

## **CHAPTER EIGHT - THE RCA ON ITS WAY TO THE FUTURE**

On its way into the future, the RCA will have to face many challenges and opportunities. Among the many issues the RCA will have to contend with, the following take pride of place. The following information are from official documents of the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein (2006).

### **8.1 Empowering the Local Churches: Training Clergy and Laity**

The official work among the Indian People began through the missionary outreach of ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church. In some of the areas the work was begun by lay members who felt a burden to share the Gospel with their Indian neighbours.

The leaders soon realized that the efforts of white ministers would not succeed without the involvement and testimony of Indian workers. Both white and Indian ministers and evangelists required special training. Quite apart from the basic theological training a further requirement had to be met as far as the white ministers were concerned. They had to understand the culture and religion of the Indians - Hindus as well as Muslims. They had to learn what Paul meant when he wrote: 'I became all things to all men that I may save some of them by whatever means are possible' (1 Cor 9:22b).

The training of Indian ministers was originally provided by the University of Durban Westville. This training, however, had to be aborted on account of a policy of integrated training which included Hindus, Muslims as well as followers of other religions.

Finding another theological faculty was the only way forward for the training of RCA students. The University of Bloemfontein, situated in the centre of the country, became the obvious choice. Here students of the DRC family were already receiving their theological training. The RCA also obtained a chair to which Rev Maniraj Sukdaven was appointed.



**Rev Maniraj Sukdaven, current lecturer of the RCA at the Theological Seminary in Bloemfontein (OFS)**

### **8.1.1. The relationship between the faculty and the RCA**

- The Faculty of Theology of the Free State University is an institution of higher learning, focusing on research and training in theology and striving to serve the community. A core function of the Faculty of Theology is to train theological students for the ministry in different churches. Although the faculty is open for the training of students of different denominations and strives to enhance this ecumenical character, there are close historical ties with the Dutch Reformed Family of Churches. The Faculty aims at maintaining and even deepening its reformed and evangelical character.
- The Reformed Church in Africa is a reformed and evangelical church. The confessional basis of the Reformed Church in Africa consists of the three ecumenical creeds (Apostolic Creed, and the creeds of Nicea and Athanasius) and the Formularies of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the

Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt). The identity of the Reformed Church in Africa as an evangelical and mission church is expressed in the Laudium Declaration (1990).

- The Reformed Church in Africa and the Faculty of Theology recognise each other's independence and unique calling.
- Within the framework of the regulations and abilities of the Faculty of Theology and in close co-operation with the Reformed Church in Africa, the Faculty of Theology provides academic training to theological students of the Reformed Church in Africa, with the aim of preparing them for the ministry in and of the Reformed Church in Africa. The Reformed Church in Africa utilizes the Faculty of Theology of the Free State University as preferred institute of training of their theological students preparing for the ministry.
- As partnering church, participating in theological students' training, the Reformed Church in Africa would like to participate in and have access to the process of the development of modules and programmes regarding the training of its students.

### **8.1.2 The requirements for entering the ministry in the RCA**

The RCA Synod of 2006 took the following resolutions:-

- The RCA requires a BTh degree (four years) or a similar qualification (for instance a five-year part-time BTh) plus one year of practical training. The four years of academic training must include Greek, (one year) Hebrew (one year) and all six majors in theology on a third-year level. The Faculty takes note of the fact that the RCA has a specific ministry among the Indian People of South Africa.

Historically the RCA grew out of a ministry focusing mainly on Indian societies. The RCA gratefully accepts and cherishes this historical reality of an Indian cultural origin and identity, but it also seeks to reach out to people of other cultures and races. A multicultural and multiracial

identity – reconciled in Christ – is a growing reality and enthusiastically embraced by the RCA. The RCA is uniquely positioned to reach out, with integrity and authority to Muslim and Hindu communities. The RCA however accepts the challenge to reach out to people of all other Southern African faiths.

The RCA is reformed but also has an evangelical character in style of worship. The RCA is however not a typically charismatic church.

The RCA is a mission church, consistently striving to witness to the salvation in Christ and His Lordship. This is done through proclamation, service, communion and worship.

