

Reviewing GKSA worldview from mission-diverted to mission-oriented history biblically



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This article reflects the mission history of the Reformed Church in South Africa (RCSA or GKSA) from mission-diverted to mission-oriented worldview biblically, with a special reference to Genesis 11:1–9 and Acts 2:1–13. The first and current readers of the mentioned text were and are still urged to see their God-given mission to fill the earth by multiplying the faith community not by dividing (or isolating) it. The mission field might be either rural or local (homogeneity) and urban or global (multi-cultural). This article came to the realisation that faith (not culture) is and should always help in determining and identifying the faith community. The main question is: What are the historical lessons drawn from the missional strategy of the RCSA, where the Reformed Church was basically rural in outlook, while their context of operation is quickly becoming urban? This article is set to discuss three aspects: firstly, the RCSA worldview; secondly, Genesis 11:1–9 and Acts 2:1–13 and related biblical texts that shed light on the RCSA worldview; and lastly, the historical lessons drawn from the RCSA missional strategy.

Contribution: This article adds value (a voice) to the debate on the present and future of RCSA's missional worldview and strategy when the villages, towns and cities are still posing inevitable socio-economic and political challenges and opportunities for the church planting and growth to God's glory. It became clear that multiplication of missional strategy in the multi-cultural context of South Africa and beyond is still a relevant missional mandate in light of Genesis 11:1–9 and Acts 2:1–13 – even today.

Keywords: mission-diversion; mission-orientation; worldview; RCSA; Genesis 11:1–9.

Introduction

Imagined communities

The concept of 'imagined communities' was coined by Anderson (1983:6–7). He argues that a nation is a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of the community and whose members might, for example have access to the same print media (newspaper, books, magazines, etc.) and electronic media (radio, television and computer, film, etc.); they might also watch national games (soccer, cricket, rugby, etc.) as well as sing one national anthem and yet remain heterogeneous individuals with differing worldviews (Muller 2004:18). This article says that the socio-economic and political context and climate are ripe for the church to be part of the solution – as an agent of reconciliation, to bring about cohesion, and not to breed more division. The same climate can be both a challenge and an opportunity for the church and, particularly for the Reformed Church in South Africa (RCSA or GKSA) to understand her worldview and missional strategy in her history of mission in the past, present and future. It is from this background that this article is written.

Understanding the worldview of the Reformed Church in South Africa¹ to understand her missional ministry

The main challenge addressed in this article is the worldview of the RCSA regarding the role of the cities in RCSA's missiology yesterday, today and in the future. Can Genesis 11:1–9 bring insight for the church to fulfil her God-given mandate of multiplying Christian converts in the multi-cultural context, rather than dividing people? The question will be answered within a church context.

The context of the Reformed Church in South Africa's worldview and its origin in the interior of the Cape Colony

The RCSA's worldview can be traced back to the 17th and 18th centuries, though it was ultimately a 19th-century reality. It was in 1860 that the Potchefstroom churches were established in

1.To Van der Walt (1984:39), worldview is 'an integrated, interpretive set of confessional perspectives on reality which underlies, shapes, motivates and gives direction and meaning to human activity'.

Burgersdorp, Middelburg and Colesberg. The majority of the RCSA members were mostly the descendants of the emigrant farmers or *trekboers* (Hexham 1981:61; Spoelstra 1989:62), who moved away from the Cape to the north-eastern part of the Cape (Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:6; Spoelstra 1989:64). It was a close-knit, self-sufficient and individualistic community,² characterised not only by intermarriage, anti-liberal and anti-imperial stance, but also known for fighting for a 'distinct' land free from British rule, a 'distinct' culture and customs of their forefathers and a *distinct* religion based on the books of the pietistic *oude schrijvers*, the Bible and the Reformed Creed (Elphick & Davenport 1997:123; Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:5–6; Kamsteeg & Van Dirk 1990:17). In light of that context, to those Trekboers any matter that did not concern them directly was of little importance (Saunders 1994:58). Generally, once a year a trekboer family would make the journey³ to the Cape, mostly for the Holy Communion, the baptism of children, to trade by selling animals, animal skins, meat, wool, et cetera, to buy coffee, tea, sugar, lead, gunpowder, ammunition, and other such sundry (Beinat 1994:40; Saunders 1994:58).

The Reformed Church in South Africa's worldview was also nurtured by the books of the *pietistic oude schrijvers*

Though the extent of the Calvinistic influence on the Trekboers in the 1800s is still debatable, there is a general acknowledgement of the fact that the books of the *pietistic oude schrijvers* also played an important role in the formation of their inner-orientated religious individualism (cf. Malan 1984:456). According to Saunders (1994):

[T]his isolated and monotonous existence presented few opportunities for intellectual advancement or even basic education. If he could afford it, a trekboer might hire an itinerant *meester* (schoolmaster) to teach his children. The *meester* would almost certainly be unqualified, and probably a deserter from a ship or from the Company's service. (p. 58)

It has been widely argued that the worldview of the piteous *oude schrijvers*, and hence also that of the *Trekboers*, in most cases was diverted from Calvin's stance (cf. Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:12, 13).

