

CHAPTER 5: CHALLENGES ON THE ROAD TO RECONCILIATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

When it was decided to have special hearings for different sectors of society, the TRC had high expectations of the faith communities and especially the Christian church. For many years in South Africa it was believed that the church was the one organisation that would be the factor to reckon with. This supposition was made when statistics showed that approximately 76% of the people of the country were members of a Christian church (Hendriks, & Erasmus, 2002: 13-30). But the praxis shows that there is a decrease in numbers and more and more adherents to the mainline churches are just disappearing from the scene. They have had enough of the church.

During the proceedings of the TRC, a delegation from Rwanda visited South Africa. The Rwandan Minister of Justice, Dr Faustin Ntezilyayo and his colleagues told a group of TRC members what happened during the genocide in that country. Piet Meiring, one of the committee members of the TRC asked him:

While all these things happened in Rwanda, what was the role of the churches? With so many faithful in the country they should somehow have made a difference? Did the churches contribute towards reconciliation?

The minister exploded:

The churches! They did not play any role. No, it is worse than that. The Christians were part of the problem! Some of the ministers and priests and even nuns were just as guilty as all the rest... In some churches men and women and children were decimated at the pulpits and altars. Christians who had been neighbours for years, Tutsis and Hutus, attacked each other.

Later the minister asked Meiring:

...Please tell me, in all the things that happened in your past, all the things unearthed by the TRC, did the Christians play any role? Did the churches really take the need of the people seriously, help the people to reconcile? Moreover, with the problems you are facing today, does it matter that there are Christians in South Africa?"(Meiring, 1999:110)

Yes, does it matter that there is such a high percentage of people in South Africa who indicated that they are Christians?

Carl Niehaus wrote in an article, *Reconciliation in South Africa: Is Religion Relevant?* (1999), that he can't answer other than in the negative, if he would be asked if religion was a decisive factor in the transformation of South Africa? He does this as a Christian, because he questions the fact whether the Christian religion is still today a decisive factor for reconciliation anywhere in the world. He went on to say, and argued his case, that Christians must be freed from the illusions of the real influence of the church today.

When one listens to these words of a person who had become part of the struggle, was imprisoned (and tortured), who studied theology while in prison and became part of the negotiation team of the ANC for the Interim Constitution during the time 1990 – 1994, then one can understand his own disillusionment with the church, but that he has got something to say that is applicable for today is absolutely certain.

Niehaus made the following worthwhile comment about the negotiations. He said:

During the process of negotiation for the Interim Constitution that guided South Africa towards the first democratic elections of 27 April 1994, the church played a very marginal role. It was the leader of the South African Communist Party, Mr Joe Slovo, who – in following up on what his predecessor Braam Fischer had advocated in prison years before – suggested the most significant compromises for a peaceful settlement to the broad anti-Apartheid front. He argued for it with great conviction until it was eventually accepted. If there is someone who, together with President Nelson Mandela and Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, ought to be recognised as a moral and intellectual prophet of the relatively peaceful settlement in South Africa, then it is not a religious person, but the outspoken communist and atheist Joe Slovo (Niehaus, 1999:87).

As regards the TRC, Niehaus said that it was the religious convictions of Desmond Tutu that played an important role in its functioning. Because of this there were objections against the religious role the TRC played. Niehaus concluded that it was people like Tutu who let one see how important one's faith is, "but also how irrelevant the church is in the broad sense.

How were the churches and specifically the Afrikaans Churches planning to become relevant in the post-TRC season? This is the question that needs to be answered in this chapter. Which direction must they take? Are there any guidelines to follow? Yes! The TRC set up a few proposals in their address to the faith communities regarding what to think about in their attempt to work towards reconciliation. These proposals will be discussed in paragraph 5.3.

When one embarks on the road to reconciliation, it can be a lonely road, as many people in our country have experienced in the past. Above all it requires obedience to the Word of God. And these demands can be difficult, but worthwhile, for the Afrikaans Churches to follow. In the following paragraph twelve theses are given as a kind of test of obedience on this road. They are not new – they originated in 1985, during the heyday of the struggle and the quest for reconciliation.

5.2 THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION AND THE DEMANDS OF OBEDIENCE

Reconciliation is a costly exercise. It demands commitment and obedience. One of the most profound statements in this regard is from the pen of Prof. David Bosch, the late South African missiologist.

During September 1985 the National Initiative for Reconciliation (NIR) was born out of Christian concern regarding the rapidly escalating conflict situation in South Africa. A group of approximately 400 church leaders, from a broad spectrum of denominations in the country, were called together by African Enterprise (AE). The point of departure was to consider, that, with 70% South Africans confessing that they are Christians; the church of Christ should be able to afford, not only a potential common base, but also a potential network of communications, which surpasses that of any other organisation in the country.

On 11 September 1985, Prof. David Bosch presented a paper, *Processes of Reconciliation and demands of obedience – Twelve Theses*, at the meeting of the NIR in Pietermaritzburg. In the introduction, he gave a short overview of whom and what the

Afrikaners are where they came from and where they are going. Then he put forth twelve theses on the processes of reconciliation and obedience.

1. *Cheap reconciliation is the deadly enemy of the church.*

During the Second World War, Dietrich Bonhoeffer introduced the term ‘cheap reconciliation’, a term that has been used all over the world. What is meant by ‘cheap reconciliation’? It is reconciliation that costs us very little, that can be obtained at a minimum of expense. There are people who think that when you are really reconciled to Christ, you will almost automatically also be reconciled to one another. Cheap reconciliation means to tear faith and justice from each other, driving a wedge between the vertical and the horizontal. It suggests that we can have peace with God without having justice in our mutual relationships.

When one think about the role played by the Afrikaans Churches during the past decades, it is clear that in their preaching and pastoral care, the role of religion and churchism was a big one. In the more evangelical churches, the relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ was much more pronounced and thus the role of Christ’s reconciliatory work got more attention. But it is a sad fact that the basic relationships amongst all the people of the country, white, black and coloured were not really paid any attention. Two of the churches that are under discussion in this dissertation, stated outright that reconciliation with God is the important issue and they teach that to their members and from there the members must figure out reconciliation with other people on their own. This boils down to what Bosch calls cheap grace. The researcher is afraid that this is going to mean, if it hasn’t already, the death of the church.

2. *All of us are prisoners of history, and are, as such, challenged to become prisoners of hope.*

The history of South Africa is indeed a prison that locks us in. Through the years there was faction fighting: black against white, black against black, Afrikaner against English, etc. We have been

driven into so many camps and have built so many walls around us, peeping through keyholes at one another. We cannot get rid of our past by just shaking it off and starting afresh. Our history goes with us into the future. But our history is also the key that can open the prison for us, that can take us into a future of hope. The metaphor of a bird in a violent storm is used to explain this.

If the wings of the bird are set wrongly, it will be smashed against the cliff. But if the wings are set correctly, the storm itself will lift the bird above the cliff soaring into the sun. We do not need new wings. We only need a new setting for our wings.

One of the goals of the TRC was to open the books of history – open the wounds that were afflicted during the Apartheid years so that the truth could be revealed and that the same mistakes will not be repeated in the future. This formulation was precisely one of the big reasons why there was a reticence and even reluctance in the Afrikaans Churches to co-operate with the TRC. They were kept captive by their own history and to break loose from that was too much for some. Frost (1998) stated that Prof. Johan Heyns believed that the DRC had “led South Africa to Apartheid as far back as 1857... it now had to lead the country away from it.” Frost went on to quote Heyns: “there is a necessity for liberation for black people, but also for white people. We are all prisoners of our history and we must all rid ourselves of perceived ideas about black people and white people because only a liberated people can create a new society”. The researcher doesn’t believe that this has happened yet. There is still a long way to go.

But the DRC, for instance, has broken out of the grip of the past and organised a Year of Hope (See par 5.7.2) during which the whole church was led to look at the future with hope. This was followed by a Statement of Commitment during the General Synod meeting in 2000 (See par 5.7.1).

3. *The biblical concept of reconciliation has as its corollaries the concepts repentance and forgiveness.*

We cannot talk about the one without, at the same time, talking about the other. We must reflect on the meaning of repentance and forgiveness as well, since they can help us to give a clearer picture of what reconciliation means.

From passages such as Ephesians 2, Romans 4 and 6 it is clear that reconciliation between people is one of the results of reconciliation between God and people. During the late 1980's and through the '90's some of the Afrikaans Churches such as the DRC, RCSA and the AFM made efforts to let their voices be heard with regard to reconciliation when they confessed in public that they distanced themselves from Apartheid. The DRC did it at their synod meetings of 1986, 1990 and also at the Rustenburg Consultation and have tried to work more diligently towards unification with the other members of the DRC-family of churches. Since the writing of these pages, the process has already gained momentum and there are very high expectations that it will succeed.

The AFM had their official unification of the two sections during 1996. Both these churches brought submissions to the TRC, as well as some theologians of the RCSA, in which confessions were made and forgiveness asked.

4. *In ordinary inter-human communication people are usually more aware of the sin of others than of their own sins.*

The Biblical metaphor is applicable in this situation: Why do you see the speck in the eye of your brother, but the beam in your own eye you do not see? If we think about reconciliation in a context where there is a win/lose situation, the fronts harden. Michael Cassidy made a comment on such a situation that it is as if each group had its own muscular Christ. And if any group's Christ becomes too muscular, the others groups' either go back into their shells or they make their Christ even more muscular. If Christ becomes muscular,

he ceases to be the man of Calvary. The marks of the nails disappear behind the flexing of those powerful muscles.

One of the problems amongst churches in South Africa is that we can easily point fingers at others and criticise them for what they are doing or not doing. Past history has also shown that clearly. The TRC pointed out in their report that churches have had the opportunity to look at themselves in a mirror and what they saw were acts of commission and legitimisation as well as acts of omission during our Apartheid's history. Bishop Michael Nuttall of the Anglican Church mentioned that his church was "unwilling to speak out when it should have" and apologised for that as well as "for the often arrogant condemnation of those whose ideas and actions differed from those of the Anglican Church" (Meiring, 1999: 269). Churches that supported the struggle were really vicious toward those who did not. On the one hand active support for the struggle; on the other hand those who fight against "terrorism and communism". It is sad to say that those who were in the "corner" of the government committed just as many atrocities by omitting their responsibility to warn. Amongst this last group one could classify the Afrikaans Churches.

5. *In the context of the Christian faith, by contrast, we judge ourselves before we judge others.*

As Christians we can be critical about others only after we have been critical about ourselves. We should be prepared to carry the burden of our own guilt as well as that of others; and carrying the burden of their guilt means forgiving it, wholeheartedly. This is the difference between the critic and the prophet: The critic accuses, the prophet weeps; the critic boasts, the prophet beats his breast; the critic remains unscathed, the prophet is ridiculed, ostracised, persecuted. Criticism is easy, but therefore also cheap; being prophetic is terribly demanding and therefore very costly.

To a very large extent the Afrikaans Churches had been very critical towards people like Beyers Naudé, Desmond Tutu, Alan Boesak, and others. They were scolded and called names. The researcher believes this was because of the fact that too many Christians in the church is more concerned with tradition and religion – most have a Church vision – as opposed to an intimate relation with Jesus Christ and a Kingdom vision. When one’s view of the church changes from church orientation to kingdom orientation, one tends to see other Christians in a different light. We have seen this in South Africa. Since the work of the TRC commenced, the true leadership of people like Naudé, Tutu and Boesak has been revealed. This is sadly not true amongst a large contingent of Afrikaners, but there are big changes taking place.

6. *If we are followers of the One who was crucified we, too, will have to be cross-bearers.*

This is the normal Christian life! The Cross is the hallmark of the Christian Church. Jesus showed us the way and when we are his disciples we must know for sure that we ourselves will get hurt. The true Christian will bear on his body the scars of Jesus. This is quite the opposite of the world. Where the world demands violence the Christian brings peace and where the world cries for vengeance, the Christian offers forgiveness. They turn the world upside down.