- The Faculty endorses the unique identity of the RCA as expressed in the Laudium Declaration which emphasises the following:
  - The Biblical Gospel about Jesus Christ as the only Saviour
  - The Holy Spirit's witness in the church, bringing revival and new life.
  - The church's evangelistic call to witness and compassionate service.
  - The God-given unity of the church as the one body of Christ transcending all barriers of race, gender and class.
  - The call to prophetic witness, proclaiming God's Kingdom of justice, peace and holiness.

### **8.1.3 Profile of an RCA minister:**

- RCA ministers must know the Lord, be spiritually mature and steadfast in prayer and in obedience to scripture.
- RCA ministers must have a clear calling to the ministry.
- RCA ministers must be able to proclaim the gospel and serve others with humility, adaptability, joy, perseverance, self sacrifice, diligence and in a professional way.
- RCA ministers must be able to maintain very good relationships with people.
- RCA ministers should live exemplary lives in all facets of their personal, family and public life.

- RCA ministers must have teachable spirits, be able to listen and to discern God's will.
- RCA ministers must continuously equip themselves for their calling.

#### **8.1.4. Further training**

The theological faculty brings students and RCA ministers together from time to time for discussions relating to further training. These meetings are designed not only to support the students in their ministry to the laity, but also to discuss the continued training of pastors in the RCA – as well as the in-service training of lay leaders in the congregations. In recent years meetings have been held in Durban for all ministers of the RCA, each minister being accompanied by an elder. It is clear that much thought needs to be given to this issue – especially the need for lay training - in years to come.

#### **8.2 Retaining the RCA's missionary élan**

The RCA was born of the missionary enthusiasm of members of the Dutch Reformed Church. Living in a world where the RCA is daily confronted with Hinduism and Islam the church's very existence is under severe pressure. The negative side of this reality is that believers are confronted daily with family and friends who do not share their faith. The positive side is that suffering is indeed the seed of the church.

Born-again believers would seldom consider turning back. However, second and third generation believers are faced with the challenge of remaining faithful, often without their parents' commitment. Most of the RCA congregations attend to their young believers, strengthening their faith through teaching, admonishing and encouraging them to be faithful witnesses of the Gospel in their own right. The Sunday school and Youth Movement play a critical role in this respect. Regular youth camps are arranged in most of the congregations.

Opportunities to reach out into the Hindu and Muslim community strengthen the faith of the believers. Most congregations are involved with outreach and provide training for this purpose. Participation in outreach campaigns

enhances their spiritual growth. Many young people have found Christ at these meetings.

In some congregations members of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church as well as the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa assisted the Reformed Church in Africa in escaping from her Indian mould and serve the wider community. Members of the RCA are beginning to play an important role in the ecumenical field.

Sukdaven in his thesis titled 'Inclusive of Exclusive?' 'A Missiological Analysis of Congregations of the Reformed Church in Africa,' makes an earnest plea to the RCA to adopt a more comprehensive vision of their task, reaching out to people from other population groups. The RCA has a unique opportunity, Sukdaven maintains, to minister to one of the most marginalized communities in South Africa, the people living in informal settlements and in squatter camps in the country. Several congregations are already doing this. In recent interviews with ministers and members of the RCA, all pleaded for official involvement with outreach to non-Indian people living in the vicinity.

### **8.3 Developing the RCA's theological basis**

The RCA inherited the theological basis of the Dutch Reformed Church when she was founded on 27 August 1968 in Pietermaritzburg, as the fourteenth younger church within the DRC family (Pypers: 2). The adoption of the Laudium Declaration placed her irrevocably on the road of Evangelical Reformed Theology.

Being a committed Evangelical Reformed church, the RCA has a definite contribution to make within the DRC family. In the unity discussions, where the URCSA strongly advocates the acceptance of the Belhar Confession – a confession which underlines the deepest convictions of the URCSA on the Biblical imperatives of unity, justice and reconciliation - the RCA in turn is called to uphold the evangelical truths encapsulated in the Laudium declaration.

The RCA finds herself in a world of many religions, particularly, Hinduism and Islam. In future witnessing among African traditionalists will hopefully also be on the agenda. To share the good news with them from a deep Christian conviction but also with a profound understanding of the world where these people come from, as well as a deep respect for their religious convictions, the RCA needs her clearest minds and most committed hearts. From her dialogue with people from other faiths, her own theological basis needs to be informed and strengthened.