The Reformed Church in South Africa's worldview missed mission work opportunities in the Cape colony

By the 1850s, the Cape colony (initially a refreshment station for the Dutch ships to the Eastern countries) was already a city and an integration centre of Europeans, Asians and indigenous South Africans. It was an export centre for meat, hides, fish, skins, ivory and aloes (for medicinal purposes), and above all wine (cf. Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:5; Saunders 1994:95). By then, most European denominations, including the Anglicans, Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics, were transplanted in

2.Spoelstra (1969:96) (Not in the bibliography) outlines this interior territory as follows: If one draws a line on the map of the Cape colony from Barkly East, through Cradock and Victoria West, to Britstown, this community could be found north of this line and south of the Orange River as early as 1830.

3.This was due to the inefficiency of transport in the early 19th century; and the long distance that had to be covered also contributed to the geographical, economic and spiritual isolation of the *trekboer* families from the socio-economy and religious activities of the Cape.

the Cape Colony (cf. Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:87, 124). Though Rev. Dirk Postma had many goals, including evangelism before arriving in the Cape Colony in 1858, these could not be realised in the Cape Colony. The reason was that the imperialist, Methodist and Liberalist influences in the Cape Colony and particularly on the churches, including the Dutch Reformed churches, constituted barriers to such evangelical work, according to the early RCSA Trekboer families (cf. Hexham 1981:61; Spoelstra 1989:62). However, pioneers like Rev. D. Postma and Rev. Jan Lion Cachet laid a foundation for the RCSA for the coloured people in the 1870s, both in Philipstown and Venterstad, outside of the Cape Colony (cf. Jooste 1958:334; Spoelstra 1999:12).

The Reformed Church in South Africa's worldview developed in the contestation era for the land and land resources (labourers)

Most scholars who studied the history of the Afrikaners, including Villa-Vicenzio (1997), Moodie (1980a; 1980b), and Hexham (1981), conclude that one of its main characteristics was the contest over the native land, land resources and the native labourers, particularly in the Orange Free State (OFS) and the Transvaal republics. Saunders (1994:115) mentions the fact that the two Afrikaner republics, the OFS and Transvaal, were part of the land, which was on the one hand claimed by early 1830s expedition reporters, to be 'uninhabited and belong to no one' and hence, the report strengthened the Voortrekkers' claim to the Republic; on the other hand it was part of the land ignored by the English, and hence left in the control of the Afrikaner, as confirmed in the Sand River convention of 1854, before the discovery of diamonds and gold. After the Afrikaner Civil War, the united Afrikaner commandos in the late 1860s, under the leadership of Paul Kruger as commandant-general, were involved in the contest for the native land, land resources and the native labourers. Kings Makhado of the Vendas, Moshoeshoe of the Sotho, Cetshwayo of the Zulus, and Sekhukhune of the Pedis were among those kings who resisted them on their respective mountain strongholds before the British annexed the Boer Republic in 1877 (Mason 2003:114ff. Saunders 1994:147, 160). The seed of hostility between the Afrikaners and the natives led to many sporadic tensions in the Transvaal Republic (Boeyens 1994:193; Bulpin 1989:98; Lamb 1974:79; Nemudzivhadi 1998:100) and hence, to a large extent, shaped and influenced the RCSA mission work to the native people. There were several important factors aggravating the hostility. Firstly, the discovery of diamonds in 1867 in Kimberly and gold in 1886 in Johannesburg led not only to the movement of many African workers from rural areas and from 'the Landlords', most of whom were Afrikaner, to the 'Rand Lords' of whom most of them were *uitlanders* foreigners, but also to the outnumbering of the Afrikaner farming population by the native people, Asians and Europeans, whom the Afrikaners regarded as *uitlanders* (Callinicos 1985:12–14). In 1880, The *Star* newspaper reports that 'the anti-Johannesburg stance taken by Pretoria was no figment of the imagination. Kruger and

the Volksraad simply hated the place' (Clark 1987:7). Secondly, the Keate Awards of 1871, whereby the Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, Keate, as a final arbitrator gave his verdict, which led the Afrikaner Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State to lose 143 farms in the large area of land extending from the richest diamond-fields through to the Bloemhof District, up to the Marico District (cf. Bulpin 1989:113; Van Rensburg & Oosthuizen 1986:262). Thirdly, the Transvaal Republic was under the leadership of Burgers, a liberal president since the early 1870s and a religious rival of Paul Kruger and Reverend F. Lion Cachet and their followers (Bulpin 1989:146); and also the breach of the Sand River Convention (1854), when some Afrikaners were found guilty in Court on the charges of stealing cattle and child kidnapping (Boeyens 1994:191, Bulpin 1989:98), which caused significant setbacks and humiliation to Paul Kruger and others (Boeyens 1994:193; Lamb 1974:79; Nathan 1942:79; Nemudzivhadi 1998:100). Fourthly, there were alarmist rumours of a joint attack to be launched on the Republic by the Pedi and Zulus, in concert with the rest of the Transvaal tribes, while the ZAR Republic was in the state of financial and military-volunteers poverty (cf. Bulpin 1989:147; Nemudzivhadi 1998:145).

The Reformed Church in South Africa's worldview and the mission work initiatives in Pretoria since the 1860s

By the 1860s, other church denominations and mission societies from the Cape colony have already expanded their mission work in Natal, the OFS and onwards into other parts of Transvaal, directing their mission work specifically to the convention of black Africans, and hence, by 1910, those missionaries had already produced a handful of western-educated native elites and missionaries (cf. Elphick & Davenport 1997:82; Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:127, 129, 131). The DRC and the Berlin Missionary Society's missionary work among the Transvaal natives was affected by the hostility between the Afrikaners and the natives regarding the land and labour, which dominated the period (Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:138; Nemudzivhadi 1998:127–128). According to Ndou (2000:259), 'during the misunderstanding between the traditional leaders and Government, the missionaries were caught in the crossfire because whichever side they took they could be blamed by either party'. It is also this context which shaped and developed the indifferent-mission worldview. The RCSA was established in Rustenburg in 1859 and in Pretoria later in the same year before Pretoria became the seat of Government in 1860.