Since the earliest days of the Afrikaans Churches’ involvement with Apartheid i.e. by giving theological sanction to it, there were individuals who had raised their voices against it. At the same time there were leaders’ voices from the “other corner” who criticised the church and the government. “Church leaders like Archbishop Tutu, Dr Beyers Naudé, Dr Frank Chikane, Fr Albert Nolan, Bishop Simeon Nkoane, Dr Wolfram Kistner, were amongst these” (Niehaus, 1999:86). They became cross-bearers because of their relentless prophetic utterances against the system. But there were many others, who knew in their hearts that they should stand up, but didn’t do it in the same way as those mentioned above. One of them was Prof. Johan Heyns. A quote from Frost is meaningful in this regard: “It is a terrible mess which we are’ in, he would say privately, but when

urged by Prof. Klaus Nürnberger to make his views known he would say, ‘If I simply stand up and say what I know the same will happen to me as happened to Beyers Naudé’. Maybe this was the big problem in the Afrikaans Churches – too few wanted to see themselves as imprisoned, scolded or abandoned by their own people (Frost, 1998:62).

7. *Repentance and conversion always affect those elements in our lives that touch us most deeply, which we are most attached or devoted to, without which – so we believe – we simply cannot exist.*

Many of these elements may be very good, but our faith challenges us to live without them. It is about ‘self-denial’, about ‘dying to self’.

Abraham had to give up Isaac; Paul had to give up his ‘pedigree’.

They had to deny themselves. The gospel challenges us to be willing to give up our privileges, to deny ourselves. The gospel challenges us to do justice now, even if our world comes to an end.

Bonhoeffer’s words ring in our ears: Only the one who believes, obeys; only the one who is obedient believes. God does not ask about the extent of our successes but about the depth of our obedience. I am suggesting that we should begin thinking about the possible emergence of a situation where we, as white, Afrikaner Christians, become the underdogs. We should be able to continue being Christians even in such circumstances.

These prophetic words of Bosch became true on 2 February 1990 when in Parliament President F W de Klerk unbanned the liberation groups in South Africa, as well as set Mr Nelson Mandela free. This was the beginning of a time of repentance and forgiveness, given and received, of negotiations, which ultimately resulted in free democratic elections for all South Africans in April 1994. The door was opened on the government’s part for confession and repentance for the out going government. But the opportunity slipped away. For the first time in its history, South Africa has a black majority government and the ‘the white Afrikaners have become the underdogs’, to use Bosch’s words. This led to intense debate in the Afrikaans Churches, because for many it seemed

as if the ‘writing was on the wall’ that the ‘bastion of Christianity’ was crumbling before the ‘total onslaught’. It seems as if the Afrikaner, in this whole process, experienced a difficult time being Christians, because there is a clear decline of membership in the historical Afrikaner Churches.

8. *Confession of guilt and repentance cannot be imposed by others, but is a gift of the Holy Spirit.*

If repentance and restitution approximate even remotely the kind of steps I have intimated in my previous theses, there is no chance that demands from others will persuade me to take such steps. (During the Amnesty process of the TRC it was not expected of perpetrators to say they were sorry, because you can’t orchestrate forgiveness-Researcher). I’ll only take them willingly if God has changed my heart. I can, however, challenge those who share my privileges to open their hearts too. I may then be used by the Holy Spirit as a catalyst. Ideally, then, it should be white Christians who challenge other white Christians, Afrikaners who challenge their fellow-Afrikaners, to come to recognise that we all share the guilt of the sins we have committed, that we should recognise the guilt for what it is, confess it, and take deliberate steps at making restitution.

Afrikaner Christians are beginning to express and confess their guilt, even publicly. They have been doing so for some time already, mostly as individuals or unofficial groups. Now, for the first time, a regional DRC body, in its official capacity, has done the same. The presbytery of Stellenbosch, in its recent annual meeting on 29 August 1985, released a statement that says, inter alia:

1. We recognise that, in South African society, racial discrimination plays a fundamental role in both structural and personal matters; we confess that this is contrary to the biblical principles of love of one’s neighbour and justice.

2. We also acknowledge that the ideal of Apartheid did not succeed in creating social justice but has, on the contrary, led to human misery, frustration and injustice.
3. We confess that the DRC has often insensitively and uncritically tolerated the negative realities of the consequences of Apartheid.
4. We therefore hereby declare ourselves prepared
 - a) to assess the Apartheid system in all its consequences truly, honestly and critically;
 - b) with all other people in our country, to seek prayerfully for a meaningful alternative for our land, and to do whatever we can to alleviate the suffering caused by the system.

At last the process has begun. We pray that it will gain momentum. We must not wait for others and make our confession of guilt and repentance subject to or dependant on theirs. We dare not even demand forgiveness; we may not withdraw our confession of guilt if the other party fails to forgive us. Confessing our guilt is in itself a supreme blessing and a sign of grace. It opens up the fountains of new life and cleanses us.

It is astonishing to think that already in 1985, the Presbytery of Stellenbosch actually opened a door for the DRC, as well as for all the Afrikaans Churches, to persist and confess and repent of their support for Apartheid. This Presbytery was also the first to bring a submission to the TRC during 1996. But, as Bosch said, it cannot be imposed on others, but must be driven by the Holy Spirit. Did the Afrikaans Churches have a doubt about what the Spirit can do or were they just disobedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit out of fear.

9. *Our most terrible guilt is that of which we are unaware.*

There are enough examples in the gospels to show that ignorance regarding a certain situation is no excuse. To say that you are unaware regarding something wrong does not lessen guilt. Not being aware of our guilt may be our most terrible guilt.

When one trespasses a law of the country it is no excuse if you say you didn't know about it. One is guilty of the trespass. One of the main excuses that were heard from churches during the work of the TRC was that "we didn't know". Even the chaplaincy of the police and the defence force, who were with troops in overt and covert operations, said that they didn't know about the full extent of what was going on. There is no excuse for all South Africans who "didn't know" – we were guilty. During the special hearings of the TRC, two former cabinet ministers, Leon Wessels and Roelf Meyer, appeared before the commission. Wessels said, inter alia:

"The political defence of 'I did not know' is not available to me, because in many respects I believe I did not want to know..." Meyer agreed with him during his presentation (Meiring, 1999: 242).

10. *God forgives us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.*

These words are from the Lord's Prayer. They intimately link reconciliation with God to reconciliation with our neighbour. The person who honestly confesses his or her guilt knows, categorically and totally, that God forgives. We cannot receive God's forgiveness and remain unyielding to our human debtors.

Desmond Tutu has written about forgiveness and told about the picture that was published in the Journal for Spirituality and Health. "Three United States ex-servicemen were standing in front of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. One asks, 'Have you forgiven those who held you prisoner of war?' 'I will never forgive them,' replies the other. His mate says: 'Then it seems they still have you in prison, don't they?'" (Tutu, 1999:272)

11. *If we reject the road of reconciliation we are crucifying Christ anew.*

Confessing our sins, repenting, forgiving and reconciling are not optional extras for those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. If we refuse to walk this road, we are denying our Lord. We are saying,

in effect, that what Christ did, is of no consequence. The question: “Are you prepared to be reconciled with your brother and sister?” is in essence the same as the question: “Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?”

Often the question was asked: How many times must we confess? We have confessed – there is no need to do it again. The Biblical way is not to wait for someone else to confess before you do, but when you become aware of a trespass or a wrong attitude you have to confess. It is the same with forgiveness. How many times? The Lord Jesus Christ said: Infinity! (Matthew 18:22ff)

12. *Reconciliation is not a human possibility but a divine gift.*

When Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, his disciples abandoned Him and fled. But still, in spite of what happened, the band of disciples constituted a community of hope in the midst of despair; and so do we, not because of ourselves but because of our Lord who bound us together and enlisted us in the ministry of reconciliation.

When one look back it is true that there is always hope, because “God is the God of surprises” (Tutu in Meiring 1999: 126). These words were uttered on 21 April 1997, after former police officer, Eric Taylor, who applied for amnesty for his part in the death of the Cradock Four, had requested to meet the families of the four murdered men and asked them to forgive him for the deed (Meiring 1999:123-126). This was but one of the examples of how God is working in the hearts of people when they came to see Him as the worker of reconciliation.

These theses were laid on the table in 1985. It is twenty-one years later, 2006, and Christians are still struggling to get to a point where they will take the ministry of reconciliation seriously. A few things have happened as has been shown above, but was it enough? No. When is the Christian body in South Africa, going to be obedient to the Word of God – without reservations and excuses?

It has been said that reconciliation means to build bridges between people, but is it not better to say that everyone that is seeking reconciliation is a bridge-crosser. God has already built the Bridge, Jesus Christ, and this Bridge must be crossed. The Church has been given the ministry of reconciliation and if it does not use it, it is disobedient to Him.

The researcher is convinced that churches must again or perhaps for the first time, look at these theses and use them as yardstick to measure their progress towards reconciliation. They can be used in conjunction with the proposals of the TRC – to check and crosscheck if progress is being made.

5.3 PROPOSALS OF THE TRC

The TRC, in its *Final Report* expressed high hopes for what may be done in South Africa to promote healing and reconciliation – calling on the faith communities to fulfil a unique role in this regard.

Faith communities enjoy a unique and privileged position in South African society. They are widely respected and have far-reaching moral influence. As such, they should play a key role in healing and reconciliation initiatives.

Amongst the recommendations of the TRC were a number of *challenges to the different faith communities*. These can be used as guidelines as already mentioned above:

- Different religious groups must seek ways to communicate with one another as a basis for eliminating religious conflict and promoting inter-religious understanding.
- Religious groups must seek ways of incorporating marginalised groups into their communities as a way of addressing the problems contributing to various forms of asocial behaviour.
- Faith communities must promote a culture of tolerance and peaceful co-existence.

- Forms of worship must be explored which transcend language and cultural differences.
- Religious communities must take the initiative to expose members from predominantly white and black communities to one another.
- Religious groups, in consultation with other NGO's, must establish institutional forums to promote reconciliation. Specific attention should be given to the establishment of a peace-corps, not only as a means of helping communities in need, but also for developing the skills of less privileged youth. Such a body could also be used to expose more privileged members of the community to the needs and the living conditions of the majority of South Africans. Given the racial and ideological conflict prevalent in the country, the Peace Corps should include conflict resolution and peacemaking as an integral part of its curriculum.
- Religious communities should develop theologies designed to promote reconciliation and a true sense of community in the nation. Particular consideration could be given to:
 - the role of white people as the beneficiaries of Apartheid, with regard to reconstruction and reconciliation;
 - the empowerment of black people and those who have suffered gross violations of human rights to move beyond 'victim-hood' in regaining their humanity;
 - the characteristics of good citizenship, the rule of law and the 'common good' in society;
 - the articulation of a global ethical foundation which is in keeping with the major beliefs of the various religions (TRC Report, Volume 5, 1998:316ff).

At the East London hearing of the TRC all the representatives of the different communities categorically stated their commitment to work together for healing and reconciliation and nation building (Meiring 2005:169ff).

To work on this would keep the different faith communities occupied for many years to come. There are already many things happening in the different faith communities; even if it is on a small scale. Many Afrikaans congregations have become involved in their nearby communities. One is only sceptical about some of the “projects”, because it is still ‘doing things **for** the people’ instead of ‘doing it **with** the people’ and endeavouring to help the poorer communities to take ownership as integrated communities.

The next few paragraphs show what is being done as a result of the proposals of the TRC.

5.4 CHURCH INITIATIVES AND RESPONSES TO THE PROPOSALS OF THE TRC

When the final report on the work of the TRC was handed to President Mandela on the 29th October 1998, Desmond Tutu said, inter alia, the following:

Not everybody will be happy with the report. Many have already started to discredit it in advance. But even should they succeed, what would they achieve? It will change nothing of the facts... We did not dream up these facts, the perpetrators themselves came to tell them.

When Mr Mandela received the report he spoke highly of the commission and the work they did. Naturally it was not possible to attain everything, either in regard to the truth or the process of reconciliation. He said:

I accept the report as it is, with all its deficiencies, as the TRC’s contribution to reconciliation and building a nation. ...Let us approach the future together. Finally we are free, can we accept our calling with responsibility. But to build a better future, we need everybody’s hands – your hands, as well as mine (Meiring, 1999:367).

