

Cottesloe 50 years later: Did the Dutch Reformed Church answer to the call?

ABSTRACT

The Cottesloe consultation took place fifty years ago. The declaration after the consultation made a call to the church in South Africa to get involved in the struggle against the unjust system of Apartheid. Although the declaration was met by negative reaction from the Dutch Reformed Church, the church struggled since 1961 through various synods to answer to the call of Cottesloe. After the first answer, *Human relations and the South African scene in light of scripture*, was rejected, it was back to the drawing board. The final answer was eventually given at the Rustenburg conference in 1990 after several important impulses influenced the theological thinking in the church. Although the Dutch Reformed Church officially answered to the call in 1990 the challenge of Cottesloe still remains, fifty years later.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Cottesloe consultation took place from 7-14 December 1960. The consultation's declaration made an appeal to all churches in South Africa to get actively involved in changing society in South Africa. It was met by strong negative reaction from the major white Afrikaans Church, the Dutch Reformed Church. The call which Cottesloe made on the church, could however not be ignored. Almost 50 years later it is appropriate to revisit the events which led up to the consultation, but more significantly, to ask the question: Did the DRC answer to the call?

The aim of this article is to give a short overview of the events that led to the consultation and to the declaration itself. It will then focus primarily on the struggle which took place in the Dutch Reformed Church on her way to answer to the call of Cottesloe, before concluding that the DRC did answer to the call of Cottesloe, but only 30 years later at the Rustenburg conference in 1990.

2. THE ROAD TO COTTESLOE

2.1 1960 year of political turmoil:

The year 1960 will always be remembered as one of the stormiest years in the history of South Africa (van der Merwe 1990:10). It all started when the prime minister, HF Verwoerd announced in parliament that a referendum¹ would be held in order to decide to become a republic (Pelzer 1963:306). On the 3 of February the British Prime Minister, Harold Mc Millan held his famous "Winds of Change" speech² in Parliament in Cape Town while non white political organizations targeted 1963 as the year of freedom for South Africa. This led to widespread unrest in black populated areas (Lombard 1981:191).

The unrest and competition between the African National Congress and the Pan African

1 Only the white population could vote in the pre 1994 South Africa.

2 Mc Millan warned that the struggle for freedom which happening in almost all of Colonial Africa was on it's way to South Africa and that there would be now way to escape it.

Congress to get the majority support from the masses added fuel to the fire which reached its zenith on 21 March 1960 in the black township of Sharpeville when Pan African Congress supporters marched on the police station to protest against the pass laws (Giliomee & Mbenga 2007:335). The Police panicked and started shooting, killing 69 and injuring 180 more³. On 30 March 1960 the government called a state of emergency and detained more than 18000 people over the next few weeks. On 8 April it banned the ANC and the PAC (Giliomee&Mbenga 2007:335).

Sharpeville and the events which followed drew the eyes of the world to the injustice taking place in South African society. One person, who played a major role, was the Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg, bishop AR Reeves (Steenkamp 1987:124). His letters and reports led to an enquiry by D Kitagawa, secretary of the study group on "Intergroup Relations" of the World Council of Churches. This led to letters from WA Visser' t Hooft⁴ to CB Brink, BJ Marais and AR Reeves to gain information on the situation in South Africa (Steenkamp 1987: 124). As a result of further correspondence between the World Council of Churches and churches in South Africa,⁵ RS Bilheimer departed on a fact finding mission to South Africa on 18 April 1960 ⁶ He had to consult with the different churches. On 20 April, the thought of a church conference was already on the table and after further consultation a planning committee was named and the decision was taken that the conference would take place from 7-14 December 1960 at Cottesloe in Johannesburg (Van der Merwe 1990:19-20).

2.2 The Cottesloe Declaration: Call to the Dutch Reformed Church

Although the official history of the ecumenical movement has only one passing reference to the Cottesloe consultation, it was a gathering of great importance for the churches in South Africa (De Gruchy 2005:64). The concluding statement which was issued after the conference comprised of three sections (Cottesloe 1960:1). Part one rejected all forms of injustice and emphasized that: "in its social witness the Church must take cognisance of all attitudes, forces, policies and laws which affect the life of a people; but the church must proclaim that the final criteria of all social and political action is the principles of scripture regarding the realisation of all men of a life worthy of their God-given vocation" (Cottesloe 1960:1).