The Reformed Church in South Africa and the mission work challenges among the coloured and black Africans

The Pretoria Volksraad's consolidated hostility had some effect on the way in which the Potchefstroom church viewed the mission work to the growing influx of people in their midst. Firstly, the Pretoria delegates to the Potchefstroom Synod of 1869 and 1873 (Spoelstra 1999:33, 41; RCSA, Synod 1869:24; 1873:120[3]), numbered among the delegates who

questioned the issue of the equality of coloured and black people with white people in the church, as they felt that it was inappropriate and unsuitable to worship with coloured and black converts, and hence, they were part of the resolution of the synod, which resolved that the churches were too weak to evangelise among them, even after 14 years of its existence, with 19 churches, seven ministers and 4 362 members (Jooste 1958:167; Spoelstra 1999:33, 41). Secondly, there was also no mission work done in Pretoria by the Reformed Church in Pretoria for 45 years since 1859 (Van der Vyver 1951:44), as there was a general attitude of ignorance and indifference if not ferocious resistance to mission work in some Potchefstroom local churches (Van Rooy 1997:33), whereby at Burgersdorp, Rev. Postma once refused to minister the sacraments to those who objected to his mission work in the local jail, and at Nylstroom he was also refused permission to minister to black people, upon which he wrote a letter to that church, earnestly admonishing them to repent of their sin of racism. In Bethulie, there was a schism over the matter of mission to black people, and later in Angola, the church was divided into two sections, a pro-mission, and an anti-mission section (the latter seceded from the Potchefstroom churches, and they formed the Reformed Church). It is in this context that Van der Vyver (1951:44) can be understood when he noted that there was no mission work done by the Reformed Church in Pretoria for 45 years from 1859. Thirdly, in this context, Spoelstra (1963) states that:

[D]ie genootskaplike sendingmetode and sendingresultate is ook deur Postma en Beyer veroordeel. Dit is maklik om weerstand teen 'n sendingmetode as vyandigheid teen die sending as sodang voor te stel, veral as daar nog nie eie sending gedrywe word nie. (p. 241)

Comparing the decades from 1859 to 1999 in the RCSA's existence, it ought to be noted that only five local churches were established between 1876 and 1889 (GKSA, Almanak 2004). This indicates that in the decade 1879 to 1889, the RCSA had its lowest number of established local churches. The contest regarding the native land, land resources and native labourers had a direct impact not only on the isolated worldview of the RCSA, but also on the indifference to their own mission work and that of other churches and agencies. Fourthly, Spoelstra (1963) summarises the political and economic scene between the 1860s and 1870s by saying:

[D]ie burgeroorlog, die ontruiming van Soutspansberg, die natuurle-onluste, die verlies van die diamantvelde en uiteindelik die triomf van Burgers onder wie hulle geen seen van God ver wag het nie. Die drang na isolasie was daarby 'n tipiese kenmerk van die Doppers. (p. 256)

Clearly *die drang na isolasie* became a *tipiese kenmerk van die Doppers* (cf. Spoelstra 1963:256f.), which led some RCSA families to move to Angola with their leaders' support (cf. Ras 1981:126–127) and isolate themselves from their 1870s religious-political and economic context, as well as from the republican ties, and they also isolated the black children from

their ethnic ties, claiming that it was a 'Christianisation process' of the 'less civilised' by the 'civilised' (cf. Delius 1983:64, 80). Yet, it was done for the sake of their home economy (cf. Boeyens 1994:191ff., Delius, P & Trapido, S. 1983:64ff. knowing that it was a breach of the Sand River Convention of 1854 (cf. Boeyens 1994:191, 193, 200; Mason 2003:94–95). Pieter Biewenga was a missionary to those Africanised natives called *mak-volk* in Angola, but the church stopped existing by the late 1920s. This also happened to Ndebele farmworkers of Middelbult, southeast of Pretoria, and Bapedi farmworkers of Moelietsieskop and Uniondale, namely that the churches respectively stopped existing after the death of their missionary, Pieter Bos, in 1923 and his wife in 1949 (GKSA Synod Acta 1910:47, 55; Jooste 1958:327; Spoelstra 1999:33, 40, 41, 61, 65). Yet, Nemudzivhadi (1998) and Ndou (2000), among others, also acknowledge some considerable fruits of the European mission work under such circumstances, even in the Zoutspansberg area, where mission work only started later in the early 1860s, compared to other areas.