Not only theologians and ministers are called to play their part. Ordinary members of the RCA have a great deal to contribute. Some of them have suffered persecution and ostracism in many ways, and have come to discover the true meaning of 'marturia,' of explaining and demonstrating their faith in everyday life, among the many peoples of South Africa.

#### **8.4 Serving the unification process in the DRC Family**

The RCA, being the smallest member of the DRC family has been in a position to move relatively fast towards church union. At the different unity talks held over the past 10 years, (2000 – 2010) the RCA took her place at the table. There were some concerns in this regard. Some feared that, as a result of such union, the RCA would simply disappear into the large future church. Others were concerned that the RCA would lose her reformed evangelical basis, or that the church's missionary zeal might be dampened. Fortunately, however, there were also those who felt that church union was long overdue and that union with any willing partner or partners of the family should be sought.

The process of reuniting the four churches, the DRC, RCA, URCSA and the DRCA, is a long and quite arduous one. At one stage, in 2009, the URCSA called upon the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to mediate in the process. Many obstacles – not only of a theological but especially of a non-theological nature – still have to be addressed. The RCA is however committed to the process, and is willing to contribute as much as she can in bringing the churches together.

## **8.5 Strengthening ecumenical ties locally and internationally**

### **8.5.1. Local ties**

In every area where the RCA laboured ties existed between the various churches. Most of the ministers of the RCA congregations became participants in the existing ecumenical gatherings, usually once a month. The well-known Pastor J F Rowlands of the Bethesda Full Gospel Church became a role model to many. He encouraged churches among the Indians to put aside their differences and work together for the expansion of God's Kingdom. He taught his congregation to take hands with other Christians who laboured among the Indian people in the same field. His Bethesda Church is the largest Protestant denomination among the Indian people of South Africa. He taught his people to bless other churches and never to be guilty of 'sheep stealing'. In many areas the Roman Catholic churches also participated in these ecumenical prayer meetings.

These ecumenical ties resulted in a relationship of love, respect and support of one another. In some areas, when an outreach campaign was arranged all participating churches and ministers would work together. New converts were referred to the various churches. In the Indian field we learnt that intolerance of other churches or missions cancelled the message of God's grace and love. To merely tolerate others would, however, still be a rather negative attitude towards them (Newman, :6). Tolerance means accepting, enduring, putting up with. Genuine *agape* love is required. The RCA will have to continue on this road, the way of *koinonia*, with vigour and enthusiasm.

