

# Can a leopard change its spots? Long walk to diversity<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The goal of this article is to reflect on transformation and diversity in South Africa and specifically at University of Stellenbosch (US) and in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). It does so from a theological point of view in an attempt to understand what enhanced the process of diversification. The article highlights racial reconciliation. The methodology is basically descriptive with a few theoretical points made towards the end of the article that help to explain what happened in this particular case study.

## 1. THE CHANGING SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

### 1.1 A country in transition

It is probably not necessary to describe in detail the 1994 transition to democracy in South Africa. One needs simply mention Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk to recall one of the most remarkable peaceful transitions and power shifts in history.<sup>2</sup> What subsequently happened in South Africa can only be fully understood if the dramatic impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) hearings is taken into account (Tutu 1999; Krog 1998, 2003). The truth about what happened behind the scenes during the apartheid era could no longer be denied. A new democratic government with a black majority came into power. The balance of power shifted and a process of restitution is taking place.

As a result of affirmative action everybody was confronted with new faces and new situations. The different racial groups were all crossing boundaries. People were dealing with one another in new ways within a new power scenario.

### 1.2 Two seminaries<sup>3</sup> in different worlds

During a hearing from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> of October 1996 the Faculty of Theology and the Stellenbosch Presbytery of the DRC voluntarily testified before the TRC about their share in, and responsibility for, what went wrong in the country.<sup>4</sup> Tutu accepted this confession with grace. During the apartheid years the attitude in the DRC changed. At first it provided the theological

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1 This article was read as a paper at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the Religious Research Association in Portland, Oregon, USA. The theme of the meeting was: "Diversity within Religious Organizations."

2 Cf. Mandela, N.R. 1994. *Long Walk to Freedom*. Randburg: Macdonald Purnell (PTY) Ltd.

3 South African law allows universities to have Faculties of Theology. Usually church and university come to an agreement on ways to administer a faculty. In the vernacular the faculties are referred to as seminaries.

4 Cf. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report (Vol. 5); pp.384-386

rationale for apartheid.<sup>5</sup> However, ever since the General Synod of 1974 every subsequent synod meeting became more critical of the apartheid dogma and the situation in the country.<sup>6</sup> This culminated in the Rustenburg Confession in 1990.<sup>7</sup> The Rustenburg meeting was by far the most profound ecumenical meeting ever held in South Africa. Prof. Willie Jonker of the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch publicly confessed the sin of apartheid on behalf of himself, his church and his people (the Afrikaners).

The Reformed family of Churches were racially divided with separate seminaries for each group. The Faculty of Theology at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) was “Coloured” in the sense that it trained students from the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. Quite a number of their students were from other denominations. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the majority of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa merged to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).<sup>8</sup> The UWC played a major role in the struggle against apartheid. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has served as their Chancellor from the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1988 to date (2006). A good working relationship existed between the seminaries at US and UWC. Since the late 1980s growing numbers of students from other racial groups began to study theology in order to become ministers in Reformed Churches at Stellenbosch. However, the two institutions represented different worlds that existed in the country and in terms of resources there were huge disparities?

One of the major contributions of the Faculty of Theology at UWC and the DRMC was the Belhar Confession.<sup>9</sup> The identity of the DRMC, today the URCSA, is integrally linked to this outstanding document. As an internationally accepted confession, it became a symbol of the rights of minority groups and an indictment against all forms of discrimination. It was a symbol of the self-respect and dignity of a people. It was born in opposition to the theological legitimisation of apartheid.

### 1.3 The NetACT story

In 1997 three staff members of Stellenbosch University (US) and one from the UWC embarked on an exploratory trip in Southern Africa, travelling 10,500 km (6,600 miles) through five countries and visiting 34 institutions from all denominations (Conradie *et al.* 1997). The purpose was to visit theological institutions in Southern Africa and be informed of their problems and challenges.

US's Faculty of Theology was founded in 1859 as a seminary of the DRC. It played a major role in mission work in Africa (Cronje 1982; Pauw 1980). After the demise of apartheid, members

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5 Cf. Du Preez, A.B. 1959. *Inside the South African Crucible*. Cape Town: H.A.U.M. & Lombard, R.T.J. 1981. *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke en Rassepolitiek – Met spesiale verwysing na die jare 1948-1961*. Silverton: NG Kerkboekhandel.

6 Cf. The General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. 1974. *Human relations and the South African scene in the light of Scripture*. Cape Town: Dutch Reformed Publishers; Die Algemene Sinode. 1986. *Kerk en samelewing – ? Getuienis van die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk*. Bloemfontein: N.G. Sendingpers; and Die Algemene Sinode. 1990. *Kerk en samelewing – ? Getuienis van die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk*. Bloemfontein: N.G. Sendingpers.