The Reformed Church in South Africa's mission work and President Paul Kruger's initiative towards mission funds

It was also in this period that God used President Kruger and his Volksraad in consolidating the mission work of the Potchefstroom churches, both in the rural and the urban areas in South Africa and outside. There are many indications to illustrate this fact, some of which are the following: Firstly, Paul Kruger's visits to Europe on behalf of the Pretoria Volksraad and the Afrikaner Republic in the late 1870s (after Transvaal was annexed by the British in 1877, and after the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in 1886) established him as a skilled political negotiator acknowledged even by the British government (Saunders 1994:198). He was also known as a tactful recruiter of teachers, civil officials, and businesspeople, particularly from Holland, to come and work in the Republic to resist the British's Anglicisation plans (Spoelstra 1999:42). Secondly, some of Paul Kruger's European visits benefited the Potchefstroom churches as Spoelstra (1999:42) said, Paul Kruger '*het oortuigde Gereformeerde Nederlanders uit die Afskeiding en Doleansie en ... nuwe denke oor sending in die Gereformeerde Kerk Pretoria gestimuleer*'. Some of these immigrants had influenced the views of the Potchefstroom church leaders regarding mission work since the 1880s. Thirdly, according to Spoelstra (1999:40, 42), it was the Church Council of the Reformed church in Pretoria, led by Rev. Petrus Postma, who questioned the 1888 synod on how they should expand the kingdom of God. They influenced the synod mission funds, and hence suggested that an eligible person ought to be carefully selected for mission work. The 1894 synod was persuaded to search for a missionary and a mission field, and hence the synod mission funds were collected from the 1880s onwards, led by President Kruger, by giving 100 pounds himself. Thereafter, mission work started for the coloured people and the Jews. From 1905 onwards, the GKSA Pretoria laid its foundation as a church promoting mission work in the Soutpansberg. Rev. Petrus Postma was the pioneer in the

establishment of the Reformed Church in Johannesburg. In 1925, Rev. Marthinus Postma wrote down⁴ the history of the first RCSA Church in Johannesburg from the mid-1890s to the demarcation period in 1924. Rev. Petrus Postma was the pioneer in the establishment of the Reformed Church (RC) in Johannesburg.

The Reformed Church in South Africa's mission work started but derailed and diverted in Johannesburg

The Afrikaners suspected British motives not only after the discovery of diamonds in Kimberly and their annexation of the Transvaal Republics in 1877, but also after the discovery of gold in 1886 in Johannesburg, where they were alarmed and threatened by the outnumbering of the Afrikaner farming population by natives, as well as Asians and Europeans, whom the Afrikaners regarded as [*uitlanders*]. The residence section of Johannesburg, called Hillbrow, was one of the open doors to many different ethnic groups from near and abroad. Most of the African workers moved from rural areas and from landlords (most of whom were Afrikaners), to work for the Landlord (most of whom were uitlanders)? (cf. Callinicos 1985:12–14). The first RCSA in Johannesburg was established in a quiet suburb of Melville, 10 years after the discovery of gold on 23 May 1896 (cf. GKSA Almanak 1944:121; Clarke 1987:7). Since 1998, some church services were later on rendered next to Randjeslaagte in the RCSA Braamfontein ward, until they stopped in 1902 and the church building was then hired and later sold in the 1920s. Thus, the RCSA's prophetic voice was not present in the city centre not only in those first 36 years of the residential area of Randjeslaagte, called Hillbrow, which was a potential urban and multi-cultural residential middle-class suburb (Saunders 1994:212; Meredith 1997:28), but also when Paul Kruger and the Volksraad outlawed prostitution and the prostitutes' exodus from the west in 1897 in the Johannesburg city centre (Saunders 1994:214). According to Clark (1987):

[J]ohannesburg, at no stage, was granted proper municipal status during the time of Kruger's republic – not even in 1895, when it became South Africa's most populated urban centre. The trouble was that Pretoria did not think Johannesburg would last. It believed the gold would run out, just as it had in Barberton – and then all the troublesome uitlanders would go home to Britain, Australia, California, Germany, or wherever, and the Boers could live in peace. (p. 7)

4.He (Postma 1925) mentions:

Wijlen Ds. P. Postma, toen leraar van Pretoria, maakte met de Kerkraad van Pretoria voorziening in de geestelike behoeften van de leden alhier door eenmaal in de maand alhier te preken. Later hielp wijlen Ds. Ph. Snijsman hem. Het kerkje was een zink of ijzeren gebouw op Van Brandis Square. In de eerste godsdienstoefening waren slechts 22 tegenwoordig, en, volgens onze Afrikaanse gewoonte, droeg elke manslidmaat een stoel op zijn rug voor hem en een voor zijn vrouw naar de Kerk [...] Er was toen een ouderling en een diaken, die alle drie maanden met de koets naar Pretoria moesten gaan om in de Kerkeradsvergadering te zitten. Ds. P. Postma heeft ons dikwels verhaald van zijn eerste dienst. Hij was de eerste Hollandse leraar die hier in 't Hollands preekte. Bij zijn eerste dienst was grote nieuwsgierigheid'. (p. 16) Hence, Van der Vyver (1951) concluded: [N]aas die belangstelling van ds. Postma, sal ons aan die sendingsaak nie reg laat geskied as ons nie hier vermeld dat ons in die opsig ook wel veel dank verskuldig is aan Nederlanders, wat hulle veral in die Gemeente Pretoria gevestig het nie. Uit die name is dit duidelik dat dit juis hulle is wat die belange van die sending gedurig op die kerkeradsvergaderinge ter sprake gebring het. Wat aksie in die saak aanbetref het dit egter nooit verder gekom as 'n vrye kollekte afgesonder vir die sendingwerk te Humpata en Venterstad nie. (p. 46)

This report in the *Star* of 1889, reveals the general attitude of the *Burgers* towards *uitlanders*.