Are these words of Mandela coming true in post-TRC South Africa? The researcher agrees with Meiring when he said that many people, who, at the initiation of the work of the TRC were not interested, are coming aboard to help make a difference in our country. The question whether the TRC could bring about reconciliation during the two and a half years of its existence must be answered with an emphatic no. The only thing it could do, was to open the minds of the people of our country to look around, perceive the beauty of

nature and all the people and get to work to make this country something to be proud of. Meiring asked the question: “Has the process helped to bring people closer to one another – or just the opposite? History will have to make the final judgement on this as well. As was the case with the quest for truth, humility is necessary when we speak of reconciliation. Reconciliation is indeed something wonderful, something fragile, a gift from above. But it is not something one can arrange or organise”. He went on to ask: “Who is responsible for the process of reconciliation? Naturally we would say that every individual, every group, every denomination and religion has a contribution to make. But the most important group in the country are the Christians. There are no two ways about it. There are great challenges and opportunities for the churches in the country, and their millions of members” (Meiring, 1999: 374-377).

Did the churches in South Africa listen to the proposals of the TRC in this regard? The researcher is of the opinion that there is hope that faith community, and especially the Christian church, is on the move. In some instances the movement is very slow, in other instances a lot has already been done.

John Paul Lederach in his book *Journey towards reconciliation* used the narrative of Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25-33) to illustrate his concept of reconciliation. The researcher believes that this is currently applicable in our country. Lederach suggested that:

- (i) *Reconciliation is a journey*: When Jacob returned to his own country after years with Laban, he came face to face with his brother Esau. After his flight away from his brother, he had to take the trip back. But there was unresolved conflict between them. Reconciliation is the journey toward and through conflict. Jacob knew one thing – God promised him to be present in this whole venture.
- (ii) *Reconciliation as encounters*: In the story we read of at least three encounters. There are encounters in every journey of reconciliation – with self, God and others. Jacob had to face himself first – a type of outward and inward journey. Further, the journey towards reconciliation always involves turning towards the people who have

contributed to the pain one experiences. When you turn to seek the face of the enemy, you look into the face of God (Genesis 33:10).

- (iii) *Reconciliation as a place*: Esau and Jacob came to a place of heartfelt reunion where they had to face each other. A place is a specific time and space where certain things come together on the journey. Reconciliation is a journey, an encounter and a place. God calls us to set out on this journey. It is a journey through conflict, marked by places where we see the face of God, the face of the enemy and the face of the own self (Lederach, 1999: 22-26).

Something of this metaphor is seen in the following examples of reconciliation that took place when the Christian Church gets involved in communities and the lives of individuals.

5.5 EXAMPLES OF RECONCILIATION IN COMMUNITIES

5.5.1 Healing Cradock after Apartheid (Nyameka Goniwe)

Mrs Nyameka Goniwe, the wife of Matthew Goniwe, one of the ‘Cradock Four’ who was assassinated by state security forces in 1985, relates how the community of Cradock in the Eastern Cape, has stood up from total despondency to start with a program they called Cradock Community Healing Programme (CCHP). She reflects on the deep scars that the people of Cradock had to carry because of the rule of Apartheid. Apartheid is a thing of the past, but the damage to the people, physical and psychological, will stay with them for the rest of their lives. She said that community members need a space where they could reflect on the past and where the many untold stories of trauma, suffering, loss of hope and opportunities, depression, anger and weariness could emerge. She went on to say:

The Cradock Community Healing Programme (CCHP) came about as a result of my reflections about my own loss and pain, exposure to the discourse of reconciliation, reading about the subject, insights of other people and being challenged to respond to questions that included lessons

drawn from my involvement as an activist at both community and development levels. The experience of participating in the TRC process made me realise the value of storytelling.

Mrs. Goniwe tells the story of how the CCHP took responsibility for the healing of individuals in Cradock, via a community-based steering committee, in which the *faith communities* were also involved. Consultative meetings were held with community-based organisations so that these could fully understand the concept and the program they would buy into.

The faith communities – as one of the most prominent groups in the community – applauded the timing of such a concept as something that will ‘jerk the church out of its slumber and drive it to develop a focus and direction’. Some spoke of ‘the need for the church to reconcile within itself’, while others saw it as ‘an opportunity for the church and the community leadership to meet in order to get to know each other and reconcile’. (Researcher’s Italics)

The whole process is under way and people have expressed appreciation for what is going on. The image of the community of Lingelihle, the township, is also being transformed. What about the involvement of the church? She relates that the involvement of the Church is adding value to the process and ensuring that it is taken seriously. She goes on to say:

The church’s embrace gives the concept a level of acceptance and the respect it deserves. An example of the active role was seen in an inter-faith church service that focused on peace and reconciliation. Its main aim was to honour and recognise those who died during the bitter years of our struggle. An additional benefit of this occasion was to acknowledge and validate victims and survivors who suffered in different ways during Apartheid. This storytelling gathering, triggering sad and painful memories about the past, allowed a release of emotions. A candle-lighting ritual was added to the ceremony and was followed by reading the names of all those who lost their lives, and those who took an active role in the liberation struggle. The service contributed a lot towards enabling families to reconcile with what happened to their relatives”. (Researcher’s Italics)

Cradock is a town consisting of three communities separated physically along racial lines. The healing process has made it possible for the three communities to participate in a *community dialogue seminar* with the aim of confronting and reflecting on issues of difference, while seeking areas of commonality that can bring them closer together. The three racially divided residents’ groups never came together before and the move is being

hailed as a successful, groundbreaking development in the arena of reconciliation and nation building (Du Toit, 2003: 275-280).

When one tests this example against the proposals of the TRC, it becomes clear that this is a community that really tried to reach out to each other to make Cradock a better place to live for all its diverse racial groups.

5.5.2 A partnership between Gugulethu and Stellenbosch (Amelia Burger)

Here follows another example of how it is possible for communities to work together. Faith communities can play a very important role in promoting social and economic development as well as interracial interaction. Amelia Burger talks about the tremendous work that has begun through this partnership. She says, inter alia:

There can be no reconciliation without people getting to know one another, without creating space for people to interact, for things to ‘rub off’,” says Spiwo Xapile, minister of a *Presbyterian congregation in Gugulethu*. “The reality of God is to be found in human relationships, whatever the colour of the skin”, he continues. “One has nothing to gain by keeping away from people. Reconciliation happens when people meet and get rid of their preconceptions. Before we make assumptions or judge people, we need to get to know them as people’.

Spiwo met Prof. Jan du Toit of the University of Stellenbosch and, through a friendship that developed between them, they planned and worked together and in the end they fitted out six shipping containers to serve as a development centre, next to the church where Spiwo pastored, with an initial focus on practical skills training and after-school studies. Because of the high unemployment rate, various courses for the unemployed were introduced by the church in the JL Zwane Centre. Jan said: “People must learn to help themselves. The meaning of reconstruction and development is that communities must work for themselves”.

With the help of fund raising and donations a community centre could be build.

Questions were raised against Spiwo’s involvement with the University of Stellenbosch (US) and white people. But he sees the interaction as an opportunity for reconciliation, to create space for positive collaboration with the perceived ‘enemy’. Spiwo remarked:

One cannot shut people out. One's own forgiveness depends on one's capacity to forgive. If we forgive white crime, we help ourselves. To keep on hating and bearing grudges just leads to suffering. We must go through a process of healing past wounds – and some of these things racial communities have to deal with by themselves – otherwise we'll have problems that make communities self-destructive.

The centre has given the people of Gugulethu a new sense of identity and even self-worth.

A minister from the white DRC Student Church (DRCSC) in Stellenbosch was commissioned to work at JL Zwane for four years until the beginning of 2001. He described his time in the township as a close encounter with the broader South African society – a unique experience he will always remember. As time passed the *relationship between the two faith communities reached maturity* and a proper relationship of mutuality could be established.

The *concept of partnership* requires a fundamental mental shift from the idea of one community 'helping another'. It suggests that easing one community's needs is mutually beneficial. Put differently, it involves *viewing both communities as having needs to be met and resources to share*.

The partnership between US and JL Zwane received a new dimension when the DRCSC entered into the partnership. The partners did *planning together* and developed a planning methodology that they called '*matching needs and resources*'. Both parties identified their own needs and resources and then linked them. It is instructive to see how many 'matches' could be made. *Gugulethu had many resources to offer and Stellenbosch many corresponding needs. Similarly, Gugulethu had many needs and Stellenbosch many resources to match*.

A combined committee of participants from both faith communities needs to drive each project. These committees report back to a general meeting of both communities, as well as to each community separately. These feedback sessions might be held during special church services dedicated to the cause, where progress can be celebrated. (Du Toit, 2003: 235-238) (Researcher's Italics)

Looking at this example, it is quite clear that both communities have resources and needs and that an important feature of their mutual co-operation was the fact that they could share the needs and resources. It was not a case of one community giving and the other

only receiving. In this way both benefited and the reconciliation that took place is of unspeakable value.

5.5.3 Individual acts of reconciliation

During the TRC hearings, important acts of personal reconciliation and forgiveness took place from all sides of the spectrum – perpetrators to victims and vice versa. There are numerous examples of this. Du Toit (2003) and Meiring (1999) mention different cases of personal reconciliation that took place during and after the TRC hearings. People whose names were heard time and again are Amy Biehl, Nyameka Goniwe, Ginn Fourie, Brian Mitchell, Mahlomola Tlale, the “Bisho massacre”, and others.

Since the end of the TRC hearings, the process is still going on. One interesting case to illustrate this happened in 2006 and has had an impact on the whole country, positively or negatively.

On 3 August 2006, Adriaan Vlok, former Minister of Law and Order and Dr Frank Chikane, Director-general in the office of the President, had met in Chikane’s office. It took Vlok two months to arrange the meeting. He had one thing in mind and that was to ask for forgiveness. At this meeting forgiveness were asked and given and as an act of humility, Vlok washed Chikane’s feet. Mr. Vlok, who gave orders to blow up Khotso House, and so many other operations, had undergone a transformation after the death of his first wife in 1994. He said it took him twelve years to come to a point where he could rid himself from his own pride, egotism and selfishness.

Chikane had made the comment in his church in Soweto, where Vlok was also addressing the congregation, that he believed the apology was sincere and that more was likely to follow. He then said: “The fact that Mr Vlok has come to make a confession to me, and is here with us today, is a miracle... We must not let the past we’ve defeated, dictate our future” (The Star, 4 September 2006:1).

Vlok had also made contact with nine mothers from Mamelodi, whose sons were murdered by the police, and who asked him to help them to get the bones or something back from their sons. He asked them for forgiveness also and washed their feet as well.

This also attracted the attention of the public and some Afrikaners and even of the other races were furious about this, while others thank the Lord for the example and that a road has been opened for others to follow (Vlok's personal testimony, Sunday 4 January 2007, Paarl).

This whole event reverberated even in the Presidency. In his weekly letter, September 8-14, 2006, President Thabo Mbeki gave ample space to Vlok's encounter with Chikane. He said, inter alia:

“But, centrally, I believe that this happening, and especially the legitimate and necessary debate it has provoked, has also made it necessary for all of us as South Africans, to pose the question whether we are indeed listening and hearing one another! Or is it a case that the chasms that continue to fracture our society are so big and deep, that we are still unable to hear one another!

In the Bible he gave to Frank Chikane, he inscribed the words, “I have sinned against the Lord, and against you. Please forgive me.” and referred Rev. Chikane to the Biblical Psalm 51. This Psalm contains a verse that says, “Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.”

His words and actions said to me that even as he embarked on an intensely personal journey, Adriaan Vlok communicated a message to all who will listen, including the Afrikaner people he led, that together we must build a new and humane society of hope, in which we are each one another's keeper. As a South African, I felt uplifted and strengthened that Adriaan Vlok had spoken and acted as he did” (Mbeki; Presidential Newsletter, September 8-14, 2006)

What powerful words from the President of our country. May we take notice of it and start doing it. Reconciliation is not a “humanly thing” but it is an act of God, who changes one's inmost being, to be reconciled to Him and then one can be moved to reach out to those around one. When one looks around one at this stage, and see the gulf of neo-racism starting to rumble, especially amongst a faction of Afrikaners (adults and youth, even children) there tends also to be a wave of pessimism and depression engulfing our people. May the Lord, who worked in the heart of a person like Adriaan Vlok, and others, do it in the hearts of the rest of our country's inhabitants also.

Not everyone shares the enthusiasm of the moment. One person that has a question mark in his mind regarding Adriaan Vlok, is Fr Michael Lapsley, who lost both hands, an eye and part of his hearing as the result of the explosion a letter-bomb sent to him by the security police in April 1990 while Vlok was still the Minister of Law and Order.