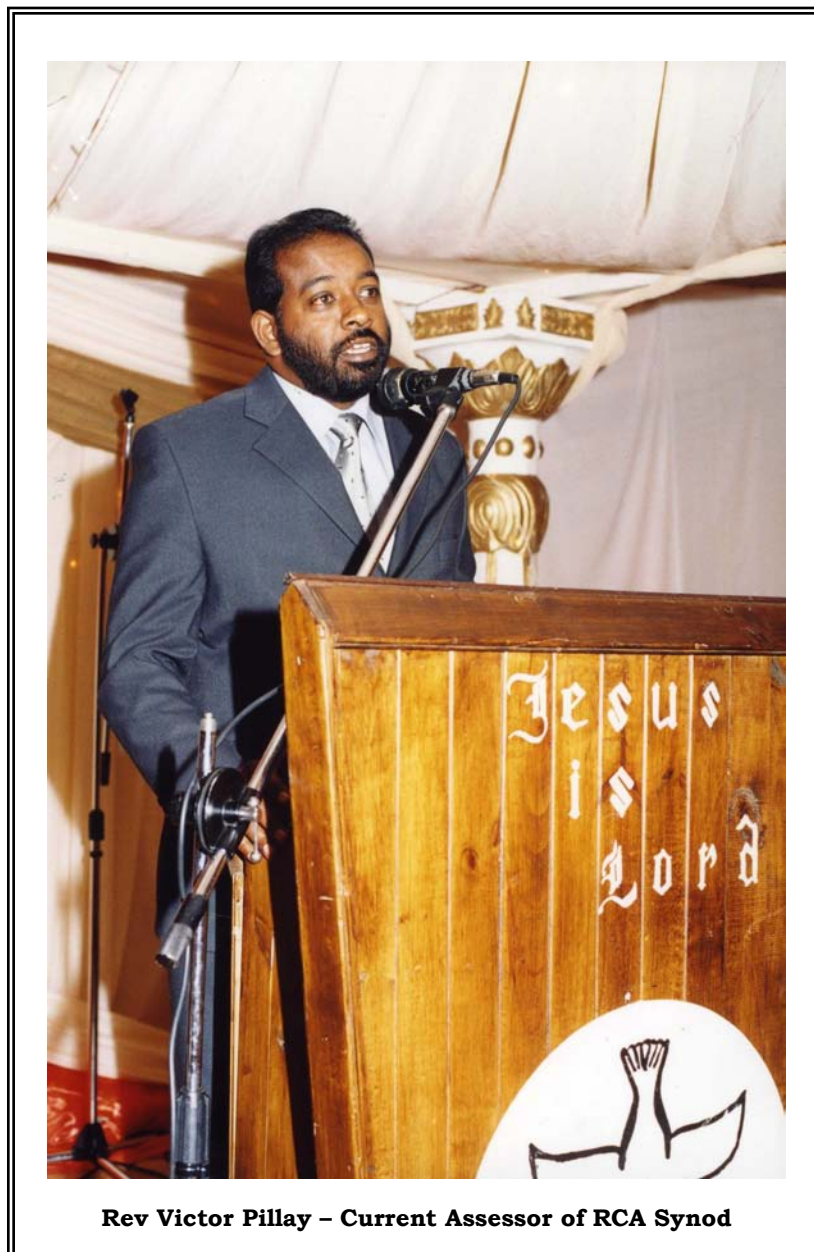
### **8.5.2. Ecumenical contacts with the Reformed Church Family worldwide. (The following sentiments reflect the stand point of the RCA at present).**

The RCA enjoys an official ecumenical relationship with the Reformed Church of Japan. The writer was privileged to chair the Mission Japan Board over a period of several years. At present Rev Victor Pillay is the chairman. Rev Tobie de Wet, formerly minister of the Port Elizabeth RCA congregation, has recently accepted a call as a missionary to Japan. Official ties have existed



between the Reformed Church of Japan, the RCA and the NGK since October 1998 when the Synod of the RCA decided to enter into a partnership with the RCJ. Upon the occasion of our visit to Japan we had the privilege to present the Church in Japan with a framed copy of the Laudium Declaration.

The RCA, furthermore, maintains strong ties with the two world bodies that represent Reformed Christians across six continents, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). Being part of these bodies has enriched the RCA in a myriad of ways – and the hope must be expressed that once the WARC and the REC merge in June 2010, the process will continue.



Being one of the smallest member churches of both bodies, the RCSA was invited to play an important role in the WARC as well as the REC. In an interview on 17 August 2009, Rev Victor Pillay the present assessor of the RCA and minister in Laudium, Pretoria, commented on the involvement of the RCA. Because of his deep involvement over many years, proper note needs to be taken of his experiences.

Rev Pillay's first taste of the ecumenical life of the church came when he was attending a Youth Conference of the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) on behalf of the Reformed Church in Africa in Botswana. At this meeting in 1994 with Rev Jim Lont of the Youth Desk REC, Rev Victor Pillay and Dr Nobin Shunmugam representing the RCA, all the REC members from the Reformed Churches in Southern Africa were present. The discussions centred on Africa being marginalized by the world regarding its needs and problems. This conference was taking place even while faction fighting and civil war were being waged between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi. A leader from within one of these countries commented that there were no more devils in hell, because they were all in Rwanda and Burundi. At this conference it was clear that the focus of the world would rather be Singapore, Hongkong, Jakarta, Delhi, Korea, China and other countries of the Far East that were of economic benefit to the first world, and the wealthy countries of the world. The only people coming to Africa were khaki-clad social workers. Yet Africans were desperate for assistance with development, education, the economy, job creation, poverty alleviation, agricultural training and political leadership. Conditions that caused Africa to remain a DARK continent needed to be addressed.