The Reformed Church in South Africa's worldview was built around an exclusive nationalism

There were many factors which led to an exclusive nationalism consciousness. Firstly, unity and solidarity against the possible incoming of *uitlanders* urged Paul Kruger and the Afrikaners to the emergence of nationalism and republican consciousness (cf. Saunders 1994:195). Secondly, the fragmented Afrikaners were persuaded to realise their unity around the Afrikaner language, culture and nation. Rev. Jan Lion Cachet's criticism of President Burgers' liberalism opens a possible coming *uitlanders* threat to their republic (cf. Bulpin 1989:149, 147; Saunders 1994:195). Thirdly, the initiatives by Rev. S.J. du Toit's organisation (Die Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners – 1875), newspapers (*Die Afrikaanse Patriot*) and historical books (*Die geskiedenis van ons land in die taal van ons volk*; Saunders 1994:196, 197). Fourthly, there was an ultimate victory of the first Anglo-Boer war (1881), and the subsequent choice of Paul Kruger as their president (1883). Yet, it was Paul Kruger's exclusive nationalism which was objected to by S.J. du Toit, who called for a united South Africa (d'Assonville 1993:35ff.; Shorten 1970:101), who also foresaw the Anglo-Boer war (cf. d'Assonville 1993:63ff.). This led him down the lonely road of 'Ismael' as d'Assonville (1993:39) states. Fifthly, the exclusive nationalist writings, including that of Rev. Jan Lion Cachet between 1882 and 1899 (Hexham 1981:129–133; 156–157), had a further influence on the student society, 'Veritas Vincent' (1903), who propagated the love for Afrikaans, and those of his theological students, including Willem Postma and J.D. du Toit, who, later, in turn, reacted against an Anglicisation of the Afrikaners by Milner, and also rejected any attempt of uniting them with English under the British common-wealth by J.B.M. Hertzog. The so-called 'Ismael' road of loneliness became the usual road for all who objected, even when their initial contributions to the Afrikanerdom were formerly acknowledged. This included J.B.M Hertzog, who exposed the Broederbond secrecy in 1935 at Smithfield, and Prof. L.J. du Plessis, who challenged the white *Baasskap* in the 1950s (cf. Hexham 1981:190ff.; Serfontein 1978:80, Wilkins & Strydom 1978:48ff.).

Exclusive nationalism was nursed and nurtured by the cultural ideologies

Weiss (2000) notes:

[I]n the wake of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902, a group of 14 fervent Boer Nationalists – railway employees in Johannesburg – founded an Afrikaner cultural society in 1918, which in 1921 became a secret society, the Broederbond. (p. 44)

The main aim of the *Broederbond* was to purify the Afrikaans language, culture and nation (cf. Wilkins & Strydom 1978: 59–62). From the 1930s up until the mid-1950s, this was administered in Potchefstroom (cf. Elphick & Davenport 1997:136, 372–373; Hexham 1981:189, 190; Ngcokoyane

1989:70; O'Meara 1985:69; Van der Vyver 1951:244, 251). From Potchefstroom, the Broederbond deputation dissuaded the wavering Dr. D.F. Malan in Cape in January 1934, and also Advocate J.G. Strydom, not to join General Hertzog and Smuts' alliance, for the sake of the interests of the future of the Afrikanerdom (Serfontein 1978:40, 79–80). There was a five-page petition against the *Broederbond* activities in the church (Serfontein 1982:211; Wilkins & Strydom 1978:209), which was unanimously rejected as unconvincing in the RCSA General Synod (ACTA) (1964:453[4]) The secrecy of the *Broederbond* was already exposed by J.H.M Hertzog in 1935 and by Rev. D.P.M. Beukes, at the NGK Synod (1963), also appeared in the English press by means of Rev. J. Visser. In the white *Baasskap* ideology, black people are viewed as white people's perpetual servants. The presupposition behind the views is that black people are viewed as 'primitive or tribal', 'uncivilised', 'backward', 'inferior', and 'second-class' compared to white people, and this ideology should lead to white Christian civilisation through paternalism and by the intervention of the white guardian (RCSA Synod Act 1869:24; 1873:120[3]; 1876:25, 58–59, 193; 1961:118–119; 1964:265c; 1988:153–154; see also S. du Toit: *Holy Scripture and race relations* [1960]).

The exclusive nationalism was enhanced and elevated by Kuyper's [natural law or norm]

Abraham Kuyper's *stroomwet* found its reception in both the exclusive nationalism and the 'isolation is strength' worldview. Kuyper's *stroomwet* is claimed to be a creation ordinance (or a natural norm according to Dooyeweerd), which determined a distinctive nature and course for each nation (Strauss 1985:12). The *stroomwet* was received in the 1930s and thereafter influenced the Afrikaner worldview, particularly that of the Reformed Church leadership, in many ways. It includes, in the first place, that some RCSA scholars argue that it gave Afrikaans language, culture and history its distinctiveness (Hexham 1981:126f.; 169f.; O'Meara 1985:69; Saunders 1994:195ff.). Secondly, it is also argued that it consolidated the stance: '[in] isolation [there] is strength'. The stance is used both to urge GKSA members to support an exclusive republican stance, especially in the early 1910s (Hexham 1981:180; De Gruchy 1979:28, 29), and also to urge them to reject any attempt of uniting English and Afrikaners by Botha, Smuts and Hertzog, respectively. Thirdly, it is argued that it combined a stance, '[in] isolation [there] is strength', with sovereignty-in-own-sphere. This combination was expressed by Jan Kamp – the former editor of Kuyper's daily newspaper, *De Standaard*, who admitted in an article, *The Doppers and politics in Het Western* on 24 June 1914, that by isolation or standing apart, the RCSA can be powerful and effective in the world, where they sought to apply Calvinistic principles to all areas of life (Hexham 1981:188ff.). Fourthly, it was applied by the RCSA Broederbond ideologists, who reorganised and administered the Broederbond from 1927 to the mid-1950s, before Dr Verwoerd and his supporters wrested it from their control (Hexham 1981:189ff.). The latter used the *Broederbond* ideology to criticise both the Afrikaner Nationalist dissidents in the 1960s and 1970s, and the Koinonia Declaration Calvinists (Elphick & Davenport