Lapsley had been invited by Prof. Piet Meiring to attend a session on forgiveness and reconciliation at the South African Missiological Conference in Pretoria during January 2007 at which he could meet Vlok.

He said that during the “feet washing” incident he was out of the country. A number of his friends had asked him what he thought of it and at that stage he was not sure. Then at this conference he had the opportunity to hear Vlok testifying about the change in himself, etc. Then Lapsley, as first respondent on Vlok’s message said the following:

I said that it was a significant moment for me because I had been a victim of the Apartheid State. I went on to reflect a little on some of the public response to his initiative as well as my own. I expressed respect for the step Vlok had taken. Many people were worried that he did not seem to be at all forthcoming about all that he knew about the past. I said that it was not often easy for people to believe in an apology until people saw what perpetrators did with the rest of their lives, including their money, their time, their energy.

There was some discussion and after the meeting ended, Lapsley pressed Vlok again, privately, about what he must have known as a member of the cabinet and State Security Council. To this Vlok said that *he admitted that he should have questioned more but he didn’t because he didn’t want to know*. (Researcher’s Italics) Lapsley went on to say:

I have always been slightly incredulous that the whole world knew in significant measure, exactly what was happening in South Africa during the Apartheid years, especially those who were at the top of the chain of command. The inquest into Steve Biko’s death in police custody took place back in 1978 and was comprehensively covered in the Rand Daily Mail. I remember saying to myself, “Let no-one ever say, ‘we did not know’.

I wondered for a moment whether I should forgive Vlok for what happened to me, but how do you forgive what is claimed to be unknown? I remember once reading that the words; “I forgive you” is also an accusation (Lapsley, in Sunday Independent 28 January 2007).

What happened here? Lapsley, the Director of the Institute for Healing of Memories, who is helping people to receive healing from their pain from things that happened in the past,

has found that he cannot trust the testimony of Vlok. The researcher is also baffled by the fact that Vlok said: “I never asked questions because I did not want to know”. How is it possible that this could happen, because one should believe that the Minister, as head of a Department, is the one who actually should know more than anyone under his command? That he should be on top of every operation or the planning thereof. The question that now haunts the minds of many people is: ‘To what extent can one really have pity with Vlok?’

In *Die Burger*, 7 February 2007, an article appeared under the heading “First prosecutions after the TRC” (*Eerstes vervolg na WVK*). In the article it is said, inter alia:

The first prosecutions concern the attempts of Dr Frank Chikane, Director General in the Presidency, to find out more about who tried to poison him in 1989... This is paving the way for the prosecution of Mr Adriaan Vlok, former minister of Law and Order...

The article went on to reiterate the past few months’ attention on Vlok’s “feet washing” etc. and also Pres. Mbeki’s reaction (see above). It then said that Vlok didn’t want to comment on the possibility of prosecution.

During the finalising of this thesis, the above mentioned possibility of the prosecution of Vlok and others became a reality. On Friday 17 August 2007, Adriaan Vlok and four other ex-policemen were brought before court for their part in the Frank Chikane poison case. Vlok and Gen. Johan van der Merwe, Ex-Adjunct Police Commissioner, were each sentenced to 10 years in jail, suspended for 5 years. The other three each received a 5-year sentence, suspended for 5 years (*Die Beeld*, Saturday 18 August 2007). This whole drama started a new polarisation process in the country. Within the opposition parties in Parliament and white people in general there is fear that a one-sided “witch-hunt” is underway. The general feeling amongst white South Africans is that there must be a balanced way of prosecuting - including people from the current government who had not received amnesty.

Dr Coenie Burger, previous Moderator of the DRC, made the comment in an article: *Versoening is op ‘n mespunt (Reconciliation is balancing on a knife-edge)* in *Die Kerkbode*, 10 August 2007, that matters regarding reconciliation in the country can go

wrong if this issue is not handled with a great deal of wisdom. In the same article, Prof. Piet Strauss, current Moderator of the DRC, said that he is afraid that this new revealing of the past can create a lot of bitterness and lead to a lack of motivation to go on working together towards reconciliation.

It remains to be seen what will be the outcome of this whole venture, which was brought into the limelight by Adriaan Vlok, seeking forgiveness and the washing of feet.

5.6 SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (SACC) STRATEGY AND PLAN OF ACTION IN RESPONSE TO THE FINAL TRC REPORT

The SACC played an active role in the mobilising and preparing of churches and communities for the TRC hearings. Similarly, SACC submitted proposals to the TRC regarding the Reparations and Rehabilitation Policy. In short, the SACC was visible and influential in the TRC process. Now that the TRC has finished its work, the SACC cannot sit back. The SACC must reactivate the TRC process by monitoring the implementation process of the TRC's recommendations.

The SACC has adopted a program as its initial response and a plan of action to the post-TRC process.

In the adopted program the main objective is *to implement, as far as possible, the recommendations of the TRC and to assist SACC member churches and the Provincial Councils to grapple with the issues of our country's past.*

The following programs have been adopted for the post-TRC process in 2003 – 2006:

1. *Reparations:*
 - Advocacy for restorative reparations as a matter of urgency.
 - Securing the TRC list of survivors who were recommended to receive urgent interim reparations.

- Network with other organisations such as Freedom Park Trust, regarding the implementation of other categories of reparations recommended by the TRC.
 - Network with other organisations to formulate strategy for victims of gross human rights violations who did not appear before the TRC.
2. *Pardons, Indemnities and Amnesties:*
- Monitor government initiatives on presidential pardons.
 - Lobby government to delay general amnesty and indemnity.
 - Set up a study group to explore other ways of achieving lasting reconciliation.
3. *Healing of Memories:*
- Interact with local communities with a view to allowing them to articulate their ways of healing.
 - Workshops on healing of memories to be held in all the regions.
 - Establish support groups especially in the townships and rural areas.
4. *Liturgies and other rites of reconciliation:*
- Develop models of reconciliation and rites suitable for regional contexts.
 - Advocate for Constitutional entrenchment of national reconciliation.
 - Intensify the use of 16 December as a day of national interfaith services and events of reconciliation.
5. *Inter-Religious Dialogue:*
- Promote inter-religious understanding through joint programs of actions with all faith communities.

The work plan consisted of short term and long term plans to be executed. When one examines this it becomes very clear that the SACC has done a lot of work during the past few years.

1. Short term:

- Mobilise resources, e.g. funding proposals.
- Identify at least 3 Provincial Councils to roll out the program.

- Set up regional and congregational TRC information and implementation desks.
 - Collate the TRC recommendations in Vol. 5 and the Codicil.
 - Interact with national government departments regarding recommended victims' list.
 - Advocate for activation of reparations.
- 2. Long term:**
- Interact with victim support groups and Freedom Park Trust for implementation of all categories of reparations.
 - Intensify healing-of-memories workshops and setting up of support groups.
 - Set up study groups to explore ways for securing lasting reconciliation.
 - Hold national and regional interfaith prayer services and events for reconciliation.
 - Lobby government regarding the idea of general amnesty and indemnity.
 - Monitor the implementation of the TRC recommendations.

(Document Source: *SACC strategy and plan of action in response to the final TRC report*)

Of the Afrikaans Churches it is only the DRC and the AFM that are members of the SACC and, therefore, whatever their programs for the future hold, as members of the SACC, they also have some guidelines as to what to do and how to go about it with regard to reconciliation.

5.7 ATTEMPTS IN THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

Much has been expected from the DRC after the Synod of 1990, the Rustenburg Consultation and the synods of 1994 and even 2004. There is still an atmosphere of anticipation when the DRC speaks or does something. During the church's submission at

the TRC, Rev. Freek Swanepoel said that the church will give attention to reconciliation in the country and, since then, good things have happened. In this section we will examine some of the groundwork that has been done, via synod resolutions and how it was practically applied.

Reconciliation is a fragile ‘commodity’. It is something that does not come on its own. The question that needs to be answered when looking at the attempts of the DRC, is: “What role can the DRC play to accelerate the reconciliation process?” Prof. Piet Meiring suggests that there are five challenges for the DRC specifically to help this process.

These challenges have been derived from those posed by the TRC:

1. The concept *reconciliation* must be understood clearly: This was one of the problems in the work of the TRC, that the concept was a bit vague. What is the type of reconciliation that we are looking for? The lawyers and politicians had their idea and the baruti had had their idea. And that led to a certain amount of stress amongst commissioners in the TRC. The Biblical view, which Tutu followed, was the one found in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 which shows that true reconciliation is only possible when people are reconciled to God, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. If we do not really know what we mean when we use the word *reconciliation*, how would we be able to help people? Can the DRC help with this?

As regards this, the DRC is in a difficult position, because of the diverse meanings found within the DRC. Over the last couple of years a significant movement has taken place and different views have found a nesting place under the roof of the DRC. From a staunch Reformed Church more moderate and even charismatic voices were heard. Responses differ from congregation to congregation, to such an extent that one sometimes wonder if you are still in a DRC congregation? Then there are also the inroads that are being made from the so-called *Jeus-seminar*, in South Africa known as the New Reformation (Nuwe Hervorming). Therefore one would also have different ideas about the meaning of *reconciliation*.

2. A “Theology of reconciliation” must be developed: This was one of the forthright challenges that came from the TRC to the faith communities. This is not an easy instruction because it is possible to become so entangled in it as the DRC did during the Apartheid years, with its biblical sanction of Apartheid. Attempts have been made, but the process must be continued. From all quarters the DRC is expected to take a leader’s role in this because of its strong Reformed tradition.
3. A search for “truth” is ongoing: The TRC tried to construct as clear a picture of our past as they could. They tried to resolve the problem of “what is the truth?” But this process is not over yet and the DRC and other churches in the country are challenged by it. Only a handful of people could testify before the TRC. There are still millions of people from all racial groups who are living with pain in their hearts. Would it be possible for the church to carry on with this process, by having mini-truth commissions where members and other people could come to for help? (See Chapter 6 for models)
4. Justice and reconciliation are two sides of the same coin: Reconciliation and justice goes hand in hand. Reconciliation is not cheap and you can’t talk about reconciliation and negate the responsibility that people have towards one another. You cannot talk about reconciliation and neglect poverty, reparation and the land issue. Does the DRC see its way open to get involved in these issues?
5. Church members must be accompanied on the road to confession, forgiveness and reconciliation: The church must make it very clear to its members that true reconciliation is not possible if people are not willing to openly confess wrongs and ask for forgiveness. Will it be possible for the DRC to accompany its members along this road? Can the church help the victims to forgive? Amongst the members of the DRC there are men and women who went through terrible experiences and who must learn to accept and to forgive. There are organisations that can help the church with this. (See Chapter 6) But churches must

also help their members to celebrate acts of reconciliation by having special celebration services, etc.

6. A need for strong leadership: All over the world there is a cry for strong leadership – especially in the church. The church needs leaders who will be able to help people to cross bridges in the different communities. Church members will have to realise that, in the years ahead of us, there can be no such thing as cheap grace and how indispensable costly grace is. Can the church cultivate and groom such leaders? We have to look at the youth of the church, but the question is: Where are the youth, especially the youth of the DRC? (Meiring, 2003: 117-121).

When one looks at these challenges for the DRC as well as for other Afrikaans Churches (and their brothers and sisters in other language groups), there is only one way to go: down on our knees. Presently (2006) there is so much turmoil in the country, because of the high crime rate, land claims, murders of farmers, fraud, the uneasiness in the Afrikaans Churches regarding theological issues, etc. that it seems as if Afrikaners especially, are not very interested in any kind of reconciliation.

The DRC, however, has taken the proposals of the TRC to heart and there are truly wonderful things happening in the church and through the church. In the next few paragraphs examples of these will be highlighted.

5.7.1 Statement of Commitment

The DRC responded with a whole-hearted commitment to the proposals of the TRC. At the meeting of the General Synod in 2002, a *Statement of Commitment* was adopted to guide the vast amount of serious planning towards the future of the DRC. This Statement will also guide the Church in its response to the TRC.

Statement

During the meeting of the General Synod we, the delegates, experienced a growing conviction of the love of Christ and therefore, also of the vocation and position of the Dutch Reformed Church in Southern Africa. Therefore:

(a) we commit ourselves anew to the Lord who brought our Church here 350 years ago. We thank Him for the privilege that we can still be part of his church. We are convinced that only the gospel of Christ can lead us upon the path of salvation. Therefore we, as church, wish to proclaim the Word of the Lord in all circumstances and witness everywhere to the hope which lives in us.