This conference endeavoured from a deep sense of soul searching to find answers to these questions. There was a special emphasis on what the church could do. The conclusion was that Africa could no longer depend on aid and assistance from abroad but had to look to its own leaders and the resources of the church to build its own infra-structure for development. Many of us in Africa were convinced that this was the way forward after much discussion and deliberation on these pertinent issues. Many of the young leaders were inspired to go back to their countries and make that difference.

In 2000 Rev Pillay was joined by his colleague Rev Bennett Shunmugam, also from the RCA, to participate in the meeting of the REC General Assembly at Yogyakarta in Indonesia. The assembly was arranged in this city and away from the capital city of Jakarta due to the tensions that existed between the Muslims and Christians. The theme of the assembly was *'Making All Things New'*. This assembly aimed at addressing the question of how churches could develop this theme in spiritual and practical renewals in the countries and people they served. The delegates found the papers presented and the discussions extremely stimulating, encouraging and thought provoking; and a great source of information. The interaction with Reformed Christians from throughout the world was an enlightening experience. Rev Pillay joined a group of youth delegates to spend one day in one of the rural mountainous regions to join in building an irrigation system. Working with and among the farmers was a rewarding experience.

An interesting exposure was to hear at first hand from students of the Molluccan Islands of their persecution as Christians at the hands of Muslims. Many of the delegates could identify with their suffering, pain, loss of lives, poverty and the extremely difficult lives they had to live every day. The assembly prayed for the students and assured them of their support in endeavouring to take up these issues with the Local Reformed churches and the authorities concerned. The Reformed Churches in Indonesia also assured them of their support in practical ways. The assembly provided a platform for people to articulate how *'Making All Things New'* could be achieved through the church. The RCA delegates left the meeting challenged.

During the assembly a special meeting was called to discuss the dissolving of the Federal Council of Churches of the DRC family in Africa, as had been proposed by the South African churches. This could not be done because the meeting was not a duly constituted Federal Council meeting. There was also an appeal to continue with the Federal Council from churches outside South Africa. Dr Willie Botha, the Ecumenical Officer of the DRC, was tasked with pursuing this matter subsequent to the Assembly. However not much could be done due to costs and logistical difficulties.

The next General Assembly of the REC took place in Utrecht, in the Netherlands. The theme here was 'I Will Be With You Always'. Rev Victor Pillay was elected to the Executive Committee of the REC as the First Clerk. Rev Maniraj Sukdaven attended as the RCA's youth delegate. At this assembly the churches of the DRC African family again met to discuss the status of the Federal Council. It was decided to reconstitute this body in a form that would be acceptable to all the churches in the DRC family in Africa. Dr Kobus Gerber was tasked to drive this process.

Rev Pillay's position on the Executive Committee exposed him to the views and activities of many churches in the Reformed family in many parts of the world. In 2006 Rev Pillay and the General Secretary Dr Richard van Houten hosted a conference in Nigeria for all the Nigerian Reformed churches that were members of the REC. This was done to accommodate the many Nigerian church leaders who could not acquire a visa for entry into the Netherlands for the General Assembly. At this conference, the proceedings of the General Assembly were discussed over some days.

In 2007 the Executive Committee of the REC met in South Africa. Rev Pillay together with Dr Winston Kawale visited the Reformed Church in Botswana. This visit not only brought wonderful opportunities to meet the many leaders of this church, but also extended to community and church projects. Both REC members preached at different churches. The delegation was well received. Our challenge was to understand the financial predicament that this church suffered after gaining virtual independence from the DRC in South Africa.

In 2008 the Executive Committee met in Jakarta, Indonesia. Rev Pillay was privileged to preach in a large church in Jakarta and to visit the two Reformed Churches in Toraja Mamasa and Toraja Rantepau on the Island of Sulawesi. These Toraja churches were in the remote mountainous regions. The opportunity to travel, to visit congregations and experience many church projects was interesting and encouraging. It was a blessing to see the extent of the Lord's work and ministry in these regions despite the extreme poverty and limited resources. Rev Pillay's exposure to these situations certainly enhanced his ability to relate to these churches from his RCA experience.

In 2008 the REC Executive met in Utrecht. Rev Pillay was tasked to visit the Evangelical Church in France. It was wonderful to experience the church in a European context. Most of these congregations are in the South of France. The visit entailed meeting with leaders and church ministers. The evangelical ethos of the RCA enabled Rev Pillay to identify with and relate to this church.