1997:372ff.; Hexham 1981:188ff.; Hofmeyr 1991:81). The *stroomwet* ideology propagate the fact that there is a natural law or norm which is not destroyed by the fall of the human beings into sin (Loubser 1987:39; Hofmeyr 1991:81), but it is destroyed by mixed-cultural marriages and worships, and socio-political and economical values, et cetera (GKSA Synod Acts 1961:118ff.; Strauss 1985:12). It is through the *stroomwet* that the coloured and black people of South Africa are regarded as children of Ham, people who lacks both natural and special grace, hence located at the very lowest level of human development. It would therefore be foolish to treat them as equals in family, or social and political life (Strauss 1985:8, 12). Abraham Kuyper's views influenced S.J. du Toit, who had met Kuyper himself, where his views were subsequently propagated in South Africa (Botha 1984:482), and in the 1930s and 1940s, a few prominent RCSA scholars and theologians were important trailblazers for Kuyperian thoughts in the RCSA Synod decisions in 1958 and 1961 (Strauss 1985:8, 12).

Genesis 11:1–9 and the Reformed Church in South Africa's worldview regarding missional strategy

Reformed Church in South Africa's worldview in light of the first homogenous unit of Noah's descendants

Genesis 11:1–9 follows Genesis 10, and yet reading them in sequence, appears to be contradictory, because Genesis 11:1 says that the whole earth had one language, whereas in Genesis 10, the descendants of Noah's three sons had their own families, territories and nations (cf. Gn 10:1, 5, 20 & 31), each with its own distinct language. Clearly, Genesis 10 is like a preface, or international context, or a flashback to a time early in the spread of the nations over the earth to chapter 11 (cf. Rogerson 1990:75). Genesis 11:1–9 links two genealogical accounts [*tōlēdōt*] of the Shem (cf. Gn 10:21–31 & 11:10–26) and introduces the genealogical account of Terah (cf. Gn 11:27). This provides a background to Abraham, through whom God promised to bless his created, beloved and scattered nations (cf. Gn 12:1–25:18; Dt 32:8; Am 9:7; Ac 17:26). What the author described linguistically and geographically in Genesis 10, is theologically described in Genesis 11 (cf. Sailhammer 1990:103). In this regard, Genesis 10 and 11 cannot be interpreted chronologically as a running narrative (cf. Smith 2003:132). In the Genesis 10 account, the author introduced parenthetical statements about Nimrod (cf. Gn 10:8–10) and Peleg (cf. Gn 10:25), which were clarified and explained in Genesis 11:1–9 as a way of giving the reason for the division in Babel (cf. Boice 1982:339).

The essence of the message is within the literary structure of the text of Genesis 11:1–9

The narrator not only emphasised the homogeneity (originality) of the ethnic group, as the first survivors of the flood were bound by language (a correct means to tie them together) (cf. the two chiasm structures of Wenham 2007:235 and of Ross 1981:236), but also highlighted that the oneness of their

language and dialect was a means of understanding each other and hence to reach a mutual concert, exhortation and commitment in building the city of Babel (cf. Gn 11:1–4a). Up to this, their actions attested to a God-approved cultural mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and hence fill, subdue and control the earth and all in it (cf. Gn 9:1, 7); which also presupposed the building of the city-states (cf. the pre-flood cities – Gn 4:17ff. and post-flood cities – Gn 10:10).

Babel was built to avoid God and his cultural mandate to scatter by multiplication