De Gruchy (2005:64) makes a correct assessment by saying that it was in Part Two that far-reaching consensus was achieved. It started by saying: "We recognise that all racial groups who permanently inhabit our country are a part of our total population, and we regard them as indigenous. Members of all these groups have an equal right to make their contribution towards the enrichment of the life of their country and to share in the ensuing responsibilities, rewards and privileges", (Cottesloe 1960:1). In the following paragraphs it addressed the wrongs that were part of the heart of the apartheid system. In paragraph 6 the declaration read: "No-one who believes in Jesus Christ may be excluded from any church on the grounds of his colour or race" and paragraph 10: "There are no Scriptural grounds for the prohibition of mixed marriages." Paragraph 11: "we call to attention once again to the disintegrating effects of migrant labour on African life." Paragraph 15:" It is our conviction that the right to own land where he is domiciled, and to participate in the government of his country, is part of the dignity of the adult man and for this reason a policy which permanently denies to non-White people the right of collaboration in

3 Although there are many different accounts of what actually happened, there are consensus about the numbers of dead and injured (Steenkamp 1987:198).

4 Dr WA Visser't Hooft was the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (De Gruchy 2005:61).

5 Detail about the corespondation in (Van der Merwe 1990:16).

6 RS Bilheimer was a minister of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and one of the four general secretaries of the World Council of Churches.

the government of the country of which they are citizens cannot be justified.” Part three included specific resolutions about justice in trials, freedom of worship, freedom to preach the gospel and future consultation and cooperation between churches (De Gruchy 2005:65). The declaration was a definite call to the Dutch Reformed Church, and indeed also to the other two Afrikaans churches, to take a stand against the government’s policy of apartheid. This is confirmed by the dramatic response from Prime Minister HF Verwoerd himself (De Gruchy 2005:65). Verwoerd condemned the declaration in his New Years message saying: “the churches have not yet spoken. The voice of the churches still has to be heard through the different synods where members and ministers are present.”⁷ Strong reaction followed from conservative groups in the church and in April 1961 the Transvaal synod of the Dutch Reformed Church strongly criticised the delegates to the consultation and rejected the declaration of the consultation (Van der Merwe 1990:28). The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa followed in October 1961. This led to the withdrawal of the church from the World Council of Churches (De Gruchy 2005:67). What was meant to be a highpoint suddenly became a low point. What should have been an enormous ecumenical breakthrough became a serious breakdown in relationships between the different churches in South Africa. The call from Cottesloe on the Dutch Reformed Church, was however loud and clear! In some way the church had to give an answer to the call. The importance of the call is confirmed by the actions of the acting moderator of the time, Beyers Naude⁸. He founded the Christian Institute which led to him being deprived of his ministerial status by the Dutch Reformed Church and later to his banning by the state (De Gruchy 2005:67).

3. THE STRUGGLE TO ANSWER TO THE CALL

3.1 A first answer

The fact that Cottesloe was a call to the Dutch Reformed Church that could not be ignored was first realized by the Cape Synod of the Church. During the 1961 synod, the circuit of Cape Town requested the synod to appoint a permanent commission for the study of race Relations (Handelinge 1961:51). The appointment of this commission was the important first step in formulating an answer. In 1965 the commission tabled a report about the church and race relations in South Africa. This report became the vehicle which transported the call from the Cottesloe Consultation from synod to synod and kept the discussion about race and relations between races in the Dutch Reformed Church on the agenda (Van der Merwe 1990:35).

It formed the basis of a report tabled at the General Synod of 1966, before another revision was tabled at the Cape Synod of 1969 (Handelinge 1969:193). In 1970, the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church decided to appoint a permanent commission for the study of race and ecumenical issues (Handelinge 1970:785). The report from this commission which was approved by the General Synod in 1974⁹ was published in 1975 under the title: *Ras Volk en Nasie en volkereverhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif*¹⁰. It was also translated into English under the title: *“Human Relations and the South African Scene in the light of Scripture”* (Van der Merwe 1990:110). The fact that this was the first official answer to the call of Cottesloe was confirmed by a remark from FE O’ Brein Geldenhuys¹⁰. He wrote: *“With Human relations and the South African Scene in the light of Scripture under my arm, I went to Europe to present it to all the important*

7 My Own translation of the following: “In feite het die kerk nog nie gepraat nie. Die stem van die kerk moet nog gehoor word en wel op sinodes waarop lidmate sowel as predikante teenwoordig is” (Van der Merwe 1990 :23).