(b) we commit ourselves anew to our continent, and in particular to Southern Africa. We are distressed by the tragic stories of the most terrible forms of violence, the tremendous extent of poverty and famine, the consequences of the Aids pandemic, the lack of respect for people, animals and the environment and that we, too, are implicated. General Synod extends its sympathy to the many victims. We also want to make a difference. Therefore we commit ourselves to work together with others to find solutions for our society. As a Church we make ourselves available to be involved at every level where we can be of help. We assure the government of our intercession and our commitment to service to the community.

(c) we commit ourselves to greater unity with other churches. We wish to re-unite with our Church Family, which, we believe, is in accordance with the will of God. We also wish to affirm and expand our ecumenical relations and along with other Christians join hands to build up our countries and relieve painful circumstances.

(d) we appeal to our congregations to be involved in the healing of our countries. We thank the Lord for the commitment of members and for the many positive and widespread actions we hear about. Let us show the world once again that by being “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” our prayer is that the Kingdom of God may come. We have a Lord. We are here. We are his Church. To God be all the glory (Acta Synodi 2002: 584; Acta Synodi 2004: 426).

In an interview with Dr Kobus Gerber, General Secretary of the DRC, (See Addendum 9) the question was asked how the DRC sees its role in reconciliation in the future. His views can be summarised in the next few statements.

Because of the DRC’s involvement in the ecumenical bodies, The South African Council of Churches (SACC) and The Evangelical Alliance of Southern Africa (TEASA), it is involved in what is happening on a larger scale.

With respect to reconciliation it is important to remember that it is not something hanging in the air. The focus will have to be on local levels/communities and guiding people to journey with one another in a process. It has different aspects to it. The one important issue is *Reparation*.

There must be one or other form of reparation. It includes much more than material issues. If churches are going to focus only on money, it will be unjust towards our country. The country must be repaired! Together with all the role players, who had been present at SACLA, the issues to address are HIV/Aids, poverty, crime and violence, morality, a deeply rooted atmosphere of human rights, etc.

The whole issue of land reform is also included in reparation. In an African and post-Colonial context there can never be discussions about reconciliation aloof from the land debate, because when you talk about land in an African context, it is something different than in a colonial context. Therefore it will be good to think and move towards a Reparation Fund. There are certain things that fall under the jurisdiction of government, but for its own good the ecumenical church must help manage it. Some business people attached to the DRC have indicated that they will contribute, with the provision that the churches manage it. As part of reparation, the church must make available its skills, sources/buildings and human potential to make a difference in local communities.

Another important aspect to think about in this whole issue of reconciliation is *A National Program of Action*: The DRC, as part of this country and nation, wants to be involved in the bringing about of a program that deals with racism, sexism, discrimination, intolerance, etc. In the schools some of these are already included in the curricula, but the church will have to implement it in its catechism curriculum and its preaching. Such a National Program of Action must include a theological angle from which discussions can follow that will make sense to our children and youth. In the 2002 Statement, the DRC declared that it wants to be involved with this country and its people.

Gerber is of the opinion that the DRC must define what is understood by the word reconciliation. A few years ago the DRC had great action around the Year of Hope. This was a program where good things happened, but one does not really accomplish much

through programs. It must become part of people's lives. It must become the blood in their veins.

Two things of importance have happened since 2000 in the DRC. First was the Statement of Commitment and second was the clarification of seven priorities the church wants to focus upon. This changed the agenda for the DRC.

Another thing that is necessary to think about regarding the recommendations of the TRC, is *Healing of memories*: We must listen to one another's pain. At the Synod of the URCSA an important decision had been taken with regards to this. They asked that in the Family of churches such a process must be initiated. This can be a facilitated reconciliation exercise. Part of the problem the churches face is that for the government the initiative was taken through the TRC, but the churches, amongst one another, haven't passed through this exercise. For example, there are things that had been done by the DRC against the Roman Catholic Church and by them against the DRC, which must be discussed. Members of the DRC still experience the SACC as an enemy. This type of "story-telling" must become part of the reconciliation process. The pain in peoples' lives must become words.

Researcher: Do you have hope for the future? That reconciliation will take place in our country?

Kobus Gerber: Yes, very much. There are thousands of signs. If you examine what is happening at the moment in the DRC, where small congregations are working in their communities – people go to squatter camps to help with, amongst other things, bed-wash Aids patients. We don't know about all these cases, but what is happening is unbelievable. We are working on a database of all these things.

There is a bigger thing happening in the country. Churches of reformed descent have started to talk to each other about uniting. The Conventus for Reformed Churches became a reality with approximately 14 churches being involved in. The question is asked: should we not walk this road together? I do not think we must become despondent when a first process doesn't produce the results.

Dr Gerber went on to mention the "close list" policy of the TRC and that it is difficult to understand the policy surrounding it. The researcher is quoting the specific points from the TRC Report to clarify Gerber's use of the term.

36. The commission, anxious not to impose a huge burden on the government, adopted a 'closed list' policy. Effectively this limited the payment of reparation only to those victims who made statements to the Commission before 15 December 1997. In the period between December 1997 and January 2002, victims' groups confirmed with the Commission that they had collected more than 8000 statements from victims who, for a variety of reasons, were unable to access the Commission. The consequence of ignoring this group of people has potentially dangerous implications for South Africa, as communities may become divided if some receive reparation that is not accessible to others, who have had similar experiences.

37. The Commission is of view that the 'closed list' policy should be reviewed by government, in order to ensure justice and equity. It needs to be noted that, in many other countries, which have gone through similar processes, victims have been able to access reparation many years after the truth commission process has been completed (TRC Recommendations: TRC V 6, Sec 5, Chapter 7: 732).

What Dr Gerber said is a mouthful. To work out all the details and to assist ministers and congregations with this will demand a lot of wisdom. But the point is made that the DRC wants to be involved in the country's problems and especially with reconciliation amongst the different groups. But to do this will ask the co-operation of every member of this church. There can be no spectators. And the time to start is – yesterday!

5.7.2 Year of Hope

At the meeting of the General Synod in October 1998, the following decisions were taken:

1. The General Synod accepts its immense responsibility to give, together with other churches in the country, attention to the following important issues:
 - the facilitation of reconciliation
 - the fight against poverty, as well as,
 - the decline of moral values in the country.
2. The General Synod appoints an *ad hoc-commission* to provide the General Synodical Commission (GSC), as soon as possible, with concrete proposals in this regard.

3. The GSC is empowered to act on the proposals of the *ad hoc* commission if it is acceptable to the GSC.
4. It is important to work closely with other members of the DRC family in this regard (Agenda General Synod, 1998:402; Acta Synodi, 2002:332).

The *ad hoc* commission was elected, the Commission for Reconciliation, Poverty and Moral restoration (RPM-Commission), to work out some practical proposals for addressing these issues. *A Year of Hope* was introduced by the DRC in 2001. During that year attention had been given to the three issues as were decided on by the synod. The issues of poverty and moral values were discussed in congregations during the first two terms and reconciliation during the last term.

To assist pastors and church leaders to facilitate these themes, the commission published two booklets to be used in the congregations: *Jesus Christus bring Hoop (Jesus Christ brings Hope)* – an anthology of 13 sermons to be preached during the Year of Hope; *Op Pad na Versoening (On the Road to Reconciliation)* – guidelines for Bible Studies on reconciliation by the congregation. These Bible Studies, written by Dr Fanie du Toit could also be seen as a “theology of reconciliation” (Meiring, 2003:118). In the introductory chapter of *Pad na Versoening*, Prof. Piet Meiring, chairman of the RPM-Commission, wrote the following on the Ministry of Reconciliation:

Reconciliation in our country is a very complex issue, but it must be done. The Lord gave us the ministry of reconciliation. This book makes it clear that we must get involved in all facets of our community life. To name a few:

1. *Political tension* in the country is not making it easier for people to be reconciled with one another. There are too many unresolved issues.
2. *Economical problems* are like mountains. For many years promises have been made, but the gulf between rich and poor is just expanding.
3. *Cultural differences* are a gift from God, but some are using it for their own purposes.
4. *Racism* is still alive. To get it off our law books was one thing, but to get it off our hearts is quite another.
5. *Family stress* is something that needs a lot of attention. Family violence, family murders, etc. are just escalating.
6. *Crime and corruption* levels are rising. This makes it difficult to bring about a change of attitude in people’s lives.
7. Amongst the *churches* there is disunity, stereotyping, unwillingness of believers to reach out to others, etc.

8. Differences amongst *faith communities*. South Africa is a country of many religions, and we have to learn to respect one another.

To be agents for reconciliation amongst all these issues, ask of each one of us commitment, conviction and sacrifice. '*Reconciliation is not for the faint-hearted.*'

The big question that had to be answered in the Year of Hope and the years to follow was: does it make a difference that there are churches in South Africa?

For many members of the DRC the *Year of Hope* was a positive and inspiring experience in which the church found a new role. Church media and commissions worked together with enthusiasm. There was expectancy that the *Year of Hope* would become a season of hope in which the DRC and other churches would continue working on poverty, moral issues and reconciliation.

Three years later in 2004 the question was still: does it make a difference that there are churches in South Africa? Often it seems as if the *Year of Hope* or as people would want to call it *The Season of Hope*, has deteriorated into a *Season of Despair*. The gap between the rich and poor in the country is only widening; it seems as if morality is going down the drain and the general feeling amongst the ordinary people is that there is no real hope for reconciliation, because of the type of activism from all quarters, that is beginning to raise its ugly head.

But in spite of all these negative voices and acts that are running rampant in the streets of our communities, there is still hope, because God Almighty is still on the throne and He is still asking, as in the beginning: "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9)

5.7.3 Season of Listening

During 2006 the DRC started with a Season of Listening and congregations have been asked to get involved in this program of listening with a renewed, open mind to God. The DRC wants to live before God as a listening church, according to Zechariah 8:23. To accomplish this, it is necessary to create a place where members can listen and live

according to the Will of God. The vision is that people will (a) *find their joy in the Word of God (Psalm 1:2-3)* (b) *listen in love to one another (Colossians 3:12-16)* (c) *listen with compassion to the world (Philippians 1:9-10)* and (d) *live purposefully and with understanding in a changing world (Luke 4:18-19)*. These will be underscored by four important values: *a teachable attitude, trust, compassion and openness* (<http://www.gemeentes.co.za>).

Many congregations throughout the church have decided to become involved in this venture and it is heard, from all over, that members are being blessed by this.

Researcher's prayer is that this will not just be for a time and then it is gone, as with so many "Years of ..." in the past, but that it will have a lasting impact on the lives of people. This again will depend on the attitude and motivation of the leadership in the congregations.

5.7.4 The process of Church Unity

This process has gathered momentum during the time of writing this thesis, and will be discussed in later paragraphs.

5.7.5 Examples of congregations involved in the process of reconciliation

5.7.5.1 DRC Lynnwood, Pretoria

The Lynnwood congregation of the DRC has a long history of being active and co-operating with reconciliation in our country. Already in the nineteen-seventies the first minister of the congregation, Dr Murray Janson, pleaded that the DRC must open its doors for black people to hold their church service and for that he had to suffer from the church's hierarchy. President Mandela was invited to attend a worship service in the congregation in 1995 and since then the congregation has been active with numerous outreach- and reconciliation projects.

During a church board meeting in November 1997, it was decided to invite Archbishop Desmond Tutu to lead a worship service in this posh white Dutch Reformed Church in

Lynnwood. This was the parish church of some of the members of the former government. Of this occasion Tutu said:

I was feeling tense and apprehensive as I prepared to go to Pretoria because many in the white community, especially Afrikaners, had regarded me as an ogre, barely Christian and they wondered whether I was not now presiding over a witch-hunt against Afrikaners. I received a very warm welcome, however, in a church that was quite full. The music was superb. A group of children processed in with symbolic candles. My text was Romans 5:8: “Whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”. I preached my only sermon – that God loves us freely, as an act of grace, that we do not have to impress God in order for God to love us as a reward.