At the General Assembly in Utrecht, a decision was taken for the REC to unite with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). The decision was that the REC would request to be an entity within the WARC, so as to maintain its identity, close fellowship and somewhat evangelical ethos. Two committees of four representatives from each of the REC and WARC met in Grand Rapids to discuss this matter. It was proposed that both these Reformed ecumenical bodies dissolve and form a new entity. There were many meetings and discussions between both organisations on this process. Eventually the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) was chosen as the appropriate name for the new Reformed world ecumenical body.

Rev Pillay was invited to serve on this committee for unity, where he experienced great co-operation, understanding, mutuality and a willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit. The dissolution of the present bodies and the forming of the WCRC will take place in June 2010 in Grand Rapids Michigan, USA. The Theme for this Uniting General Council will be 'The Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace'.

Rev Pillay found it difficult to believe that he, being from a relatively small church, could be elected into office in the REC. However, the contributions of Rev Pillay at these World Reformed meetings and organisations were certainly informed by his evangelical experience and life in the RCA. His familiarity with the problems of his church was always evident in his contribution to these ecumenical interactions. He insisted that the evangelical ethos of the RCA as articulated in the Laudium declaration was the guiding principle for all its ecumenical engagements. The RCA is grateful that Rev Pillay is still serving in this capacity, and as a son of the RCA, may continue to represent the church at the World Reformed Ecumenical meetings and conferences.

The involvement of the RCA in these bodies has been one of learning and of contributing. The RCA benefits from these ecumenical bodies and has always been enriched by the contributions of members. Although the RCA is one of the smaller churches in South Africa her contribution at the meetings has always been respected. We often hear the comment that our voice, though small, is heard clearly and received positively. The RCA values this relationship.

### **8.6 Who is equal to such a task?**

In the course of the thesis we have journeyed with the RCA on her way over the years, through the past and the present – trying to understand the challenges on the road ahead. Paul’s famous message to the congregation in Corinth, two thousand years ago, may serve as an encouragement and a guide to us, on our journey into the future:

Thanks be to God who always leads us in a triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death, to the other, the fragrance of life. And who are equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God... For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake... We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us (2 Cor 2:14ff, 4: 5ff).



**Demission of Rev Perold and Marietha de Beer ( April 2004)  
Together with the Church Council of Charisma and their wives**



Rev Perold & Mrs Marietha de Beer  
Calender in memory of a lifetime of ministry in the RCA



## CHAPTER NINE - CONCLUSION

### 9.1. Introduction: Who despises the day of small things?

This, then, is the story of the Reformed Church in Africa, a small church and a relatively newcomer on the ecumenical scene in South Africa. In comparison to the other churches in the country, the main line churches with their long and proud histories, and the huge African Indigenous Churches with their following of millions, the contribution of the RCA may seem to be humble and rather insignificant. But then, in the words of the prophet Zechariah at the consecration of the new temple in Jerusalem, when many of the older Jews were disheartened when they realized that the new building would never match the size and the splendor of the previous temple built during King Solomon's reign, "Who despises the day of small things?" (Zech 4:10).

It indeed behoves us, looking back at the history of the RCA, and in evaluating the ministry of the church over the past decades, to thank the Lord for his grace and mercy to the faithful in the church - the pioneers, the pastors and evangelists, and above all the lay members of the RCA - by calling them, guiding them, and sustaining them through the years. Errors were made. Serious challenges still await the church. But the Lord God in his grace did not despise this day of small things.

### 9.2. Hypothesis and research aims

The *hypothesis* of the research, as described in the Introduction to the thesis, seems to be proven correct:

A small and relatively young church, like the Reformed Church in Africa, can play a significant role in the wider community by witnessing to the love of Christ in word and deed, in every context and in every community that the church is sent to. In order to do this the church needs to know and understand its own history and needs to be willing to learn from its own experience.

The *threefold research goals*, (1) to record the history of the RCA in South Africa, (2) to evaluate the missionary contribution of the church, and (3) to draw lessons from the past, to guide the church into the future, were achieved.