8 Beyers Naude was Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Church in Transvaal

9 The report is discussed in (Van der Merwe 1990: 96-104).

10 O’ Brein Geldenhuys was the first Director of Ecumenical issues in the DRC

protestant churches in England, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. The request to all of them was: This is the point of view of the DRC about the South African scene. Please study it and let us discuss it" (O' Brein Geldenhuys 1982:81).

The content of the document was nothing else than a confirmation of the church's support for the policy of the National Party government, giving *separate development*¹¹ a biblical foundation.¹² *Mixed marriages* were undesirable and forbidden and common worship was only permissible in special situations. It was nevertheless still severely criticised by conservative groups in the church, as being too liberal and moving away from the true biblical point of view and the well known policy of the church.¹³

That this answer was no answer at all came hard and clear from churches outside South Africa. Although there were also voices criticizing the document from a more liberal side from within South Africa,¹⁴ it was the protestant churches in Europe that tore the document apart.

The Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland reacted by denouncing the document. One of the major points of critique was the fact that the document sanctioned the political policy of separate development and gave it a biblical foundation (Van der Merwe 1990:167). The Swiss Federation of Reformed Churches¹⁵ invited a delegation of the Dutch Reformed Church to a conference in Louvain.¹⁶ Main points of criticism against the policy adopted by the Dutch Reformed Church was the interpretation of scripture, the prophetic calling of the church, separate development, and a large dualism between theology and practice in the document (Van der Merwe 1990:190). After their visit to Switzerland the delegation went to Germany to meet with delegates of the Reformierte Bund. In a report which was published after the discussions the Bund declared: "We can therefore, only regard the NG report of 1974 as a theological confirmation of the present political system in South Africa, in which the separation of races means in practice the dominion of the one and the discrimination, denial of rights and exploitation of the other" (Handelinge 1982:157). Serious questions were also asked about the use of scripture in the document. A press release from the Reformierte Bund on 22 September 1979 summed up the dilemma of the Dutch Reformed Church: "Against the background of the terrible consequences of the Homeland policy, against the background of the news we get about torture and banning, against a background of a church divided according to race, we have asked their advocating for the disadvantages of the oppressed and their involvement in the struggle for church unity. Our dialogue partner could not give a satisfactory answer, because they had to hold on in general to the present official line of the NGK as outlined in the 1974 Synod report: 'Human relations and the South African scene in the light of scripture'" (Handelinge 1982:157).

The Protestant churches not only severely criticised the document, but by 1982 they had severed all relations with the Dutch Reformed Church (Van der Merwe 1990:205).

It is clear that the answer formulated by the Dutch Reformed Church did not make the grade. Severe criticism from conservative groups in the church and the rejection of "Human Relations" by the reformed churches in Europe made it important to go back to the drawing board. It was

11 Separate development was the term used for the policy which became known as apartheid.

12 In its reaction the Reformierte Bund in Germany declared: "We can therefore, only regard the NG report of 1974 as a theological confirmation of the present political system in South Africa, in which the separation of races means in practice the dominion of the one and the discrimination, denial of rights and exploitation of the other" (Handelinge 1982:157).

13 Van der Merwe 1990 p117 -135

14 Dr Allan Boesak criticized the decisions of the synod and warned that a major confrontation was on hand (Die Burger 22 Oktober 1974:1).

15 The Swiss federation of Reformed Churches published the document: "Theology – Advocate or Critic of Apartheid? A critical study of the Landman Rapport".

16 The conference took place from 2-6 April 1979 in Le Louvain Switzerland

however, not only critique against the document that led to a decision to review the answer of the Dutch Reformed Church. New impulses also played an important role.

3.2 Important new Impulses

3.2.1 The Reformed day witness

One of the important impulses which stimulated the Dutch Reformed Church to formulate a new answer was the Reformed day witness of 1980. Not only did it influence the way of thought in the church, it also showed the enormity of the struggle which took place in the church in search for a new answer. Signed by eight theologians¹⁷ from the Dutch Reformed Church, the Witness was published on 5 November 1980 in *Die Kerkbode*, official newspaper of the Dutch Reformed Church (*Die Kerkbode* 1980: 695). The Witness called on the church to answer to its prophetic calling in a South African which became more and more polarized making mention “of the divine calling of reconciliation on a meaningful and credible basis in a situation of increasing tension and polarization between population groups in the country”. It also called on the church to strive for: “the elimination of loveless and racist attitudes and actions which caused hurtful incidents” and to “a form of church unity in which the oneness of believers adhering to the same confession can take a visible form.” It also made mention of the fact that the DRC could make a God honouring contribution to a: “deeper consciousness of the demands of God’s Word under which both the authorities and their subjects are called to reform the present order, so that every individual can be given the scope to realise their potential as the bearer of the image of God” (Van der Merwe 1990:203).

