


The impact of Reformed theology on church unity and reconciliation in the Reformed Churches in South Africa since the first general synod, 2009



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The Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (Reformed Churches in South Africa [RCSA]) held its first annual historic general synod on 04 January 2009 in Potchefstroom. This was the synod that would last for 10 days. Someone who knows the history of the church would say that it was like the synod of Dort (1618–1619). Everyone was looking forward to it; yet, others approached the synod with great doubts in their hearts. Indeed, this synod reflected a true South Africa (black and white people coming together in the synod). In 2019, it marked 10 years since that momentous synod. This article intends to indicate the impact of Reformed theology on the RCSA over these 10 years. It addresses the question of how the local churches are doing after one classis, one regional synod and one general synod as far as unity and reconciliation is concerned. The question regarding the unity and reconciliation process involves converging changes of black and white churches. It is in the heart of Reformed theology where we find the confession: 'I believe in the communion of saints'. This communion of saints speaks about the unity and reconciliation of believers, united and reconciled with God and fellow neighbours!

Keywords: Reformed theology; Unity; Reconciliation; RCSA synod 2009; Sustentation fund; Language questions; Caring of retired ministers; Pension fund; Thuso fund.

Introduction

Reformed theology is described by the very well-known five *solas* of the 16th-century reformation, namely, the *sola scriptura* [only scripture], *sola fide* [only faith], *sola gratia* [only grace], *solus Christus* [only Christ] and *sola Deo Gloria* [only to the glory of God]. I started with *sola scriptura* [only scripture] intentionally because scripture is a prerequisite for Reformed theology. The centrality of Reformed theology is to go back to the scripture.

Martin Luther's (1517) historic 95 theses (Theses 27) emphasise the fact that:

[W]e are to deny self, not indulge self. For many people *experience* is key. But for Christians, *Scripture* must be our ultimate authority. Emotions are a poor substitute for Scripture. (p. 27).

The main question in Reformed theology is to ask, 'what does scripture say?' A proverb of the Yoruba people of Nigeria says, 'however far a stream flows, it never forgets its origin'. Tangelder (2001) adds that:

[I]f we no longer know our roots, we won't know where we are heading. But before we look at our roots or focus on the future, the contemporary scene should be considered. (p. 2)

'Church unity' and 'reconciliation' are two closely related terms. Whilst discussing these two terms, we especially have to bear in mind the special situation in which South Africa finds itself and the challenges of divisions and schisms that the church has to tackle.

Van Wyk (2018) argues that:

[W]hilst scripture is very clear on the unity of the church, one wonders how this tallies with the division into different churches the opposition to one another and the contradiction of one another's confessions and diverse decisions in many ways. How is it possible that the church of Christ, guided by the light of the Word and the Spirit of God, could nowadays so easily contradict, even in good conscience, the prayer of Christ for the unity among His followers. Van Wyk continues to question how the world can believe a message of reconciliation if churches themselves live in disarray and contradict one another's synodical decisions? Shouldn't we conclude that the way in which reformed Christians accept and participate in

Note: Special Collection: Impact of Reformed Theology.

church schisms, show that they are acting in a totally unbiblical way in this regard, and also very un-Christ-ian like? (p. 1)

In agreement with Van Wyk, Van der Borght (2009:1) maintains that *'meer dan 15 jaar na het einde van apartheid blijkt ras nog steeds een belangrijke factor in de Zuid-Afrikaanse samenleving'* [more than 15 years after the end of apartheid it shows that race is still a major factor in South African society; my own translation]. Calvin (1960) argues that:

[W]e ought to embrace the whole race without exception in a single feeling of love; here there is no distinction between barbarian and Greek, worthy and unworthy, friend and enemy, since all should be contemplated in God, not in themselves. (Inst 2.8.55). (p. 265)

Another Reformed scholar who has contributed much to the discussions of church unity and reconciliation is Prof. Bennie van der Walt (1996), who as early as 1996, asserted that:

[T]he policy of apartheid has been abolished, for example, but the consequences of apartheid are still with us, and are becoming clearer by the day and will probably remain a reality of the South African milieu for decades to come. (p. 1)

From 1996 to 2018, 22 years have passed after Bennie van der Walt said that the consequences of apartheid would remain a reality for South Africa for decades to come. Twenty-two years later, Baloyi (2018) argues that:

[T]he Reformed churches in South Africa are amongst the churches that officially removed barriers of apartheid to have one united church. The relevant question would be to ask if relatively good progress has been made towards the unity of these churches. (p. 1)

This article now finds its relevance from this question of Baloyi's.