The survivors of the flood were all homogenous descendants of Noah, and hence one common language and dialect could be expected and acknowledged (cf. Gn 11:6; Boice 1982:339). All the people, or the 'whole earth', who were living in the days before and during Peleg (the division), spoke one language or one tongue (cf. Gn 10:25; 11:1; Mathews 1996:477; Wenham 1987:238). The narrator repeated the word *one*, to indicate one language, one dialect, one people and a united effort in their desire to make a singular name (cf. Gn 11:1, 4, 6). The narrator's point of emphasis was that they were homogenous, or they have one originality (cf. Wenham 1987:238; Davis 1975:144). The Septuagint text's addition of 'for all', makes no difference, as 'for all' is already implied in the phrase: the 'whole earth' spoke 'one word'. All of them travelled from the east, probably from Ararat, northeast of Shinar, through modern Persia or Afghanistan, and settled in a plain of the land of Shinar (cf. Gn 8:4; 11:2; Morris 1976:267). Shinar is referred to as the Mesopotamian region of 'Babylon', or 'Babylonia', or 'Sumer and/or Akkad' (cf. Is 11:11; Zch 5:11; cf. also Mathews 1996:479). It is apparently a fertile crescent in southern Mesopotamia on the Euphrates River, about 89 kilometres south of the modern Baghdad, and just north of the modern town of Hillah in southern Iraq (cf. cf. Gn 24:10; Warren 1985:1; Beitzel 1985:78). In that place, Nimrod established Babel as the first of the four cities or kingdoms, namely Babel, Erech, Akkad and Calneh. It is clear from this narrative that there were great Mesopotamian civilisations before Abraham, and hence Ur of Chaldea a city with vast libraries and extensive trade relations, with its neighbours in southern Mesopotamia, was one of the later Babylonian cities where Abraham was born and bred (cf. Gn 11:31; Eybers 1978:14). Before Abraham and the later Israelites history, the narrator gives not only a glimpse of a first ancient Near East World Empire, but also an account of the unity of the first ethnic group. The unity of the first ethnic group is confirmed by their mutual exhortation, 'Come, let us', where all agreed (conspired) together so that the blame is neither laid exclusively upon the counsel, nor the will of one man (Nimrod) only, nor upon a few of them (cf. Gn 11:3–4; cf. Calvin 1847:323, 326; Van der Merwe, Naude & Kroeze 1996:269). The city was built with fire-hardened or sun-dried mudbrick and slime or asphalt or bitumen, which was commonly used by the southern Mesopotamian inhabitants (not using stones or mortar) (cf. Davis 1975:145). In Genesis 4b, the underlying motive behind building the city and its tower was to avoid the God-given cultural mandate of scattering by multiplication (Gn 1:28; 2:17; 9:1, 7; 11:4; Calvin 1847:328).

They engaged in a 'vertical-oriented' activity of building a tower as a symbolic dedication to and service of the heavens, or to idols, or gods as their security (Conn & Ortiz 2001:35; Douglas 1982:111) and in a 'horizontal-orientated' activity, or a secular project (without God). Their aim was to make a name for themselves (cf. Willmington 1982:53).

Babel was built at that time when the people were speaking one language and one dialect

After his first narrations (cf. Gn 11:1–4a), the author's second, final and turning point type of narrative discourse (cf. Gn 11:4a–9), which is centred on God's mutual action or exhortation, 'Come let us go down', (cf. Matthews 1996:483; Wenham 1987:235). 'God's coming down' is an anthropomorphic description, meant for readers so that they can understand that the divine, official and judicial presence of God was in the city and its tower, where human beings were in the process of building, even before construction was completed (cf. Gn 11:6–8; Davis 1975:149; Matthews 1996:483). The main aim of such a divine, official and judicial presence of God, was to show his grace and judgement at the same time. The narrator gives two reasons behind the name Babel (which is derived from the old Semitic name Bab-ilu, meaning 'gate of god', a designation which became Babel in Hebrew, and Babylon in Greek and Latin): firstly, Babel is a place where the Lord confused the one language dialect and hence frustrated the first ethnic group who were survivors of the flood (cf. Gn 11:1, 6); decisive evidence of his judgement (cf. also Calvin 1847:329), which reveals God's benevolence and omniscience of not only disapproving disobedience of his scattering mandate – a sin committed mutually by the homogenous group before God that deserved death as a punishment (cf. Bax 1982:105). Secondly, Babel is a place where the Lord confirms his mandate of scattering them upon the earth, for only God knows the self-destructive effect of the unfolding sin and its death warrant. In his grace, God not only restrained the effect of sin from becoming worse, but also by giving them an opportunity of fulfilling God's command of scattering upon the earth, although doing it against their will (cf. Gn 6:5; 11:4, 6, 9; Atkinson 1990:183; Morris 1976:275). It was apparently unthinkable to the first and other later readers of

Genesis 11:1–9, that God was commanding them to fill the earth by multiplication, not by isolation or division. Clearly the God-given and approved cultural mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and hence fill, subdue, and control the earth and all in it, was not only confirmed and attested (cf. Gn 1:28; 9:1, 7), but in the continual building of the city-states (cf. pre- and post-flood cities, including the development of music, cf. Gn 4:21; 10:10). It is an eisegesis to read a prescription of the division of humanity as God-willed, and unity in diversity as a sin, and a rebellion against God into a simple narrative statement that the entire event happened in the time of the division (Peleg) (cf. Gn 10:25; 11:4, 9, Table 1; GK Synod 1985:429, 1991:160ff.; Helberg 1993:51f.; Strauss 1995:21).

The role of language in Babel and Jerusalem and in other multi-cultural city contexts

The Pentecost in Jerusalem can easily be viewed as an opposite or cancellation of the language confusion in Babel (cf. Gn 11:9; cf. Helberg 1993:53). But reading closely the selected texts, namely Genesis 11:1–9; Acts 2:1–13 and 1 Corinthians 14, among others, God's original intention of scattering the first homogenous group by multiplication is confirmed (cf. Table 1; Gn 1:28; 9:1, 7; Calvin 1847:328). The languages of the people in the vicinity of the church are an important vehicle (not a barrier) for the benefit of the kingdom and Christ's church. God intends that the proclamation of the gospel should be done through the languages of the people in the vicinity of the church. During Pentecost in Jerusalem, on the one hand, all known or spoken languages were equally important before God in the establishment and expansion of the Church. On the other hand, the native and the common (*lingua franca*) languages are important in the proclamation of the gospel. It is based firstly on their interpretation of Peter's preaching. He apparently used the common language – understood by nearly everyone in his audience – when he preaches the kingdom of God and teaches about the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Ac 2:14ff.; De Villiers 1983:211), and as a result, 3 000 repent and are filled with the Holy Spirit; secondly, in the context of the Jews in the 1st century who often spoke Greek, the common language of commerce was Latin, and many other dialects, although in the religious (Temple) context, they speak, hear, pray and sing about God's

TABLE 1: Respondents' interpretation of three passages, namely Genesis 11:1–9; Acts 2:1–13 and 1 Corinthians 14:1–40.