The Witness caused a storm in the church which lasted for several months. Newspapers were flooded with letters, statements and counterstatements.

Although some researchers like Els (2008:82) likes to point out that the witness was “too little too late”, it was the start of a sincere struggle in the Dutch Reformed Church which would eventually lead to a meaningful answer to Cottesloe.¹⁸

3.2.2 The Open Letter

The next important impulse, which gave momentum to the struggle in the DRC, was the publication of the Open Letter on 9 June 1982 (*Die Kerkbode* 9 Junie 1982:1). Signed by 123 ministers and theologians from the Dutch Reformed Church family, the letter criticised Apartheid legislation and pledged them to work and pray for justice in society (Els 2008:85). The Letter stressed that: “the primary task of the church in our country is the ministry of reconciliation in Christ.” It went further by saying: “reconciliation includes a prophetic witness in relation to the entire life of society and therefore the church dare not remain silent on those matters of moral decay, family disintegration and discrimination” (Els 2008:86).

Els (2008:85) is correct when he says that: “the DRC establishment was staggered by the Open Letter.” It was met by fierce critique from official Dutch Reformed Church circles. Although nothing was said about the content of the letter, the critique was focused on the method which was followed and it was stressed that according to church policy the letter could not be received (Els 2008:85). It was further stressed that the timing and publication of the letter was a well planned move to influence the General Synod which would convene later in 1982 (Van der Merwe 1990:307).

Although there was a solid wall of opposition from the Dutch Reformed Church, an indication

17 The Witness was signed by CFA Borchardt, HJB Combrinck, BA Muller, WP Esterhuysen, JA Heyns, WD Jonker, HW Rossouw and AB du Toit

18 The reaction to the Reformed day witness and the way in which the theologians were handled in the Transvaal emphasize the ferocity of the struggle that started (Van der Merwe 1990: 235-260).

of the overwhelming sentiments in the church (Els 2008:85), the letter was a movement to a new way of thinking. The voices of the Reformed day Witness were becoming a chorus with the Open Letter and could no longer be ignored.

3.3 Church and Society: a second answer?

3.3.1 The General Synod of 1986

During the meeting of the World alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa in August 1982, the DRC was suspended. Apartheid was declared a heresy.¹⁹ Another blow hit the Dutch Reformed Church in September 1982²⁰ when the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sending Kerk declared that it could do nothing else but accuse the Dutch Reformed Church of heresy and idolatry because of the legitimising of Apartheid on the basis of Scripture and announced a Status Confessionis (Skema van Werksaamhede 1982:606). A concept confession was drafted which would become the Confession of Belhar in 1986 (Els 2008:88). WD Jonker summed the situation up correctly by saying: "This brought the DRC to an unavoidable situation....I was convinced that the DRC was put in a position where it has to take a serious decision" (Jonker 1988:162). The Dutch Reformed Church had no other choice but to revise *Human Relations and the South African scene in the light of scripture*. The first answer to Cottesloe met a dead end and a new answer had to be formulated. This important decision was taken during the General Synod of the DRC in 1982 and a commission was appointed to do the important work (Handelinge 1986:1201).

At the meeting of the General Synod in 1986 a new document *The Church and Society* was laid on the table for discussion and finalising (Els 2008:90). This was a new policy document on Race relations in South Africa. In the introduction social concerns were discussed and the religious scene in South Africa was examined. This was followed by basic Scriptural principles regarding the Bible as the "yardstick" of the church and its focus on the Kingdom of God. In the following chapters the nature and calling of the church were discussed, followed by prophetic task of the church. The role of the church in group relations led to an ethical discussion on Christian behaviour before the document concluded with a practical description (Hofmeyr 1991:378). JA Heyns, the newly elected moderator of the Synod explained the important new course of the Dutch Reformed Church during a press conference. Scriptural grounds for Apartheid were rejected and the church doors of the Dutch Reformed Church were now open to people of all races. Membership was also open. The Synod also decided that mixed marriages could not be prohibited on Scriptural grounds (The Star 23 October 1986:1).

