis cycle was able to capture the re-imagining, the structuring and the prophetic praxis of these four moderation members. Through their agency, these members were taking "the church into the world to transform the world and reflect the Glory of God" (Pillay, 2015:1). It shows that they associated themselves with the most vulnerable in society – where God stands (Belhar Confession) – and all made a considerable sacrifice, from turning down scholarships abroad like James Buys, to giving their lives wholeheartedly to 'save' the church and society from a quasi-soteriology (apartheid).



# CONCLUSION – A FINAL LOOK THROUGH A MISSIOLOGICAL LENS

## 7.1. THE ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND PRAXIOLOGICAL CROP

An important question to still be answered is on what crystallises from the study that might be regarded as the actual academic or scientific contribution of the book. Loosely and generally, there is a postmodern notion that the study *an sich*, [*in itself*] is the contribution. The telling of the story of Apollis, Appies, Buti and Buys constitutes the contribution. As authors, we have had intense conversations on how best the contribution to the body of knowledge in disciplines like Church History and Missiology could be defined.

In simple terms, one could say that lessons are to be learnt from the four in the areas of being, knowing and doing. On the basis of the study, the issue is about missionary or missional being, missionary or missional knowing and missionary or missional doing. The concepts of missionary and missional are, however, not used interchangeably, i.e. they do not necessarily carry the same meaning. The concept of ‘missionary’ is not only much older than ‘missional’, but it carries, more than ‘missional’, the understanding of mission

as something that emanates from the heart of God, it refers to the *missio Dei*. It is a manner of saying that mission is not ours, but God's. It also refers to the response in faith of the Church to the reality that the Church is missionary by its very nature. 'Missional' does not necessarily exclude the dimension of being God's mission, but is more explicitly to the 'sentness' of the Church. As an American export article, the concept of 'missional' is a construct aimed at pointing to the sentness of the Church to a specific culture, namely American imperialistic – a consumerist culture where patriarchy, racism and xenophobia are rife.

## 7.2. BEING A MISSIONARY, BEING MISSIONAL

An important disclaimer here is that we are not suggesting that the four under discussion in the book were consciously or intentionally positioning themselves, speaking or acting in a missionary or missional fashion. Neither in terms of what the interviews revealed nor what they themselves have expressed is there any evidence to the effect that they regarded or defined what they were doing as missionary or missional. Retrospectively, though, all four were as missionary and missional as can be. In their identification with the poor and the oppressed in different forms and based on their unflinching solidarity with suffering masses, the posture formulated was very missionary and very missional in the sense of being sent by God in Christ and the Holy Spirit to these categories of people. The jury is perhaps still out on who of the four took this ontological position to a greater or lesser extent, but it would be fair to suggest that, as much as there might have been differences of opinion and strategy, all four were located in mission inside the church and society. The brand of mission coming to the fore is more inductive than deductive. Put differently, the suggestion cannot be made that any of the four announced *expressis verbis* their arrival on the missionary or missional scene. Yet, the manner in which they positioned themselves was very missionary or missional, in a double sense. First, their location in the struggle for church unification and against apartheid reveals a consciousness of calling and 'sentness' for transformation.

### 7.3. MISSIONARY AND MISSIONAL KNOWING

There is not only an interesting ontological element emerging but also an epistemological one. The ontological aspect, once more, has to do with the location of the four in mission both in the struggle for unity and social justice. In simple terms, the epistemological element might be described as the *how* of what we know. It can also be formulated as a question: ‘How do we know what we know?’ The narratives on all four reveal a very refreshing and new, or not so new epistemology. It is a kind of knowing or knowledge that is different from the modernist way of knowing, where ideas are constructed in a contextual manner and then applied to any given situation. Inductively, the stories of the four show the emergence of a mode of knowing that is informed by experience, be it the experience in the journey of church unification or the struggle against apartheid. In this type of epistemology, the reflection and construction of ideas are premised on the faith commitment made to the ongoing struggles of oppressed and exploited people. The very distinct contribution of the four to missiological and ecclesiological knowledge is the embodiment of missionary and missional knowing, i.e. a deep awareness of being called and being sent in a particular context for a particular mission.