This article aims to investigate the impact of Reformed theology on church unity and reconciliation since the first general synod of 2009. The successes that the reformed churches (RCSA) have achieved cannot be overlooked. I have read so many articles, so many books and I keep on following every church discussion about church unity and reconciliation for I have these two obsessions in my heart. I have never heard anyone say that the RCSA has achieved great success, even in relation to its sister churches, namely the *Hervormde* and Maranatha, Dutch Reformed (*Nederduitse Gereformeerde* [NG]) and Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA). This article is intended to pinpoint the fact that the Reformed churches of South Africa (*Die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika* [GKSA]) are on the right track. The RCSA is involved in one of seven regional synods, one in 50 classises and one in local churches. There is only one theological school for all candidates called to be ministers of the Word in the RCSA. By one, I mean Afrikaans, English, Tswana, Sotho, Pedi, Ndebele, Xhosa, Zulu, Venda and Tsonga together. Bauerochse (2001) adds that:

[T]he hour has come for passing from paternalism to partnership. It is something more than even cooperation; it is partnership that is required. We want the fullest spiritual fellowship with what

we call the younger churches...We must go on in a fellowship in which there is confidence. (p. 15)

I would like to mention some very important factors that the RCSA had been divided on before 2009. These factors will indicate that those 10 years between 2009 and 2019 were 10 years of success. These factors will serve as my sub-themes, namely (1) *Emeritaats versorging* or caring of emeriti [retired ministers], that is, the *GKSA predikant pensioen fonds* [Reformed Ministers' Pension Fund and Thuso Fund], (2) *Sustentasië fonds GKSA* [Sustentation Fund RCSA], (3) *Taal kwessies* [language issues or questions] and (4) Soutpansberg.

In January 2009, there was an excellent display or portrayal of structural and functional unity between the RCSA. The *lex orandi* [rule of worship], *lex credendi* [rule of faith], *lex vivendi* [rule of life] and *lex convivendi* [rule of life together] find their meaning, as brothers come together, in one general synod since the beginning of the RCSA.

Caring of retired ministers, Reformed Churches in South Africa Ministers' Pension Fund and Thuso Fund

It is in the nature of human beings to focus on successes when they celebrate. It is important to bear in mind what we celebrated in 2019; we celebrated 150 years of Reformational theological training at the Theological School in Potchefstroom (TSP). One of the most important legacies that we inherited from the Reformation is the Church Order. Articles 11, 13 and 20 (2003) of the Reformed Church Order express our love for our retired ministers.

Article 11 (2003) of the Reformed Church Order stipulates that:

[T]he church council which represents the church, shall provide adequate means of support to their ministers of the Word and shall not deny them support nor dismiss them from office without the knowledge and approval of the classis, with advice from the deputies of the regional synod. (p. 26)

Article 13 (2003) stipulates that:

[A] minister who, in the opinion of the church council and with the approval of the classis and the advice of the deputies of the regional synod, has become incapable of performing the duties of his office as a result of age, illness or otherwise, shall nevertheless retain the honour and title of a minister of the Word, and the church which he has served, shall provide honourably for him in his need. (pp. 29–30)

Article 20 (2003) stipulates that:

[A]t the demise of a minister of the Word, the church which he has served, or in the case of a professor, the church fellowship, shall care and provide in an honourable way for his widow and children in their need. (p. 30)

In application of the above-mentioned church order articles, it is important to take into consideration the decision of synod 2009 on this matter, specifically regarding the previously disadvantaged.