7 Cf. Alberts, L. and Chikane, F. (Eds). 1991. *The Road to Rustenburg*. Cape Town: Struik Christian Books Ltd.

8 Cf. Loff, J.A. 1998. *Bevryding tot eenwording – Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika 1881-1994* (Doctoral dissertation in Theology). Kampen: Theologische Universiteit van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland.

9 Cf. Cloete, G.D. and Smit, D.J. (Eds). 1984. *A Moment of truth – The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

of the churches founded by the DRC's mission work, amongst others, came to Stellenbosch for postgraduate studies. The objective of the 1997 "safari" was to meet with institutions and churches that were sending their ministers for postgraduate studies to US. A detailed report of the tour (Conradie *et al.* 1997:1-3) outlines the problems that theological institutions in Africa face. This visit and its implications played a major role in changing the mission and vision of the Faculty of Theology at US. Personal relationships were established between people serving in the institutions that were visited. The number of postgraduate students from other African countries who enrolled in postgraduate programmes at US increased steadily. Between 1997 and 2005 23 candidates from other countries in Africa received their DTh at US. At the beginning of 2006 15 African students from countries to the North of South Africa were enrolled in DTh programme (Hendriks 2006).

One of the results of this boundary crossing experience was that the Faculty of Theology at US became a founding member of NetACT, the Network for African Congregational Theology.<sup>10</sup> For logistical reasons membership were restricted to Sub-Saharan institutions of the Reformed / Presbyterian denomination. At its 2006 meeting in Namibia NetACT's mission was formulated as follows:

### **Mission**

NetACT is a network of theological institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, created and directed by these institutions, to assist them in preparing leaders for missional congregations.

As a member institution of the Network, the Faculty of Theology is very much involved in accomplishing these goals. US provides most of the infrastructure that supports the network. The shift from the 1970s, when people of colour were not allowed to study at US, to a situation in 2006 where 64% of its postgraduate students are black, with a substantial number of the black students coming from all over Africa, testifies that a major paradigm shift has taken place. It took place, amongst other reasons, because historical boundaries of racial and class divisions were crossed.

### **1.4 Two faculties – two worlds – merge**

UWC was experiencing a difficult time during the late 1990s as a consequence of student debt and the fact that all universities in SA were forced to rationalise. State subsidies were decreased. The new leadership at UWC were not very sympathetic towards Theology and the Faculty was forced to become a Department of Religious Studies in the Arts Faculty. Several staff members were unceremoniously asked to resign. This was unacceptable to URCSA.

In the meantime relationships with US were strengthened in many ways, amongst others on a personal level as friendship and trust between key leaders developed. In 1994 a group of 27 young and upcoming leaders from the different churches and racial groups visited the USA on a five-week trip to study race relationships and reconciliation in church and society. The group presented 10 papers at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and the Religious Research Association at Albuquerque. This group went through an intense conflict and reconciliation experience while visiting the diverse constituencies of the USA. Permanent friendships were formed. Before and after this study tour members of the group worked on several

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10 See the NetACT website for information: <http://www.sun.ac.za/theology/netact.html>

projects, most of which were related to the transformation processes that were taking place in church and society.<sup>11</sup>

In 1999 intense negotiations between US and URCSA took place, the result of which was that URCSA decided to move its theological education to Stellenbosch. In 2000 all its staff members were appointed at the Faculty of Theology at US and all its students enrolled there. The Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch became an Ecumenical Faculty with the DRC, URCSA and the Presbyterian Church forming the “Reformed House.”<sup>12</sup> A new Faculty of Theology emerged from this merger.

The merger was a major event in the Reformed family. It had many implications, of which one was a change in language policy. Because of the influx of IsiXhosa-speaking students to UWC, the official language at UWC changed to English. Most Coloured people speak Afrikaans. Stellenbosch was an Afrikaans University – especially on graduate level. Given the colonial history of South Africa, language is a very emotional issue for Afrikaans people. The National Party, during the apartheid years, enforced Afrikaans on the majority of the country’s citizens. The identity and culture of the pre-2000 UWC and US Theology Faculties differed in crucial ways from one another. Merging the two faculties meant that lectures had to be conducted in both languages in the same class, since splitting the classes into Afrikaans and English classes would have been detrimental to the ideal of reconciliation and doing theology together.