This was an important new attempt to answer the question raised at Cottesloe. The full scale storm which broke loose confirms that this was a new course but that the course was not acceptable to all the members of the church. It led to an immense struggle in the church. As the intensity of the storm grew, even the Moderature, with the exception of Heyns turned back by saying: "nothing has changed" (Meiring 1994:180). Meanwhile meetings and protest meetings were organized in congregations and towns. Even politicians got involved. AP Treurnicht, leader of the Conservative Party, said at the annual congress of the party that brown and black people could now become ministers in DRC congregations (Die Burger 25 Oktober 1986:1). This did not help to calm emotions and it soon became clear that a church split was becoming a reality. At a meeting of 2500 Dutch Reformed Church members which took place on 28 November 1986 in Pretoria, it was decided to appoint a committee to look into the possibility of founding a new church (Die Burger 29 November 1986:1). This was the first step and despite all the efforts from the Dutch Reformed Church, a new church was founded on 27 June 1987. It became known as

19 Proceedings of the 21st General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 17-27 August 1982. Ottawa. Canada

20 Skema van Werksaamhede van die Ned Geref Sendingkerk 1982

the Afrikaans Protestant Church, a church for white Afrikaners only (Van der Merwe 1990:677). 19 Ministers and more than 5000 members of the DRC left to join the new church (Van der Merwe 1990:682). The church split confirms that the struggle from the DRC was sincere and intense. Heyns (Die Kerkbode 22 Julie 1987:6) described it as: "one of the darkest days in the history of the DRC". Although the reaction on *Church and Society* created a major storm in the Dutch Reformed Church it also laid the foundation for the General Synod of 1990.

3.3.2 The General Synod of 1990

The General Synod of the DRC met in Bloemfontein from 16-25 October. Els (2008:93) is correct when he writes: "In the history of the DRC this meeting will be known for its dramatic decisions on Apartheid in South Africa. It was the culmination of a process that started in 1978 with the adoption of the document *Human relations in light of Scripture* (HRS). This was revised and in 1986 the document *Church and Society* (CS) was adopted as the official policy of the DRC. The Synod of 1986 opened the way for discussions of Church and Society and asked members to send their grievances and objections as well as 'better formulations' so that it could be revised and presented to Synod in 1990."

During the synod certain changes were made to aspects of Church and Society and it was adopted as the official decision on race relations.

The Synod declared the following:

282. The Dutch Reformed Church, however, acknowledges that for too long it has adjudged the policy of Apartheid on the above named grounds too abstractly and theoretically, and therefore too uncritically...

283. While the Dutch Reformed Church, over the years, seriously and persistently sought the will of God and his Word for our society, the church made the error of allowing forced separation and division of peoples in its own circle, to be considered a biblical narrative. The Dutch Reformed Church should have distanced itself much earlier from this view and admits and confess its neglect.

285 Any system which in practice functions in this way is unacceptable in the light of Scripture and the Christian conscience and must be rejected as sinful. Any attempt by the church to defend such a system biblically and ethically, must be seen as a serious fallacy, that is to say it is in conflict with the Bible.

286 The Dutch Reformed Church wants to state clearly that it condemns all forms of discrimination and the suppression of peoples and wholeheartedly desires that all will be free to share in the privileges of the fatherland and will receive reasonable and equal opportunities to acquire prosperity and riches.

The unjust system of Apartheid was clearly condemned by the synod and although the synod also declared that not everything can be branded as wrong and inhuman.

"One cannot deny that positive developments were also achieved during this time" (Church and Society 1990:38-40).

From this revised document it is clear that the Dutch Reformed Church answered to the call of Cottesloe in a much more acceptable way. By denouncing the political system of Apartheid and the injustice it created, the wrongs that were identified by Cottesloe were answered to. The church did however not in so many words confess apartheid as a sin. This had to wait for The Rustenburg Conference in December 1990

4. RUSTENBURG 1990: THE LONG AWAITED ANSWER?

In December 1989, State President FW de Klerk, made an appeal to the churches in South Africa

in his Christmas message to formulate a strategy “conductive to negotiation, reconciliation and change for the situation in South Africa” (Du Toit, Hofmeyr, Strauss & van der Merwe 2002:105). A steering committee was appointed under the leadership of dr Louw Alberts to organise a conference of church leaders from across the spectrum of Christian churches in South Africa to “rediscover its calling and to unite Christian witness in a changing South Africa”(Alberts & Chikane (eds) 1991:15). The conference was held from 5-9 November 1990 at the Hunters Rest Hotel outside Rustenburg (Du Toit, Hofmeyr, Strauss & Van der Merwe 2002:105). The delegation of the Dutch Reformed Church consisted of PC Potgieter, moderator of the General Synod of the church, P Rossouw, DJ Hattingh and FM Gaum. JA Heyns and WD Jonker were present as speakers.