The RCSA (2009:1.4.7.) synodal decisions in paragraphs G.1 and G.2 read:

[T]he deputies reported that the care of retired ministers from former Synod Midlands is handled by deputies. The report will be included in the supplementary agenda. There are retired ministers, widows and possible orphans from the former synod Midlands who are not properly cared for. In the light of Church Order art 13 and 20 the deputies must bring this matter to the table of the synod. As there is no command from previous synods addressing the specific matter, our 2009 synod requested that the deputies emeritus care accept this matter as part of their task. G2 establishment of a help funds, the deputies have already set up a fund that will provide assistance to the retired ministers and their dependants, but which will also help retired minister in future whose pension fund is too low to be cared for honourably. This help is especially for retired ministers and their dependants from the former synod Midlands. There is currently an amount of R16 000.00 in the account of former synod Midlands. Recommendation: That the help funds be established and that the available funds be used for this purpose. (pp. 248–249)

The practicality of these decisions is visible in the reports of the synod coming after 2009. Calvin's (1552) theological and ecclesiological perspective on church unity was of such great importance to us to the very extent that he said:

[S]o much does this concern me, that, could I be of any service, I would not grudge to cross even ten seas, if need there were, on account of it. (p. 314)

In agreement with Calvin, the synod decided that continuous attention should be paid to the execution of every synod mandate per meeting by means of a standard procedure list (GKSA 2009:248:1.3.3).

Brueggemann (1978:69) in his biblical studies reminded the church that we are worshipping the God of impossibilities, who 'does not quit even when the evidence warrants His quitting'. In showing our unity and reconciliation, many things that were broken in our past needed or still need to be fixed. One of the important decisions of the synod RCSA (2009:253) was that '[n]egotiations with ministers of synod Midlands are currently under way to include them in ministers pension fund'. It is such a great joy even to the ministers of synod Midlands that they now, under the new synod, are part of the PPF or Ministers' Pension Fund.

The Thuso Fund was the decision of synod 2009 (RCSA 2009:249) to improve the living standards of the retired ministers of the Word, widows of the ministers of the Word and their orphans of the former Midlands. Since 2009 until now, there has been a great improvement and change in their lives. All these aspects that I have mentioned are results of church unity and reconciliation. When we are distant from one another, we cannot see the other's cry and need. In the care of our retired ministers, in the care of the pension funds of all our ministers and in having Thuso [helping funds], we have fulfilled Galatians 6:2 '[c]arry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ'.

Sustentation fund Reformed Churches in South Africa

Sustentatie or sustentation means the body of Christ takes care of itself. The church takes care of the church. I differ from Baloyi (2010:01) when he says 'sustentation refers loosely to the act of white wealthier churches subsidizing black poor churches financially to sustain their ministry'. We have white churches too that are beneficiaries of sustentation. We learn from Paul that sustentation is Biblical and it must be promoted as the will of God to his churches. Paul writes to the Corinthians that 'I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so (1 Cor 11: 8)'. There is no racial tag in sustentation. There is a process to follow for every church that wants to apply for sustentation. The application of sustentation is formulated in such a way that it builds up churches and promotes the expansion of the kingdom of God.

Articles 41 and 44 (2003) of the Church Order stand out in agreement with sustentation, and specifically article 41 (especially the part) that says:

[T]he chairman shall enquire whether the churches hold meetings of the church council, exercise church discipline, take good care of the poor and the schools, and whether any of the churches require the advice and assistance of the classis in any matter regarding proper management. (pp. 72–73)

The last part of article 44 (2003) says:

[I]f anyone should be found to be negligent in his office, they must admonish him in a brotherly spirit, and they must assist the church, through word and deed, in the management of everything that is conducive to peace and the building-up of the church in its best interests. (pp. 76–77)

In the understanding of these two articles, the main question here is 'what is *classis* and how does it affect our neighbourhood?' The notion of Spoelstra (1990:353) should be rejected because he thinks that elements such as culture, context, language and ethnicity define classis. Vorster (2003:73) argues that 'unity is essential, whilst cultural diversity is a reality that should be dealt with according to the context and circumstances of the church'. Therefore, this has been practised excellently in the RCSA. As the church is one, under one synod, those who have needs get help from those who can help. This has been a scriptural principle from time immemorial. It is important not only for Baloyi but also for everyone who has misunderstood that sustentation is rooted in the Bible, to remove racial class when attending to the matters of sustentation.