The balance of power between the two institutions in the merger was in more than one way unequal. The URCSA staff and students were on territory where they were institutionally and culturally not at home. A paradoxical tension characterised the first year. On the one hand, there was real excitement since we were moving away from the apartheid legacy. On the other hand, there was fear. Two groups with divergent identities and cultures were meeting on uneven ground. The UWC students were coming from a struggle background and were well-versed in stating their case and confronting anything that seemed to them to be unfair. The US students were more individualistic and focused on either their academic studies and/or other issues that they were pursuing. Suddenly lots of time was “wasted” on seemingly endless discussions, mediation and explanations.

From the very first day it was clear to this researcher that there was a big difference between the junior and senior students. Six groups from UWC came over (BTh 1-IV, MDiv (one year) and Licentiate (one year)). The first-year students jelled from the very first week, because of outstanding leadership within the different racial groups, among other reasons, and the fact that none of these students was part of the previous institution’s culture. They were set to make the new dispensation work and they kept to it and worked through their differences during the six years that they studied together. The senior students had a much harder time getting used to each other and dealing with their differences. Classes differed because of the personalities in a class, the mix of racial groups and the quality of leadership in a class.

Students go through different phases of acceptance of one another during the six years that they prepare for ministry. During the first two years they basically enjoy one another’s company and see themselves as trendsetters in the new SA. Then something like a downward spiral sets in during the next two years. The MDiv year is academically and emotionally a tough one, as students

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11 BUVTON (in English: Bureau for Continued Theological Education and Research) played a major role. It is a Bureau at the Faculty of Theology in Stellenbosch that serves Reformed and other denominations in a variety of ways, but mainly in enhancing transformation.

12 See: [http://academic.sun.ac.za/tsv/Documents/Theology\\_Factsheet.htm](http://academic.sun.ac.za/tsv/Documents/Theology_Factsheet.htm)

are working together under a lot of pressure for 38 weeks. Issues not voiced or kept behind polite barriers surface during this year. It is usually after the module dealing with the apartheid section of church history that most classes simply explode with frustration. As convenor of the MDiv programme, I then have to deal with the conflict. I basically create a safe place and time for everybody to vent their feelings and work through their differences. Without exception relationships and trust develop to a deeper level during this year and serve as a basis of trust for the final year.

A variety of factors made the merger to work. Personally I think one of the most important factors was the fact that the staff set an example. There was enough trust among us to keep things together and to work through differences. UWC staff was under immense pressure within URCSA, because leaving UWC for US was an undreamt of step to take. It was the humiliation that the staff<sup>13</sup> and the church experienced at the closing of the Faculty of Theology at UWC that set the scene for the merger. As such, all of us knew that if we could not make the merger work, there was little hope of overcoming the racial division in the church family and attaining unity and reconciliation. We knew that all of us were under threat of being called sell-outs in our respective constituencies.

The Faculty went through a long period of strategic planning, which included establishing the Church Liaison Committee (on which all churches had representatives). A new mission, goals and a new set of values were formulated.<sup>14</sup>

In the years since 2000 staff and students got to know one another on a personal level. Camps, retreats, story telling, sharing as well as recreational activities contributed to this. I remember several occasions when Russel Botman,<sup>15</sup> formerly from UWC, gave his testimony of how he was harassed by the Secret Police and imprisoned during a time when his wife was dying with cancer and his children were young, defenceless and frightened. His testimony was always balanced; he was above bitterness, but not without pain. He was working towards a new South Africa, towards the values of the Kingdom of God and he was willing to suffer, sacrifice and forgive in order to work constructively towards the future on a basis of faith. Thus the stories of staff members and the fact that they were from different racial groups inspired all to work towards the same dream, illustrating their integrity to the students. The task of sorting out the issues of cultural differences and other complex difficulties became learning experiences of the process.

I think the “ecumenical tours” played a major role in the reconciliation process. Ever since 1986 US staff and students crossed numerous boundaries in SA to get to know “the other side.” This meant going and staying with other racial groups and denominations during a 10-day exposure in unfamiliar parts of the country. Thus Soweto, Alexandra, New Brighton, etc. became familiar places to us... and their stories. When UWC and US merged, those boundary-crossing events were, of course, crucial transformational enablers. For many students this was their first experience of staying with a family of a different racial group. For many congregations this was a new thing too... telling their stories to a culturally mixed group. Intense debates and long mediation sessions were often a part of these tours. This is where in-depth reconciliation takes place. People need to voice their anger, frustration, pain, views and stories to “the other” and learn to talk about them, deal with them and address them from a biblical or theological point of view. Friendship, trust and bonding developed to a deeper level during these events.

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13 Some respected members of staff at UWC were unceremoniously paid off by the UWC authorities.

14 For the Faculty’s mission, goals and values, see: [http://academic.sun.ac.za/theology/about\\_us.htm](http://academic.sun.ac.za/theology/about_us.htm)

15 Prof. Dr. Russel Botman of the URCSA taught Missiology. In 2002 he was appointed Vice-Rector of US and Rector in 2007.