God's intention	Genesis 11:1–9	Acts 2:1–13	Transition era (in Acts)	1 Corinthians 14
In the three texts	The beginning and the bridge to the known world.	The beginning and the bridge to the known world.	In Genesis 11:1–9 & Acts 2. The role of the language was miraculous (His hand).	In Corinthians 14: The role of language is by learning and translations (interpretations).
In the three cities	Babel (post-flood city): One ethnic group united, using one language to disobey the scattering mandate.	Jerusalem (the first or early Church was launched using all known languages to obey the scattering mandate).	To the 'Israelites', foreign languages were always viewed as God's signs of judgement (Gn 11:1–9), that is to come through the Messiah (Is 28:11).	To Paul foreign languages were always viewed as God's signs of judgement to all unbelievers and of grace to all who believe in Christ (1 Cor 14:21).
By ethnic groups	The homogenous nations united by the same progeny-point of reference i.e. Noah, Adam & God got scattered (confused).	The chosen ethnic group – the Jews in the diaspora, or scattered to the known world, were gathered (united) by faith in Christ.	To the true Israelite, it was unthinkable to convey the truth of God in another tongue. It was an amazing sign to both unbelieving Gentile and Jews hearers (Ac 2:7f., 10:45ff. & 19:6).	By speaking foreign tongues, the wall of division is broken down & the message is extended to every nation. The tongues are not intended to be another Babel (chaos and/or confusion, 1 Cor 14:33, 40).
God's mandate	Scattering to the world was by multiplication (not by division) as the biblical motif (Gn 1:28; 9:1, 7; cf. also Calvin 1847:328).	God did not will or prescribed the division in Genesis 10:25; 11:4, 9. It is a simple statement (Helberg 1993:51f; Strauss 1995:21).	Scattering to the world was by unity in diversity, and not by unity at the expense of diversity. The early Church's lesson in the first general Church meeting in Acts 15:8f; 10:45f; 11:15f.	Guideline: (1) at least two or at most three should translate; (2) they should take turns; (3) if there is no translation, they should keep quiet in church and speak to themselves and to God (1 Cor 14:27–28).

Source: The author's own construction after respondents' interpretation of three passages, namely Genesis 11:1–9; Acts 2:1–13 and 1 Corinthians 14:1–40

wonderful works in Hebrew-Aramaic, because that was deemed the language of God and his people. The sign-gifts were used for the edification of others, not for one's own edification (1 Co 12:7; 14:12, 26; Eph 4:11–12; 1 Pt 4:10). Thirdly, Paul's missionary and professional activities could have also exposed him to an opportunity of learning more languages like Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek, and very probably Latin, Arabic, Syrian and many dialects of Asia Minor and Greece, than all the church members in Corinth together (cf. 1 Cor 14:18).

Conclusion

Genesis 11:1–9 shed light on the church to fulfil her God-given mandate, namely to multiply rather than to divide (isolate) the Christian converts in a multicultural context. God was and is still commanding his people to fill the earth by multiplication, not by isolation or division. It is an attested God-approved cultural mandate to be fruitful, multiply and hence fill, subdue and control the earth and all in it (cf. Gn 9:1, 7). The role of the language in Babel, Jerusalem, Corinth and other multi-cultural city-like contexts is important in establishing, building and expanding Christ's church and Kingdom. Genesis 11:1–9 reveals that God scattered the homogenous people who saw it as a privilege (and hence take advantage) of speaking one language (dialects) to attempt unity; yet, for the wrong reasons (the central of which was rejecting God and his original scattering motif). Acts 2:1–13 reveal that God gathered the homogenous people (the Jews), who were exposed to all known languages (dialects) of their times, for the right reasons (the central of which was that they believed in Christ), reflected in the preaching of Peter in Acts 2:14 and further. Clearly, the gospel came first to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' that is the pious and reverent Jews (the Jews in and around Jerusalem and the Diaspora Jews, including the Free Jews who were socially mobile and streamed to Jerusalem and re-established themselves in Jerusalem and organised themselves into a synagogue) (cf. Acts 6:9; Breytenbach 1998:329–330, 349). The diaspora (in all ages) scattered all over the 15 different linguistic groups that is from all nations on earth, or the known world of that time (cf. Mt 10:5–6; cf. Calvin 1859:42). During the Pentecost day, they gathered in Jerusalem, where some re-established and organised themselves into a synagogue (cf. Jn 19:14, 31; Lv 23:15ff.; cf. Lategan 1998:469). An omission of the word, *Jews*, by some manuscripts, made no difference. Luke called them 'devout', to distinguish them from God-fearing Gentiles, or the Gentile proselytes (Gentiles who were converted to Judaism by obeying instruction, circumcision, baptism, and an offering sacrifice, according to Ac 10:2).

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