Then I said that Afrikaners imagined that they had only two options in South Africa’s political, social and community life – either to be top dog, domineering, or to be underdog, subservient, the doormat for others. I said there was an exciting *third option, that of embracing the new dispensation enthusiastically and using their enormous resources in money, skills and experience to help make the new ordering of society succeed for everyone’s sake...* (Tutu, 1999: 185) (Researcher’s Italics)

After the sermon Ockie Raubenheimer addressed the congregation on the questions they, as ministers of the congregation, had in their hearts after hearing all the revelations of the TRC, etc. “We asked one another: ‘Where have we failed as ministers of the gospel?’” He then turned to Archbishop Tutu – and unburdened his heart: “I have to say to you: we are truly sorry ... we have asked the Lord to forgive us!”

With tears in their eyes, the minister and the archbishop, the one white the other black, held one another. The man who, for years, had defended Apartheid and the man, who had spent his life fighting it, comforted each other (Meiring, 1999:364).

In an interview with *Die Kerkbode*, 3 July 1998, the question was asked of Rev. Raubenheimer: “*How do you see the role the DRC ought to play to bring about reconciliation between our different ethnic groups?*”

Raubenheimer answered as follows:

... The Lord who had given the commission to the DRC also gave us the equipment and the opportunity. (The day)... when we succeed in uniting all the churches of the DRC family, one third of the Christians in South Africa will be members of this (new) church. It will not only be the biggest church in South Africa, but also a powerful instrument in the Lord’s hand. In this there is a great challenge and responsibility for each one of us. At the same

time we must reach out to other Christians in our country, who, like us, also have the need to work for justice and peace in their lives. We must not wait for one another, but start immediately with ourselves. If we start today, we will be a few meters further on the road tomorrow (Die Kerkbode, 3July 1998:6).

To return to Sunday 14 June 1998: Through the working of the Holy Spirit the Lord showed in a wonderful way that reconciliation is possible. To many people it was again a sign of HOPE! But there were also the Afrikaners and other white people who saw this as the entrance of the anti-Christ into the bastion of Afrikanerdom – the church.

5.7.5.2 DRC Lynnwoodrif, Pretoria

Meanwhile, a few street blocks away a sister church, Lynnwoodrif, has interesting activities going on as result of the initiative of a few women congregants.

In an interview with Mrs Marinda van Schalkwyk, wife of the minister of the DRC Congregation Lynwoodrif in Pretoria, she told about the attempts that they made to work reconciliation between their congregation and a congregation of the URCSA in Mamelodi, a nearby township.

Mrs van Schalkwyk and some other congregants saw it as a commission from God to reach out to others, because they realised how important relationships are in order to reach church unity.

It all started by inviting the ward of the URCSA congregation Pagameng in Mamelodi, Pretoria, Stansa Bopapi, for a multi-cultural meal at the church's restaurant. Tables were filled with mixed groups who could share with one another about things in the past that caused pain, but also positive things that they see in one another. The reports on this event were all good.

This was repeated the next year and it was again a success. Then a project was offered to them to facilitate a South African Women and Dialogue (SAWD) event. Mrs Mbeki is the patroness of the initiative. The AIDS ministry in the congregation was responsible for this initiative. The SAWD is an interfaith venture. To host such an event was a very

stressful experience, especially since they couldn't get even 50 white women together, so they had to invite Stansa Bopapi and women from Pagameng. In the end it was a moving experience to share stories and tears together.

Mrs van Schalkwyk was very enthusiastic as she related the following:

Some time later they came back and asked if we cannot organise a SAWD program for the whole country – an event of between 800 and 900 women. We gave a quotation but the University of Pretoria was cheaper and they have the hostels, etc. The chair of our AIDS ministry and I were asked to be speakers at this meeting. I must tell you, that we were approximately 11 white women amongst the ± 900 black women. I experienced no class prejudice amongst the women – from Mrs. Mbeki (wife of President Mbeki), the newly elected Vice-President and other women Ministers of Cabinet. I delivered my speech in Afrikaans, because there were translating services. For me, it was a wonderful and touching experience to feel the warmth and goodwill amongst all these women. (Some of these women were from the rural areas with their blankets around them.)

Out of this small initiative from a group in a congregation grew a new awareness of how wonderful the Psalmist summarised it in Psalm 133:1 “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! The way is paved for this congregation to walk on this thorny road of reconciliation. Thorny? Yes, because not all congregants (Afrikaners) are at ease with this initiative.

Mrs van Schalkwyk continued:

Something else that came our way that excites me so is to get involved in schools in Eersterus. Gangsters are a big problem in the schools. So one of our missionaries can present the Cross Roads program and we will start early next year with this in one of the schools in Eersterus. We also helped with a building team to repair one of the classrooms at a school. We have talked too much, now we must start doing things.

Q: As I'm listening to you, I gather that you have a lot of hope for the future?

R: Absolutely, although it is a slow process. I'm concerned about our own people. They tell me that some pupils in our high schools are really ultra right-wing orientated. We must understand that, because they are the children who don't get jobs. (Researcher's Italics)

In an earlier paragraph concern was mentioned for this new wave of white activism (racism?). But in spite of this, a passion in the heart of a few believers to make a difference in their community, has led to this initiative. It is possible to start a ministry of reconciliation in the congregation. Don't wait for the other to start. (See Addendum 5 for interview)

5.7.5.3 *N G Kerk Skuilkrans*

This congregation is a typical suburban congregation with between 3500 and 4000 members. It is on the border between the affluent Pretoria and the townships of Mamelodi and Nellmapius. This is not co-incidental.

This congregation believes that reconciliation is of the utmost importance and that it must be part of the official ministries. One thing that stands out is that they are not busy with large-scale reconciliation operations, but they try rather to put a few small-scale events on the table. For them it is about a lifestyle of reconciliation.

What are they doing? Arno Meiring, one of the ministers said the following:

- *We share our facilities:* We have decided to share our facilities with the broader community. We not only have projects driven by members, but we also accommodate other organisations and church groups. Examples are: The synod of the URCSA Northern-Transvaal was housed here; the congress of the SACC, about dialogue and reconciliation, was held here; different Welfare organisations are using our auditoriums and classrooms for their projects; etc.
- *We take great pains in our relationship with the URCSA:* It is of the utmost importance for us to have good relations with neighbouring congregations of the URCSA. We are going the extra mile to listen to them and to start projects with them. We have formal forums (and our presbytery meetings) where we can talk to one another. We have to spend time on these meetings. To build relationships is a costly thing as one regards the time spent.
- *We organise purposefully:* From time to time we tried purposefully to organise reconciliation meetings at the church. During our Pentecost meetings we have speakers of different church traditions. We invite theological students of the URCSA to do some practical work together with our ministers. We try to enlarge our members' territory.

- *We haven't arrived yet:* Everything is not always going smoothly. It is a struggle to get our English worship services going; people in the vicinity of the church building are not always very happy. We believe, however, that when we do things with a reconciliatory style, we will arrive at our destination (Meiring, 2005:159).

5.7.5.4 Helderberg Development Centre (Helderberg Ontwikkeling-sentrum)

“You made a human being of my wife. Never in her life could she find a job. You have trained her and placed her in a permanent job. She has changed. The ‘human being’ in her has appeared for the first time in many years”.

This is the testimony of the husband of one of the students of the Helderberg Development Centre. This Centre came into being as a project of the DRC Helderberg in Somerset-West, in February 2002, as an Article 21-company, with the vision to help unemployed people of the Helderberg-basin to master basic skills to provide an income for themselves and their families. An employment office forms part of the activities and enhances the effectiveness of this Centre. This also determines how many students can be accommodated. All this was made possible by a group of congregants of the DRC Helderberg in Somerset-West who made available their skills and time.

By the end of 2004 there were already 128 unemployed women being trained in home management. Of these women 80% were successfully employed. The Centre's Management decided to continue focusing on the relieving of poverty and to help the unemployed in the community.

There is a long waiting list of people who want to be trained, but because of limited space it is not possible to expand at the moment. The Centre, at this stage already, functions five days per week. Everything is not moonlight and roses but in dependence on God they discovered that God can be trusted and that He provides when people do not think they can continue.

The motto of the Centre is *Kukhanya* – ‘place of light’. The students themselves have given the Centre this name because they saw the light there (Möller, 2005: 81).

There are other congregations in the DRC in which beautiful things are happening – congregations such as Moreletta Park, Stellenberg, Stellenbosch, Wynberg, etc.

But what about other Afrikaans Churches? The opportunities for stretching out a hand of friendship, peace and reconciliation are plentiful. The flame of hope is starting to flicker. Here and there are signs of Afrikaans congregations having an English service in their building especially for the sake of black people. This is happening in the RCSA and is found more in the cities, such as Pretoria, but one can predict that this is the beginning of a tidal wave amongst the Afrikaans Churches. Let's hope that expectations will not be disappointed. The researcher reckons that we cannot continue keeping people of colour out of the Kingdom of God (or is it our kingdom?).

Since 1996 the AFM became one united church and all over the country there are signs that multi-cultural worship services are being held and where this is not the case, there is movement, amongst members, to reach out to different cultural groups. This is also happening in the smaller country towns. In such churches there is no fear of being "overwhelmed by others".

These are the testimonies of only a few of the literally hundreds of congregations in the DRC, and other Afrikaans Churches, where the Holy Spirit is showing people what He means by reconciliation. There is a new generation of pastors, ministers and other church leaders who are really working hard to set the records straight and who are trying to give hands and feet to the original proposals of the TRC. In many smaller towns there is no other way for the Christians than to worship together and one finds that DRC, URCSA and other Afrikaans groups are also working together. There must be jubilation in heaven!

5.8 CHURCH UNITY!?

5.8.1 DRC Family of Churches

Since the early 1980s the movement towards church unity amongst the Dutch Reformed family of churches came into being. Negotiations went well at first and then broke down, but there was always the will to carry on because all the members of the family saw it as the will of God that the church must re-unite. At that stage the family consisted of the

Dutch Reformed Church (White), the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (Coloured), the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (Black) and the Reformed Church in Africa (Indian).

What follows is a summary of the road that has been travelled, since 1994, as regards church unity in the family of Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa:

- In April 1994 the DRMC and the DRCA united to form the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA). However, not all the congregations of the DRCA went along with this unification (See Ch 1). This would later prove to be a big stumbling block for the realisation of church unity.
- In August 1994 the executive committees of the DRC and the URCSA reaffirmed their commitment to visible church unity as soon as possible and that a suitable structure for this unity must be found.
- In October 1994, the General Synod of the DRC noted with pleasure the recent developments in the unity discussions and expressed its earnest desire to work together with the other members of the family in the establishing of one denomination on the basis of an approved Church Order.

At a meeting of the South African Alliance of Reformed Churches during March 1992, the delegates of the DRC, Prof. Pieter Potgieter, Prof. Johan Heyns, Prof. Piet Meiring and Dr Frits Gaum gave the meeting this assurance: “*We want to assure this consultation that the DRC is committed to the unity of the DRC family. We agree that this is the acid test, whether the DRC has finally distanced itself from the racism of Apartheid and we are willing to be part of this process*”. At the General Synod meeting of October 1994, this statement was endorsed by Synod as a decision (Acta Synodi 1994: 443; Gaum, 2004: 37, 38).

- In November 1994 delegates of the DRC, URCSA and the RCA met for the first time and they agreed to the forming of a Joint Committee (JC) in which the three churches would co-operate in the writing of a draft Church Order for the one denomination of the DRC churches.

- On 7 March 1995 the first meeting of the JC was held. Sub-commissions would start working on different issues and report back to the JC.
- Different sub-commissions started working on issues like the name, basis and extent of the new denomination, etc.
- In October 1996 the General Synodical Commission (GSC) of the URCSA took a decision that would bring the negotiations to a standstill. It concerned the Confession of Belhar. The decision was: "... it is therefore necessary to once again confirm that the *Confession of Belhar is non-negotiable as a confessional standard for the united church.*"
- The DRC General Synod of 1998 confirmed the results of the comments received on the Confession of Belhar, but also reconfirmed its commitment to bring about one denomination for the family of Dutch Reformed Churches.
- In November 1998 an Appeal Court case between the URCSA and the DRCA was heard. As a result of all the negativity surrounding the whole issue, the relationship between the DRCA and the URCSA became severely strained and this resulted in the URCSA not being prepared to allow the DRCA to join the Joint Committee.
- By the end of 1998 the members of the family had come a long way on the road to church unity, but on the other hand all was not well. The ongoing discussion between the DRC, the RCA and the URCSA had practically come to a standstill and there was great tension between the URCSA and the DRCA as a result of the ruling of the Appeal Court Case.
- The years between 1998 and 2002 were dominated by the question whether the DRCA can be allowed as a member of the Joint Committee and so, as a member of the family, become part of the unity process.
- During 2002 and 2003 negotiations went on between the churches but in the end they are still not united.
- In spite of good progress since 1994, the road to church unity has not always been easy. On the contrary, quite often it was very frustrating. In spite of all the negative experiences, much has been achieved – at least as far as the DRC is concerned. A stage has been reached where, despite the fact that some problems

still exist, all the churches of the Reformed Family in South Africa are involved in, and are positively committed to, church unity (Coertzen, 2003:333f).