During Jonkers’s address he made the confession that resounded throughout the world within hours. He said: “I confess before you and before the Lord, not only my own sin and guilt, and my personal responsibility for the political, social, economical and structural wrongs that have done to many of you, and the results of which you and our whole country are still suffering from, but vicariously I dare also do that in the name of DRC of which I am a member, and for the Afrikaner people as a whole. I have the liberty to do just that, because the DRC at its latest synod has declared Apartheid a sin and confessed its own guilt of negligence in not warning against it and distancing itself from it long ago”(Alberts&Chikane(eds) 1991:92).

After Jonker’s address, Archbishop Desmond Tutu reacted by saying:” Prof Jonker made a statement that certainly touched me and I think touched others of us when he made a public confession and asked to be forgiven. I believe that I certainly stand under pressure of God’s Holy Spirit to say that, as I said in my sermon that when confession is made, then those of us who have been wronged must say ‘We forgive you’, so that together we may mover to the reconstruction of our land. That confession is not cheaply made and the response is not cheaply given”(Alberts &Chikane (eds) 1991:96).

Like so many times before, this special moment was marred by what happened next. From all over South Africa messages and telegrams were received to thank Jonker, but there were also those who asked the question:”who gave him the right to confess on behalf them and the Afrikaner people.” Even the previous State President PW Botha phoned Potgieter to object to the confession.(Els 2008:97). The next morning Potgieter asked to make a statement about the issue. He said that there are delegates who doubt if the confession was really genuine with respect to the position of the DRC. He then continued by saying (Jonker 1998:207): “The delegates of the DRC want to sate unambiguously that we fully identify ourselves with the statements made by Prof Jonker on the position of the church. He has in fact precisely reiterated the decision made by our General Synod in Bloemfontein recently. We would like to see this decision of the synod as the basis of reconciliation with all people and all Churches”.

Although the Dutch Reformed Church again made their own declaration after the conference²¹ the confession of Jonker and the statement by Potgieter is to my mind the answer on the call made by Cottesloe 30 years earlier. After three decades of intense struggle within the DRC, Apartheid and all the injustice that went with it was denounced.

5. CONCLUSION

Twenty years later and 50 years after Cottesloe, it is time to revisit the question: Did the Dutch Reformed Church answer to the call of Cottesloe? Officially the answer is: Yes. History tells us that after an intense struggle in the church and even a church split in 1987, Apartheid and all

21 Jonker wrote:”we left Rustenburg under a cloud in spite of all the wonderful things that happened there” (Jonker 1998:208) .

the injustice that went with it, were denounced. The Dutch Reformed Church even confessed its own role in the establishment of Apartheid. Pieter Potgieter, however, summed up the current situation correctly when he wrote (Potgieter 2002:216): “The discussion about when and where the DRC crossed the Rubicon about apartheid will go on. Was it with the General Synod of 1986 and its policy document Church and Society? Was it at the General Synod of 1990 or was it the Rustenburg Conference in 1990? Or, is the DRC’s Rubicon still in the future, encapsulated in its struggle for church unity?”

Although the Dutch Reformed Church have answered to the call of Cottesloe, the challenge of a South African society still marred by separation, poverty, racism and all kinds of injustice still echoes the call of the Cottesloe declaration. The impasse in the church unification process within the family of Dutch Reformed churches still remains a challenge, but so does the justice called for by the Cottesloe consultation 50 years ago.

For all churches in South Africa, it is time, *ke nako*²², to listen carefully, to look carefully and to speak up, to take up the challenge to make South Africa a better place for all! By doing that, Cottesloe won’t be a relic, but will be part of the living history of the church in South Africa.

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22 Ke Nako means “It is time” and was the slogan used to promote the 2010 FIFA World cup in South Africa.

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KEY WORDS

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