Reformed theologians should remain reformed in their attention to matters like sustentation. Black and white churches are beneficiaries of sustentation. Therefore, Baloyi's (2010:1) view is wrong in thinking that sustentation is something that has shifted from white people to black people.

It is through sustentation that the principles *lex orandi* [rule of worship], *lex convivendi* [rule of life together], *lex credendi* [rule of faith] and *lex vivendi* [rule of life] have found their relevance because the needs of one another are met. It is when the church helps the church that the words of Calvin find relevance 'to cross even ten seas'. As far as the new structures of the church are concerned, it is important to put forth the following questions so that we do not end up in fake or unrealistic unity and reconciliation: 'do these new structures express a full view of the kingdom?', 'can they be regarded as churches?' and 'do they reflect a proper understanding of the *Missio Dei* [mission of God]?' In seeking to be contextual, are they also staying faithful to the gospel? Can their focus on specific cultural groups be justified? What is their relationship to the Christian tradition? Are these contextual churches growing or cultivating disciples with a sense of obligation to the wider church and to others in society, or are they just a form of spiritual consumerism? Will they prove sustainable? What should be their relationship with the denominations? (Moynagh & Harrold 2012:xviii).

The guidelines of synod 2015 on sustentation stipulate the purpose in this manner:

[T]o help the sustentation deputies, either from classis or regional synod to provide guidance in monitoring and assessing sustentation applications. The questions were compiled from the rules of procedure of the sustentation deputies approved by the synod of 2015. The sustentation applications are assessed on the basis of the following questions: (1) is the primary focus of the sustentation application to expand God's kingdom in the building-up and expanding of the church according to Matthew 28? (2) Is financial bridging applied in accordance to article[s] 41 and 44 of the Church Order? (3) Will the church be able to grow to financial independence? (4) Are there any alternatives needed for the church to grow, like combining two churches? (pp. 1-4)

In analysis of these questions, one will quickly come to the conclusion that sustentation is a good practice. It is crucial to the removal of the racial lens and to become kingdom-minded.

Baloyi's (2010) fall or stumble into the trap of black theology or liberation theology led him to misinterpret the sustentation concept. He (Baloyi 2010) argued that:

[W]hen I tried to use Cone's liberation theology as a lens through which to read and understood Biko's as well as Speckman's and Kaufmann's statements, I realised that I needed to start thinking, eating, talking, reading, worshipping, theologising and praying, like a black African. This is the least I can do to find my way back to the people to whom I am a minister. It was through the liberation theology by theologians like Cone that I gained a better appreciation for the view that God identifies himself with the poor and the oppressed, and afflicting the oppressor in support of the oppressed (Cone 1975:63). (p. 13)

Reformed theology was never a biased theology. It calls a spade a spade. Therefore, when one approaches matters like sustentation, and I or one is wearing the glasses of black theology, one will get it wrong.

Language issues

According to the Constitution of South Africa 1996, chapter 1, section 6, paragraph 1, the official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, esiSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. With such a huge number of languages, I concur with Wesley (1738:1) when he says, 'had I had a thousand tongues I would praise Him with them all'. The main reason God blessed a human being with a tongue is for a human being to praise him, and thus, we find in the heart of Reformed theology, *SOLI DEO GLORIA*. What has the RCSA performed with the language problem through the years? Where is the RCSA now?