During an interview with Rev. Freek Swanepoel, who was Moderator of the DRC from 1994 to 1998, he made the following remarks on the unification process of DRC and URCSA:

Initially it went well with the moving towards church unification, but then something happened which brought the negotiations to a standstill. Actually we stood at the same point where we are at now, viz. Belhar and how the model for the new church must look. We agreed that congregations must exist, as is the case, that presbyteries must continue to exist geographically. Over the years there was no problem with geographically determined presbyteries, but now, since we started talking we must also look at language and other issues. It is *a pity that language became an issue, because that has stopped the wagon. The reconciliation process is, in a sense, steered by 'voices' of certain people in the church who used the outside press more than the church.* I am sure that at that time reconciliation was easier than now. There was a movement closer to us from other churches for which we were very thankful. In reconciliation you can move on your own up to a point, but then you need others around you. During those four years many things happened. We were not a working synod, but as synod we did a lot of things. (Researcher's Italics)

There are 'forces' at work amongst the different churches of the DRC family, which are trying their utmost to derail the unification process. Researcher is of meaning that if re-unification succeeds, it would be a devastating blow to the Satanic forces in the air who tried through all the ages to get rid of the church, as has been described in Revelation 12.

Dr James Buys, Moderator of the URCSA for the period 1994 – 1998 also shared his view on the unification process. He is of opinion that the whole process has received a new impetus after 1994, but that the Belhar Confession was one of the problems that got in the way. One of the other problems that has to be considered is that of the structure of the re-united church, especially when one talks about organic unity “with an overall general synod, united regional synods, presbyteries etc. One comes across opposition and this has to do with need for ministry, language problems as well as other minor things. It is interesting to see how the option for organic unity has had a negative impact on the broader idea of reconciliation”. He said that one of his greatest concerns is that the Lord

has commissioned the church to be a united church and that “it will be a miserable day when church unity and the way it must come into being will be a continuation in any form of race, language or any other form as we know it currently and in the form that dates from our history”.

Q: During the eighties there was much talk about church unity and from time to time it was said: ‘Now we are very close. Next year, we will be united’, and then something happened that brought everything to a kind of stand still. What was the problem that caused there to be hope one moment, and despair the next moment?

In his answer to this question, Rev. Buys said, inter alia, that he thinks there were forces at work in the country before 1986, which tried to prevent unification.

As an example take the then N G Sendingkerk (DRMC) and the Reformed Church in Africa (Indian) (RCA). They were on the brink of being united. The prevention of that uniting effort nearly led to the downfall of the RCA. It brought a schism in that church which resulted in the fact that for a time the synod of the RCA could not function. It took years to work reconciliation between the parties who were involved.

He said that another problem had to do with the fact that there are forces that want to make church unity impossible and want to re-group in race and language entities.

Race plays a role, there’s no doubt about that. There are different dimensions to it. The Afrikaner went (and is going) through a difficult situation. They lost political power, gave up rights they had in the Apartheid era, then the last haven they have, where there is still a character and identity and language, is the church. It literally causes an anxiety to consider giving this up. There are some who want to go further – the total re-unification of congregations. Wynberg, not because I’m here, is such an example of a congregation that tried to work with the history of the two congregations of 1881. Here we can say that two congregations have physically united (Addendum 12).

When one listens to these arguments, then one can come to the conclusion that the will to be re-united is there, but, as mentioned above, there are truly ‘forces’ at work to bring this wagon to a standstill from time to time.

At the General Synod of the DRC in 2004, Prof. Thias Kgatla of the URCSA was one of the speakers and the theme of his paper was: *Some obstacles towards church unification.*

In his address he thanked the DRC for its mission work in Africa and for the souls that were brought to the saving grace of Jesus Christ through the work of the church. But then he went on to say, inter alia:

However, when examining where the DRC is today in terms of Church unity in the Dutch Reformed family of Churches, it is as if we are talking about a completely different church. One feels like a traitor if one praises the DRC for what it has done. In fact, the critics of the church are quick to conclude that the church did all it did because it was driven by the ideology of Apartheid. ... Some of us, who appreciate the good work this church has done, find ourselves in a very precarious situation. How do you say this church spread the gospel with good intentions in the past and yet it is still not united with other members of the Dutch Reformed family of churches?

In the **1980s** this church was saying **Church unity is important and the unity should be more visible**. In the 2000's the church is still saying the same thing and yet there are no tangible signs that the church means what it says. Critics of this church have been made prophets of light because of non-mobility of the church towards church unity. Those who love the church and advocate its intentions are being discredited and ridiculed. because of the paradoxes in what the church preaches and does.

Kgatla said that the church has to show its credibility in the New South Africa, but there is a problem in that there are people in the Dutch Reformed family who don't want church unity. His conviction is that the church must not give heed to those voices but do the will of God. It is true that there are obstacles on the way, but it must be faced and addressed in due time. Prof. Kgatla proceeded to lift out some of the obstacles like historical issues, which led to mistrust, suspicion and prejudices amongst members of the churches. There are negative images and attitudes, stereotyping, name calling, etc. He then went on to say:

My purpose with this paper is to plead that the attitudes and behaviour of the past should not be allowed to be manifested or to stall the process. Mistrust is the second last step in a continuum of actions taken by those who are prejudiced. The first step is discrimination... The second step is isolation... The last step is dehumanisation and hatred. In our search for unity we must eliminate these stereotypes, for Christ did not call us for bitterness and hatred. ...

People that stereotype other people are either evil or insecure... There are also people who stereotype others just to make them feel bad or put them down. How much is in the Belhar Confession, which is not stereotypical? Stereotypes are unfortunately a standard impulse....

He then discussed some positive responses to prejudice and stereotypes. He said to combat these things you need to understand the nature of it. He made the statement that it takes courage to stand against injustice and to actively fight the prejudice and stereotypes. But we must stand firm and get out of our comfort zone for God's purpose of making Christians one. He then highlighted some strategies to work on to bring church unity.

As we strive for structural visible church unity between these churches, we should seriously encourage our members to practice the following:

- Encourage members to share any experiences they may have had with racism, gender or other discrimination as well as prejudices they might have against other groups. Joint projects where congregations are engaged in at local and grassroots level may facilitate this encounter.
- Encourage members to read the constitution of South Africa, Church Confessions and to relate their insights of these documents at their joint Bible Studies, etc.
- Encourage members to talk about the wealth of the country and how it is made. Discuss virtues such as hard work, management, envisioning, and public witness as well as how this could be used to uplift the local congregation.
- Encourage members to listen to and respond with openness and respect while acknowledging that genuine differences exist and to build on shared hopes and values.
- Encourage ministers to exchange pulpits and allow congregations to invite one another to their festivals, Holy Communion and bazaars. Consider one another as important and as 'comrades' in the service of God (Acta Synodi 2004:403).

The General Synod of 2004 said, inter alia, the following on the unification process:

The DRC reconfirm its serious and clear commitment to the re-unification of one Church with the other three churches of the Family, URCSA, DRCA and RCA. This commitment is based on the conviction that the Lord asks it of us – to his glory (John 17:23) and because of our mutual calling (Ephesians 4:4) and witness in Africa now. We believe that we, as family, belong to each other and that we need each other and together we can make a difference in our country.

The DRC regrets it that the unification process drags on. We are convinced that there are enough grounds for the process to start again.

The General Synod then highlighted some of the grounds, namely a shared history; the fact that all churches have already accepted the Formula of Unity; and the Confession of Belhar is in essence accepted. Good co-operation structures are in place in many congregations and presbyteries. Church schism must be avoided at all costs and, as the process develops, other issues will be dealt with (Acta Synodi 2004:311-313).

In *Die Kerkbode*, 9 July 2004, there was a report on the Conventus of Unity between the Synods of West and Southern Cape, East Cape of the DRC and the Western Cape Synod of the URCSA could discuss unification. Somebody made the following remark about the Conventus: *“The only words that can describe this Conventus, is that it is God’s doing. As the meeting progressed, mutual trust and trustworthiness grew. The meeting made a contribution to clarity and led to a mutual commitment between the role players. We will probably still make a lot of mistakes, but at this Conventus a good foundation was laid”*. It just shows that there is willingness from both sides for unification to take place. Maybe it will be sooner than we think.

In *Die Kerkbode*, 26 November 2004, Rev. James Buys elaborated on the decision of the General Synodical Commission (GSC) of the URCSA on church unity. He said that the agenda of any future discussions with the DRC would be steered by the Confession of Belhar. The GSC has rejected the decision of the DRC that Belhar can be an optional Confession of the church. He said that the DRC has to change its decision before there can be any further discussions. He said that it is alarming that the Moderamen of the DRC knew what the standpoint of the URCSA was regarding Belhar before the General Synod of 2004 had taken its decision.

In *Die Kerkbode*, 13 May 2005 it is reported that the DRC and URCSA have resumed their discussions on church unity. After frank discussions between leaders of the two churches, the URCSA will comment on it in writing. The leaders have agreed that there are certain areas where more momentum can be given to reaching unity such as co-operation amongst congregations.

Reconciliation is not cheap. It is costly. It is a process. It is a journey from point A to B and on this road are many obstacles as has been pointed out above. But ...God is still in control and He is the Author of Hope!

Up until June 2006, it seemed as if the DRC had failed its own acid test. But then Almighty God showed Himself as the God of Hope: At Esselenpark, near Pretoria, the Moderators of the DRC and the URCSA were having a meeting from 19-22 June 2006. They first gathered separately and then they came together. And as of one accord they decided that the problems, which kept them apart for so many years, have no further influence on the will to unite. In an emotional moment the Moderator of the DRC, Dr Coenie Burger confessed again the things on the DRC's part that caused problems. He received the forgiveness from the URCSA. The Vice-Moderator of the URCSA, Dr Allan Boesak confessed the things that he himself said that made unification nearly impossible. He received forgiveness. But the one thing that the URCSA had said was non-negotiable in the unification process for so many years, the acceptance of the Confession of Belhar by the DRC, was dropped by the URCSA!

On 16 August 2006 the Executive Committees of the four churches of the DRC family met in Bloemfontein to discuss church reunification and the way forward for the four churches. The discussions were open and frank regarding the road travelled together thus far as well as the way ahead. After the meeting, they issued the following statement:

In a spirit of Christian love the parties apologised to one another for the many wrongs they have committed towards one another in the past. These apologies were accepted unconditionally by all the parties.

The four Executive Committees committed themselves unanimously to covenant for the reunification of the Dutch Reformed Family. Reconciliation will be an essential part of the process of reunification between ourselves. We use the term "covenanting" because we want to bring ourselves and the reunification process under the authority of the Word of God and the will of Christ. We covenant together, not from our own will or under pressure from social and political processes, but because we believe that the Lord, who graciously committed Himself to us, requires this of us.

With regard to the issues on the table, we committed ourselves to be humble, patient with one another, and treasure the bond the Lord has

created in our family. Part of this process is that we call on local congregations and all other structures to continue to seek reconciliation, mutual fellowship, mutual support, and co-operation.

As a first step in the process, a meeting of our extended leaderships will be held on 6-8 November 2006. The General Synodical Committees of the four Churches as well as the Executive Committees of the different regional synods will meet. An Interim Committee was formed, consisting of the four moderators and the four secretaries of the Churches. The Interim Committee will do all the preparations for the historical meeting in November 2006.

The Executive Committees also decided to establish a Trust Fund for Reunification. A call will be made to all our structures and members, as well as our friends in Southern Africa and abroad to contribute to this fund to help us realise our dream.

We rejoice in the Lord! We give Him all the honour! Once again He surprised us with His grace and love for this family of Churches.