### 7.4. MISSIONARY AND/OR MISSIONAL DOING

The diverse levels of involvement coming to the fore in the narratives on the four, be that on the university campus, in the congregation, in the church nationally, in the ecumenical movement or society at large, show that the matter was not only about the ontological or epistemological location but also about the praxis. Without suggesting that these four were arch activists, their stories reveal an intense praxiological mediation. The somewhat strange word ‘praxiological’ is a way of saying that action in the struggle for church unity and social justice is defined not only by being and knowing, but also by acting – by doing. In this respect, there is quite some difference between the four. In the case of Appies and Buti, for example, their levels of involvement in student politics on the campus of UWC, in the congregation and the communities of Alexandra and Saldanha Bay, where they were quite often in the forefront of protest action, reveals an activist streak. Apollis and Buys, however, operated mostly within the confines and parameters of the official



church structures. To say this of the latter two is not to detract from the reality that they were, in the church, quite often part of prophetic statements relating to the system of apartheid and the retarded struggle for unity in the Dutch Reformed family of churches. All four seemed to have realised that words alone without action would not suffice. An ongoing praxis of involvement and struggle is to be formulated.

### 7.5. DISCONTINUITY AND CONTINUITY

The rather brief reflection on what the academic or scientific legacy of the constituting moderature of URCSA might be is showing, albeit cursorily and tentatively, that the construction of an intellectual history containing the elements of an ontology, epistemology and praxiology emerges. As such, it constitutes a new way of being missionary or missional. This is quite remarkable if the following reality is taken into consideration. In the time during the 1970s, 1980s and early-1990s when these four were emerging strongly, pretty reductionist and truncated definitions were rife, for the DRC mission was to a huge extent still understood as a movement from white people to black people. At best, mission was reduced to the saving of souls based on the dichotomy between body and soul, or the planting of churches. In their ontological, epistemological and praxiological location, the four gave rise, perhaps unintentionally so, to a new missionary or missional paradigm. It is a paradigm where the old dichotomy between evangelisation and social action is overcome. Or to formulate it positively, it is a missionary or missional approach where a radical integration between theory and practice is achieved.

The pretty obvious reality that they operated in a different context from where the DRC family of churches and the country at large find themselves now is acknowledged. At least the unification between two of the members of the family was achieved a quarter of a century ago, as well as the end of apartheid. This is what constitutes the discontinuity. However, the paradigm identified here is as relevant as ever, although it may have to be appropriated differently. First, the struggle for unification in the DRC family of churches is far from over. Political developments in the country since 1994 seemed to have complicated the matter even further with

new forms of racism, polarisation, fragmentation, corruption and decay emerging. South Africans are as divided as ever. In this context, the struggle for unity continues. Second, the neglect of the last quarter of a century, leaving millions of South Africa trapped in inequality, unemployment, and poverty, is a clear indication that the struggle for greater social justice is far from over. With so many South Africans still poor and destitute, new forms of solidarity are due to be formulated. New agents in mission are required who can position themselves in solidarity with the poor, create new knowledge through the experience of a new struggle for social justice and achieve integration between what is being said and what is being done.

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In celebrating a quarter of a century of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) (1994-2019), quite a few well-organised activities and events took place. These activities reflect a mix of serious academic seminars and liturgical celebrations of which the ones in the Cape, both in Belhar and at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) warrant special mention. In his sermon based on John 17 at the closing liturgical celebration at UWC, Prof Daan Cloete raised several pertinent issues pertaining to unity and justice as a challenge to the leadership of URCSA. Despite all the significant events taking place throughout the year (2019), there has been a major deficit. Attempts at serious historiography are few and far between. This book is an attempt at starting such a study process. However, to put it modestly to contribute to the writing of the history of the URCSA. It has been resolved to start right at the beginning: the founding synod of URCSA with a specific focus on the constituting moderature. The book discusses the issues that were looming large at the founding Synod in 1994 which captures the ‘miracle’ and the euphoria that emerged amidst some delicate matters and issues that would have posed some serious impediments that would have jeopardise the unification before it even started. In calling into service the pastoral or praxis cycle the contributions of the first moderature of URCSA: Rev Nick Apollis (moderator), Rev Leonardo Appies (Scriba Synodii) Rev Dr Sam Buti (Assessor) and Rev JD Buys (Actuaris), of the 1994 General Synod elections are presented in this book. The authors were interested in answering the question: In what way did the moderature members of URCSA assist in the transformation of church and society? The book showcases, how not only systems and structures are essential in transformation processes, but people - who take up the task in obedience and servitude.