The former structure of the RCSA was divided along the geographical, racial and tribal borders, namely, the Suidland synod (mixed race people who speak Afrikaans), Midlands synod (black people who speak South-Sotho, North-Sotho, Ndebele, Tswana, Tsonga, Venda, Zulu and Xhosa), the Potchefstroom synod (white people who speak Afrikaans) and the Soutpansberg synod (black people who speak Venda and Tsonga from the North). It is arguable and debatable that these divisions were the results of obedience to the *Race-Classification Act*. The legislative cornerstone of racial classification during apartheid was the *Population Registration Act* (No. 30 of 1950). This act divided the population into three main race or population groups, namely, white people, mixed race people and natives. Theuns Eloff, a very well-known Reformed theologian, wrote his doctorate thesis in 1988 after investigating the theological roots of apartheid and the ideological roots of the *Race Classification Act*. He came to the conclusion that the system was in no way found to satisfy the demands of justice, and that in its practical consequences, it rather brought about and enhanced injustice. The system therefore should be seen as unjust and theologico-ethically unacceptable (Eloff 1988:V). Myers (1999):

[T]he political system was created by God to encourage kingdom ethics and to bring a creation order into the management of human affairs, an order based on justice and peace. Yet, as a result of the fall, the political system becomes captive to the economic order and begins to serve the powerful; its ministries of justice cease to be either ministries, or just. The religious system, which was created by God to bring the nations and their institutions into relationship with God, too often colluded with the fallen political and economic systems. The prophets of accountability are gradually seduced by money, power and prestige, gradually becoming silent (Ezk 22:28). (p. 29)

Marjorie (1982) argues that:

[T]he architects of the apartheid plan envisioned a separate system of education for blacks (even in the urban areas) where the vernacular would be gradually included in university instruction. Blacks objected to this policy from the start. First, they saw the 'divide-and-conquer' motive behind this plan. Secondly, they wanted to learn English for the sake of a wider communication skill. Education solely in the vernacular has never reached beyond the six years at school. (p. 1)

Given this background from which the church is coming, the impact of Reformed theology has led the church to rethink its language issues [*Taal kwessies*].

The decision of the Church Order article 48 regarding the deputies of synod Midlands, Potchefstroom and Soutpansberg at a meeting held on 07 October 2003, 09 September 2004 and 09 June 2005 (section 4.2.1) states that every new classis and the new synod should take its own steps with regard to its language medium, within the framework of the official languages of the country (GKSA 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006:389).

The most important decision of synod 2009 as far as language is concerned should be taken into consideration, namely, the report of deputies of the general synod on language (RCSA 2009:2.3 & 2.4):

[D]elegates can speak during the synod and express themselves in the language they feel comfortable in and in the case of other languages especially native languages, interpretation will be requested in Afrikaans and English. 2.4 [*sic*] All documents, printed and on screen will appear in Afrikaans and English. (p. 44)

This will help the world to see how far the RCSA has moved in the direction of church unity and reconciliation. Most importantly, when one looks at the progress that has taken place on ground level, one may be pleasantly surprised. However, I will come to the progress made when I come to the conclusion.

Soutpansberg

According to Mutavhadsindi and Meiring (2014:01), Synod Soutpansberg consists of the following classises and churches, namely, classis Gateway with the churches Fundudzi, Nzhelele, Seshego and Tshitandani, and classis Luvuvhu consisting of the churches De Hoop, Hosiya, Mutale and Niani. I would differ from Ramantswana (2015:15) when he argues that classis Tshwane forms part of Synod Soutpansberg. It may be fair reasoning to say that the split part of classis Tshwane that did not agree with a decision to join the new structure joined Soutpansberg. Classis Tshwane made the decision as it was part of the Synod Midlands to join the new general Synod of the RCSA. It is important to note that many of the churches from Synod Midlands that went to Soutpansberg did so by way of a split or separation, in court (because of) with divisions, split of families, fighting of ministers and manipulation of church council, classis and synod. Many churches are coming back to the unity of the RCSA as, for example, those churches of the Reformed Church of Makau under the leadership of Dr Rev. Amos Motshine Sekhaulelo.