### **9.3. Recording the history of the RCA**

In recording the history of the RCA the thesis reached back, far into history, to record the bringing of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Indian subcontinent, from where, in the late 19th century Indian immigrants travelled to South Africa (*Chapter Two*). Pandita Nehru once said that “the history of the Christian Church in India is as old as Christianity itself” (Potts, 1967:3), therefore mention is made of the traditional mission of the apostle Thomas in the first century A D, and the coming of the Syrian Christians (4<sup>th</sup> century) as well as the Nestorians (7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries) to India. After Vasco da Gama’s discovery of the sea route to India (end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century), a new missionary chapter came to be written by Roman Catholic as well as Protestant missionaries. South African, and Dutch Reformed, interest in India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) reaches back for more than two hundred years, from the arrival of M C Vos as missionary to Ceylon (1804), to the revival of South African missionary interest in India and Ceylon during the Anglo-Boer War (1899 – 1902) which lead to a continuous relationship between the DRC and the Dutch Reformed Church in Ceylon over the past century.

*Chapter Three* was devoted to the arrival of the Indian immigrants in South Africa, from 1860 - 1911, with particular reference to their religious affiliations and customs.

The experiences of the two groups of Indians, the contract laborers as well as the ‘passenger Indians’, were described, taking due note of the socio-political problems that they faced. With the help of statistics gleaned from many sources, the religious affiliation of the Indian community was discussed, together with information about the challenges that both the Hindu and the Muslim communities had to contend with.

In *Chapter Four* the story of the first efforts to share the Gospel of Christ with Hindus and Muslims in South Africa was told. The Roman Catholic Church was first to arrive on the scene (1852), followed by Methodists (1861), Anglicans (1865), Lutherans (1896), and Baptists (1900). The DRC's involvement with mission among Muslims, from the time of the early Dutch settlers in the Cape to present times, as well as the fledgling DRC mission among the Hindus in South Africa was described at some length.

*Chapter Five* had to do with the planting of the Indian Reformed Church – later to be called the Reformed Church in Africa – in South Africa, a church that was founded 'between the Hindu Temple and the Muslim Mosque'. The efforts of the first pioneers were researched, of men and women coming from the ranks of the DRC who had reached out to the Indian community, confident that the Lord had called them to be his witnesses. The IRC was the youngest of the so-called daughter churches within the DRC Family, and the relationship between the 'mother' and 'daughter' was not always easy to define. The first decisions that the IRC had to take in terms of its ministry, the training of pastors and evangelists, the outreach programs, preaching and teaching, etcetera, are discussed.

#### **9.4. Evaluating the missionary contribution of the IRC/RCA**

At this stage of the thesis, alongside with the historical narrative, the question needed to be asked: How should the events be evaluated in terms of their missionary contributions? Missiologically speaking, as a church planting exercise, did the young church rise to the expectations? Half way through *Chapter Five* a preliminary answer was formulated. Accepting the widely accepted definition of mission in terms of *kerugma*, *diakonia*, *koinonia* and *leitourgia*, the work done in the IRC, the varied ministries, were discussed and weighed.

In *Chapter Six* a new, more adult, phase in the life of the church is described. The IRC had grown into the Reformed Church in Africa. Keeping pace with new historical developments, the missiological focus is clear. A number of crucial issues in the life of the RCA appeared on the scene: The relationship between the 'mother church' and the 'daughter' became more

complex. The RCA had to grow from a receiver to a spreader of the gospel. Again, the manifold ministries of the RCA needed to be evaluated in terms of *kerugma*, *koinonia*, *diakonia* and *leitourgia*. Other issues that were discussed included the ministry of deliverance, the development of a Church Order, as well as the often vexing problem of financial dependence.

## **9.5 Lessons from the past, for the present and for the future**

In the final section of the thesis the lessons from the past that may be drawn for today and tomorrow were analyzed (*Chapter Seven*). Firstly, the difficulties of having had to live in Apartheid South Africa, and the impact that this had for present and future relationships were on the table. From the crucible of strained relations in the DRC Family the RCA rediscovered its theological identity, as an *evangelical* church with a passion for the spreading of the gospel. The acceptance of the RCA's Laudium Declaration (1990) confirmed its theological position, but, sadly, also caused some discontent within the ranks of the RCA.