DRCA: Rev. M Lebone, Rev. J Ramolahlehi, Dr S Corrie and Dr A Hoffman

URCSA: Prof. T Kgatla, Dr A Boesak, Rev. P Makoko, Rev. C Goeman, Rev. D Maletle and Rev. P Moloi

RCA: Rev V Pillay, Rev. B Shunmugam and Rev. M Sukdaven

DRC: Dr C Burger, Prof. P Strauss, Dr N Niemandt, Rev. E Büchner, Dr K Gerber and Dr H Koornhof

Bloemfontein: 16 August 2006 (Addendum 20)

In the mean time another event had taken place. The Presbyteries of the URCSA and the DRC in Stellenbosch decided, after long discussions and negotiations, to unite. On Tuesday night 24 October 2006, the historical first meeting of the United Presbytery of Stellenbosch took place. In a statement the Presbytery declared, inter alia, that it is with thankfulness and amazement that they experience how the Lord has put them together. They said that in this way the vision came true, to accompany, motivate and support the different congregations in the practical living out of their calling to witness with a united voice.

The wheels of church reunification, which had started to turn during June 2006, were really pulling the wagon along. From 6 - 8 November 2006, 127 representatives of the

Reformed Church in Africa (RCA), The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), The Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) met at Achterberg near Krugersdorp to discuss the reunification of the family of DRC churches and how this can be realised. This, also, was a historical meeting because of the number of delegates to speak on reunification. In the end the usual declaration was given:

As a follow-up to a meeting of the four executives at Bloemfontein, on 16 August 2006, a broader representation of all four of these churches solemnly committed themselves to the reunification of the DRC family.

The meeting realised anew the importance of the individual identities, which include differences in language and practice, for these individual churches. The meeting is convinced that the richness expressed by this diversity should be nurtured in the re-united church and should be used constructively to the benefit of the church and the Southern African society.

The meeting identified core values for the re-unification process. It appointed ten task teams to work on these different aspects of reunification, in the light of these core values. A follow-up meeting was scheduled for March 2007.

The meeting is convinced that church reunification requires shared faith convictions, mutual trust and respect. Members at the levels of church council, presbytery and synod are encouraged to get to know one another better and to address common challenges together, since the key to a reunited church lies with local congregations and their acceptance of ownership of this challenge. The meeting gratefully acknowledges the many places where this is already done. The celebration of Pentecost next year presents an excellent opportunity to strengthen relationships.

The meeting acknowledged the specific requirements and procedures of the different churches that need to be complied with in this reunification process. The meeting is part of a process in which the different churches with their congregations should be partners. The meeting is convinced that the unification process is God's direction for the DRC family and that God himself will open the doors when people see no obvious way forward. The spirit of unity and enthusiasm at the meeting was encouraging and brought hope.

The meeting acknowledges the common calling of the family of DRC churches in Southern Africa and is bound to this commitment (Addendum 22).

During 2007 there will be more meetings, as the nitty-gritty of reunification will be thrashed out. There is no guarantee that it will be a smooth road. There are already voices speaking out, especially from congregations and individuals in the Afrikaans DRC, regarding legal assistance and court cases over church properties, etc.

Indeed a road that cannot be travelled without all participants, not standing, but on their knees to hear from the Lord: “...*but the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year*” (Deuteronomy 11:11, 12).

But it is also true that there are other Afrikaans congregations (from different denominations) who just carry on as if they are the only people in South Africa and as if God belongs to them. It is a pity. The researcher is a former teacher who is very interested in what is going on amongst our youth and it is heartbreaking to observe that many youngsters from conservative Afrikaans background are just following the ways of the old South Africa, because this is the example they see in their homes and hear from their pulpits.

Maybe it has something to do with what Dr Allan Boesak is calling “*the De La Rey phenomenon*” which was influenced by an Afrikaans song ‘De La Rey’ in which the singer is looking for a new leader, a true “Boereleier” like the late Gen. Koos de la Rey of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1901 (Boesak, 5 February 2007, Speech at Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch).

5.8.2 Unity within the circle of the Afrikaans ‘Sister Churches’

One of the sad stories in the reformed Church community in South Africa is the fact that amongst the Afrikaners there are four churches with the same Confessional basis and Church governing system. For many years the three Afrikaans Speaking Churches the

DRC, NHK and RCSA were known as the ‘Sister Churches’. Since 1987 a fourth Afrikaans speaking church, the APK, became a piece of the ‘puzzle’.

As mentioned in Chapter 2 an Inter Church Commission (ICC) came into being during March 1939 to which the three ‘sisters’ belong. Through the years the ICC had on its agenda church unification between the ‘sisters’, but there have always been problems. Each of the churches sends delegates to the work sessions of the ICC where discussions take place on a wide variety of themes, which are the concern of the churches. These work sessions convene every second year. For many years the question about church unification was a pressing one, but since the mutual decision to no longer make unification a pressing issue, the discussions are more open and relaxed over mutual contributions in the community. On different levels there exist official structures through which co-operation is formalised.

The APK received observer status in 2001.

During the late 1990’s all three “sisters” were taking decisions for a Conventus of Reformed Churches. The first meeting took place in 1999. (See page 90 and following regarding the Conventus of Reformed Churches.)

It seems that the Afrikaans Churches are at this stage at ease about the status quo, which is actually a sad case. But maybe ... one day when it’s too late!

Dr Fanie du Toit, Program Manager of The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) made the following remarks about reconciliation:

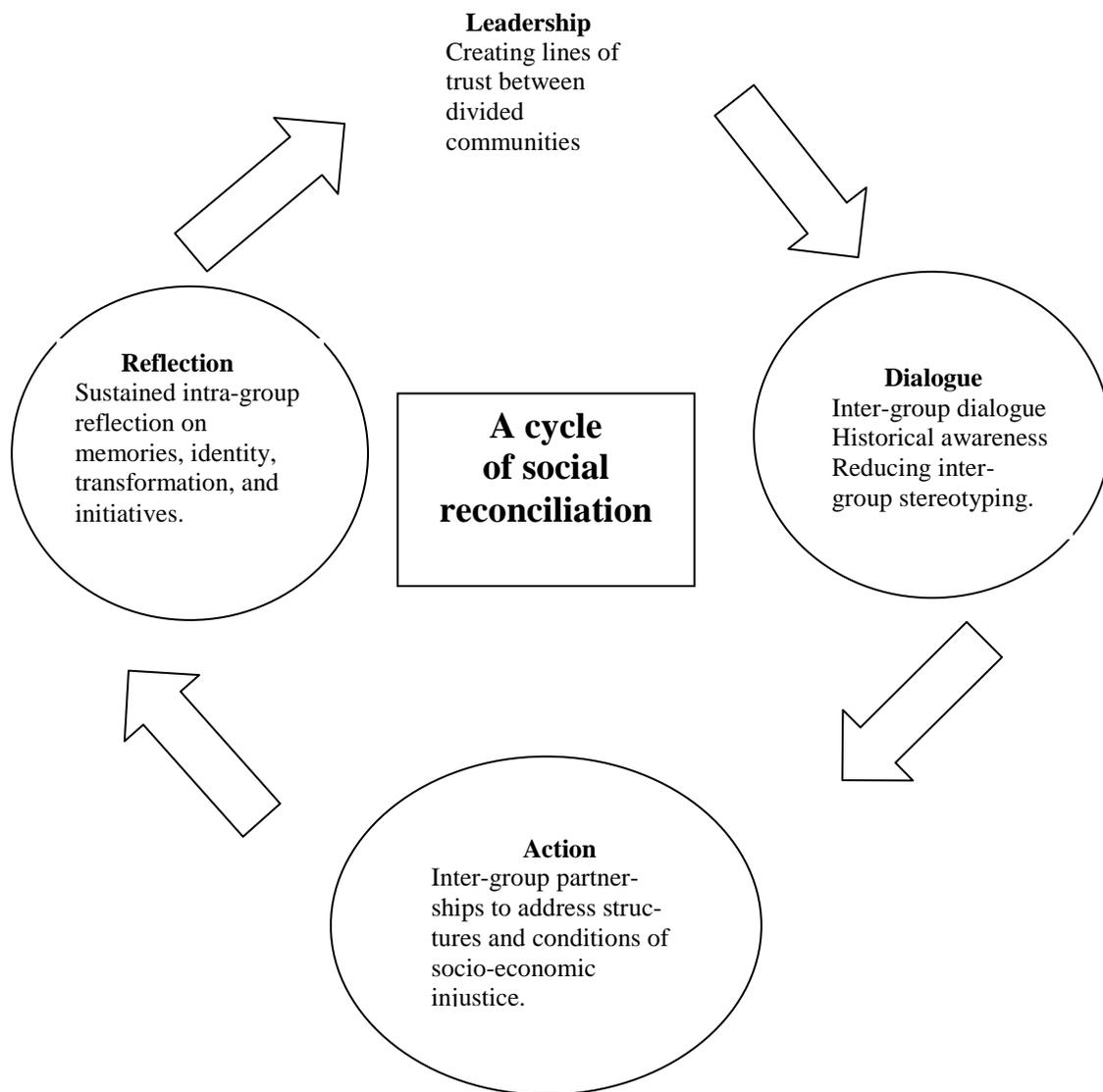
Reconciliation is only possible when the masks behind which people hide come down and people can see each others faces; when the pathos, the individuality and the dignity of others can’t be ignored any longer. It is when people look each other in the eye and realise: Here is a fellow human that is also looking at me. ...

Reconciliation is not a project that can be completed on a Saturday afternoon or by a church commission somewhere in a corner of the congregation. Because reconciliation becomes a way of life, it is a process that changes a congregation on every level. It causes opposition; any leader, who is willing to obey the Word of God on this level, will have opposition. The Christian message assents to the fact that reconciliation brings about

deep changes, but it helps us to understand that such changes are for our good.

The IJR monitors reconciliation projects all over South Africa. Many of these projects are driven by churches or churches are co-responsible for the project. During this time four themes have surfaced that are largely present as part of the process: *leadership*, *dialogue*, *action* and *reflection*. These four themes form a 'cycle of reconciliation'.

Leaders have to take initiative and create an awareness of the potential for reconciliation. *Dialogue* must start where shared values are identified and historical awareness and consensus building are promoted. *Action* must be taken as inter-group partnerships address structures and conditions of socio-economic injustice. *Reflection* is necessary to help understand the local dynamics and promoting community responsibility and working towards inter-community initiatives.



(Du Toit, 2005:154; 2003: 304)

Clarification of terminology: Inter-group – between different groups.

Intra-group – within a group.

5.9 CONCLUSION

How David Bosch would have loved it, to hear and see these things happening. When he stood in front of his audience in 1985 and said the words ‘In ordinary inter-human communication people are usually more aware of the sin of others than of their own’, he would maybe have put in the words “ in inter-church communication leaders are usually more aware of the sin in other churches than of their own”.

The TRC had done its work and thrown down the gauntlet of proposals before the faith communities. For the sake of this study, especially the Afrikaans Churches, it is heart warming to see that at least the DRC, through its General Synod and Regional Synods, had taken up the gauntlet and tried to give hands and feet to the proposals. Many onlookers would have said that it was too little too late, but the fact is something is happening through the work of the Afrikaans Churches.

When one measures the initiatives taken by congregations, it becomes clear that the theses Bosch put forth in 1985 were true and prophetically spoken. Every one that is involved in the process of reconciliation knows by now that it is not a cheap process – not financially, but in human resources, attitudes, the quest for repentance and forgiveness, etc. But the hope that it has given is unmeasurable. The words of 2 Corinthians 8:5 become true in the lives of many individuals in churches, and even congregations by and large: *“And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.” (NIV)*

When one thinks of the unification process in the Dutch Reformed family, it went through a few steps to come to the point where it is now. There had to be repentance, forgiveness spoken and received, cross bearing, listening to the Holy Spirit’s prompting, etc. The Executive Committees have committed themselves now to work with new vigour for unification as soon as possible. They have to be aware of the pitfalls along the way. Reconciliation takes place when two opposing forces clash and somebody gets crushed in between. The leaders of the different churches involved must always

remember that reconciliation is not a human possibility, but a divine gift. This is also true when the ‘sister churches’ are in discussions with one another and the churches involved in the Conventus for Reformed Churches.

But it is a pity that what is said cannot be said about all the Afrikaans Churches and especially about many congregations of these churches in the country. One can only keep on praying that everybody will be able to see the light, before the darkness comes and nobody can work any more.