The main question of this sub-theme may be to ask, as far as church unity and reconciliation is concerned, where Soutpansberg resides? At Soutpansberg! A few churches from the North or the Limpopo province that decided not to join the unity of the Reformed churches (RCSA) have placed

their reasons¹ on the table but still these do not meet the requirements of Scripture, confession and church order. Unity can only be argued or rectified in unity, and is like a marriage: you cannot leave your partner to sleep next door whilst you say you want to fix your broken marriage! Against this backdrop, Batlajery (2010) argues that:

[T]he unity of the church is fundamental for/to Calvin's ecclesiology. When he was speaking about church, he was also at the same time speaking about its unity. Willem Balke states: surprisingly, the primary accent in Calvin's ecclesiology falls on unity. The church is the body of Christ, the Christ who cannot have two or three bodies. He is the Head of the one body. And for the elect, the point is that they are united and conjoined in Christ, are dependent on one Head and grow together into one body. (p. 15)

It is sad for the church to want to discuss unity outside unity. Reformed theology is missing in the unity discussions in Soutpansberg. It seems that Soutpansberg might have fallen into the trap of black or liberation theology. It will not be a surprise if one hears soon that Synod Soutpansberg has accepted the Belhar Confession as one of its faith documents. The general synod GKSA (2012) notes with regret that:

[W]e are not aware of any Reformed church in the world which adopts or has adopted the course in ecclesiastical matters now proposed by Soutpansberg. The method which Soutpansberg wishes to adopt is therefore alien to art 30 church order: ecclesiastical matters in an ecclesiastical manner. (p. 654)

One of the problems that Soutpansberg is lodged with is the ongoing court battles. These court battles are caused by some local members who say that they do not want to go to Soutpansberg. Instead of applying brotherly love, some ministers of Soutpansberg divide and rule, for example, Tshiwelo in Soweto, Atteridgeville in Pretoria and Boipatong in the Vaal. In one church, people have two separate churches, namely, Soutpansberg next to the RCSA. There is a serious tension amongst black people themselves which makes one suspect that this is rather tribalism and nothing else. For example, the title of the letter on 05 May 2011 to Soutpansberg is (GKSA 2012):

[R]elationship between general synod GKSA and synod Soutpansberg. Soutpansberg replied on the 30 May 2011 with a title 'art 48 CO Deputies of Synods Potchefstroom and Soutpansberg during the post-2009 phase of the restructuring process'. (p. 645)

Two points are important in this title, firstly, Soutpansberg black synod does not recognise Midlands black synod, and, secondly, Soutpansberg does not recognise the new existing structure.

It is also clear that Synod Soutpansberg is a synod divided against or within itself. There are two splits or divisions: the one that wants to give unity and reconciliation a try, and the

1. Racism and paternalism in the relationship, sharing our poverty and riches, ethnic and languages diversities, a guiding vision about the countries in which the GKSA/RCSA ministers, theological training, financial church assessment and major assembly structures, missions and church planting and worship, women in church office and other conflicting decisions of the synods, ecumenicity and the Capricorn churches and similar subsequent matters.

other that does not. There is fighting for positions, specifically academic positions. How can a synod decide who must apply or not? Baloyi (2011), as one of the Soutpansberg ministers, argues that:

[T]hey (Soutpansberg Synod) thought that they should own the capacity building; there were posts made available by the University, although they did not have people who were academically qualified to fill those positions at that point. That is why after their candidates had failed the interviews (one from the camp of non-favourites did pass), their frustrations came to a head. This led them to withdraw their theological training from the then Potchefstroom University. (p. 6)

From this strong, honest and faithful statement of Baloyi, one can clearly deduce or recognise a schism that is taking place within Soutpansberg. The references use the third person plural pronoun (they) three times and the possessive pronoun in the plural (their) which should be an indication of divisions that are taking place in Soutpansberg itself. As he is a member of Soutpansberg, he should say 'we', not 'they'. Is Baloyi, one of the people who wanted to apply but was obedient to the decision of the synod, so therefore he could not? Or is Baloyi a member of another split? Was the whole synod not aware that wrong decisions were being made? Is favouritism not a sin? How can a synod (with many wise people there) make such a decision? Was there no one in the synod to say, 'brothers, we are not being consistent with Scripture, confession and church order?' Unfortunately it happened but God's will is beyond human decision.