In the final chapter (*Chapter Eight*) the many challenges and opportunities awaiting the RCA on its way into the future were highlighted: The local churches need to be empowered by the training of both clergy and laity. The invitation of the DRC's Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State (Bloemfontein) opened new possibilities in this regard. The missionary élan of the RCA must be retained, albeit that the RCA urgently needs to break out of its narrow 'Indian' mould, reaching out to the wider South African community. The theological basis of the RCA needs to be strengthened. In the past years the RCA has developed and maintained ecumenical relationship within South Africa as well as in the wider Reformed family. In spite of being a very junior member within the ecumenical family, the RCA has been invited to fulfill a leadership role in the coming merger between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (2010). These ties, in future, will have to be carefully nurtured and maintained.

The RCA is still a relatively small community, with a chequered history of success as well as failure, of leaps of faith as well as errors committed in the

past. But the RCA is willing to continue to accept its Master's command, to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you". The RCA reaches forward not in its own power or strength or wisdom, but with the promise of the Lord written in its heart: "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt 28:19f, NIV).

## **9.6 Recommendations**

Flowing from the research, the researcher, humbly, offers a number of recommendations to the South African theological and ecumenical community.

### **9.6.1 To the address of the RCA**

- The RCA should at all costs remain true to its evangelical credo, as embodied in the Laudium Declaration. In the discussions with the DRC Family on church unity, the RCA should put the Laudium Declaration forward with joy, as a gift to the family of churches, taking care that in the process of reunification the principles of the Laudium Declaration are not compromised or eroded.
- Radical conversion to Christ and his Word should continue to take centre stage in the life of the RCA. The RCA, placed among Hindus, Muslims, ancestral believers and secularists, should exemplify a life of radical commitment to Christ, of holy living, failing which, its testimony would be of no value.
- The RCA needs to do everything in its power to motivate and guide its members on their way of accepting financial responsibility for the work of the church. A culture of sacrificial giving needs to be developed in the church.

### **9.6.2 To the address of the DRC family**

- The RCA is fully committed to the reunification process, and more than willing to play its part in this regard. Nevertheless the RCA appeals to its partners in the process for due consideration of the RCA's theological convictions.
- In order to accommodate the RCA's evangelical credo as well as its unique spirituality, born and developed in the life of the church within the context of the Indian community, it may be necessary to create an entity such as a presbytery or a regional synod, within the uniting church.

### **9.6.3 On the issue of theological training in South Africa**

- Theological training touches the heart of the church, and has a direct impact on the everyday life and ministry of the church. The RCA is very grateful to the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Free State, for the invitation to join the Faculty, and to appoint a lecturer from the ranks of the RCA, to teach at the Faculty. Strengthening its relations with the two other DRC faculties, at Pretoria and Stellenbosch, especially with regard to post graduate training, should receive careful consideration.
- The theological curriculum needs constant review to ensure that students receive the best possible preparation for their ministries, as well as to serve the wider church in understanding and executing its role in South Africa. In the curriculum special courses or modules need to be developed to cover, *inter alia*, the following subjects:

*Demonology*, which is an important systematic theological as well as pastoral concern, not only in Indian congregations, but in a growing number of other churches from European as well as African origins.

*Ancestral veneration*, which is an ever-present concern within the African Christian community. The more the RCA reaches out to the Black communities in the country, the more its' students and pastors will need guidance in this regard.

*African Theology*, to counter-balance the strong emphasis on Western theological traditions, which in the past and the present left its imprint on theological training. A concerted effort to train theological students within the African context must be made, to develop a dynamic Reformed Theology for Africa, responding to the needs and the issues of churches on our continent.

The *Confession of Belhar* needs careful study and consideration. Students from the RCA, the DRC and the DRCA should join their colleagues in the URCSA, in analyzing and evaluating this important document. The same applies to the *Laudium Declaration*, which offers valuable evangelical guidelines for the church and its ministers. Both documents, flowing from the heart of the two churches, merit careful attention within the theological curricula of all *three* Faculties of Theology of the DRC in South Africa.

Then Jesus came to them and said;

“All Authority in heaven and on earth  
has been given to me.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,  
baptizing them in the name of the Father  
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
and teaching them to obey everything  
I have commanded you  
And surely I will be with you always,  
to the very end of the age.”

(Math 28:18 NIV)





Communion Table, Charisma, Laudium