Baloyi (2011) also noted with harshness that Soutpansberg's frustrations were coming to a head. Can anyone refer to the situation of court cases, continuing divisions and failure to join RCSA, as 'frustration'?

It is obvious that Synod Soutpansberg does not recognise Synod Midlands and it does not acknowledge the new structure of the general synod RCSA; hence, they still call General synod RCSA the Synod Potchefstroom. These facts were evident from the minutes of the General Synod (RCSA 2012:645) when they argued that the local churches together known as the Churches in Southern Africa (RCSA) constituted a family of churches or a church organisation. These churches currently are also organised in two synods that are commonly referred to as Potchefstroom and Soutpansberg. The names, Potchefstroom and Soutpansberg, are used here because of the location of the administrative bureaux of the churches that form each of the two synods. It is surprising that after 2009 Soutpansberg still calls the other synod, Potchefstroom. I believe that unity is possible. There is still room for Soutpansberg.

Van Wyk (2010) deduced the following notions of Christian life from Augustine and Calvin, namely:

[C]hristian life is not possible without the light of the Word of God. Christian life is not possible without putting God in the centre of it: God is our Creator, Sustainer, Provider and Source of strength. Christian life is not possible without the redeeming and reconciliatory work of Jesus Christ and without following in His

footsteps of self-denial and cross-bearing. Christian life is not possible without the renewing and transforming work of the Spirit of God, who teaches us how to live a life of love, humbleness and truth and how to reject pride and hatred. Christian life is not possible without focusing on the advent of a new heaven and a new earth where God will be all in all. Christian life is not possible without faith and hope and love. (pp. 63–64)

Christian life includes change; change comes with challenges; challenges that (declare) that now is not you, now is the Word of God.

Kysar (1999) argues that change challenges self-understanding for communities as well as for individuals. In the context of the significant cultural change around us, the church has already begun to wrestle with its identity, asking:

[W]ho are we? But how is the task of discerning and articulating corporate self-understanding to be managed? What is involved in such an enterprise? Can corporate self-understanding be managed? Can we intentionally change the way we think of ourselves as a church? If that is possible, how do we accomplish it. (p. 20)

Christian identity is in Christ. Unity and reconciliation can be accomplished if we obey the rule of Christ.

Conclusion

Church unity and reconciliation is visible in RCSA everywhere where black and white children are attending confirmation camps together at classis Far East and Central East Rand of Eastern Regional Synod. White and black ministers are rotating as per the chairmanship of classis. Old people of Reformed churches (black and white) and the whole classis of the East Rand come together at Benoni Reformed Church to celebrate music and Christmas songs every year in September. The sisters from the white churches and the mothers from the black churches have a conference together in March every year (Sisters Convention *saamtrek*). Black and white ministers are attending Bosberaad or Indaba or camps together. Black and white people are attending classes at the TSP together. There is only one school for training of ministers in the RCSA and that is the TSP. After the general synod laid a good foundation in 2009, it is the responsibility of local churches to unite, visit, camp, pray and worship together now.

From all this, one can realise that these 10 years have been 10 years of success, but I cannot deny the fact that the church in this broken world and in this life itself is not perfect. I cannot deny the fact that the bride (Church) is busy preparing herself to meet her groom (Christ). It is irrational to expect perfect unity in this short time. What is important, despite our linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences, is that we are one. It is through communication and discussions that we must solve the problems when they arise. We must not make the mistake of Soutpansberg to discuss unity outside unity. Unity of the church in a place like South Africa

entails really hard work, but our hope is our Lord Jesus Christ who has already prayed and will continue to pray for us, 'I pray that they may be one'.

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Author's contributions

C.C.M. is the sole author of this research article.

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