In conclusion, one can say that every subsequent year was basically “easier”. It is also becoming clear that the students who got to know one another over a period of six years are having an impact on, and making a difference in, their local ministries. They have worked through issues that most other ministers did not have the privilege of experiencing.

### **1.5 A breakthrough in the unification of the racially divided Reformed Church**

Once a paradigm change becomes operational, the unthinkable starts to happen and former deadlocked situations are resolved. The process that split the DRC into racially divided churches began in 1837. On 5 October 1881 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (for Coloured people) was established.<sup>16</sup> In due course Synods for Black and Indian people were formed. When the National Party came to power in 1948, the racial divide became a legally enforced system. This was adding insult to injury. However, in August 2006 at a joint meeting of the official representatives of all the racially divided synods of the family of Dutch Reformed Churches, a breakthrough in reconciliation took place that was nothing short of a miracle. The delegates who were present testified that it was an awesome and wonderful experience. Issues that were always regarded as non-negotiable for unification were suddenly put aside. The delegates accepted the confession of guilt and the plea for forgiveness by the DRC and all parties confessed their guilt towards one another.<sup>17</sup> It was a truly remarkable event. The result of this breakthrough is that the divided churches are now working together to form the institutional platform for a new, united church.<sup>18</sup>

This researcher believes that these events are not unrelated to what has been described above. A network of trust was built over time, knotted together in thousands of cross-racial personal relationships and through a new reading and understanding of Scripture. A new theological paradigm, a new theological identity, is beginning to emerge.

### **1.6 Recognition by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU)<sup>19</sup>**

While the previous Rector of US, Prof. Andreas van Wyk, played a key role in the merger of the two Faculties of Theology, the present Rector, Prof. Chris Brink, accelerated the diversification process. The basic US premise that excellence and quality in Higher Education need diversity received international recognition at the 12-15 April 2006 meeting of the 500-member strong ACU in Adelaide, Australia. Sir Muir Russel of Glasgow was one of the main speakers at the event. He addressed the issue of diversity:

... (W)e must make a positive point of our increasing diversity. In this context I was interested to read the address of Professor Chris Brink, the Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University, gave at the Rhodes Trust Centenary Reunion on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 2003 entitled ‘Quality needs Diversity’.<sup>20</sup> In this he recognises among other things the fact that ‘diversity has an inherent educational value’ and that we learn better and more when we are engaged with different viewpoints and different cultures – when we learn in an environment that is diverse. He also points to the fact that ‘the concept of quality is not

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16 Cf. Kriel, CJ. 1961. *Die Geskiedenis van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk in Suid-Afrika 1881-1956*. Paarl: Paarlse Drukkers.

17 Dr Coenie Burger, moderator of the DRC, took the lead in this and Dr Allan Boesak, Vice-Moderator of URCSA, accepted his confession and responded with a confession of his own. Delegates testify that they experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit at this meeting.

18 Cf. *Kerkbode*, July 28, 2006. “Kerkgemeenskap wil vorentoe met waagmoed en geloof”, p.3.

19 *Campus News*, 11 May 2006. Front page report: “US kry spesiale vermelding by ACU rektore-konferensie.”

20 For the complete address of Professor Brink, see: <http://www.sun.ac.za/Rector/rhodes2003e.html>

one-dimensional' and I quote: "We have come to realise that excellence resides not only in the analytical capacity of taking things apart. It also resides in the synthetic capacity of bringing many and diverse things together." The internationalization of campuses and the drawing in of students from different social, economic and faith backgrounds maps onto these two characteristics of diversity, and quality is thereby enhanced. It seems to me that helping us all to promote and capitalise on the diversity of our campuses is one of the things on which the Association should focus.

The Faculty of Theology is the most diverse at US in terms of students and staff, with the highest percentage of students from other countries in Africa. It became a trendsetter in transformation. However, the core motives behind the transition are theological. We would like to explain this in the remainder of the article.

### **1.7 Partnership for Missional Church: a new identity emerging**

The DRC is an example of a church in transition. With the wisdom of hindsight one can see to which extent the Afrikaner community in South Africa was kept together as a fully operational unit or system to keep the apartheid system in place. It provided the key leadership within the political and cultural realm. Afrikaners were in command in the military and police and most of the key positions in the government, with no small role in the economy, where English speaking whites also played a major role. The DRC at that stage had at least 50% of all whites as its members (Hendriks 2005:80) and supplied the theological rationale for apartheid in the 1950s.<sup>21</sup> It was racially divided and in the hard days of apartheid blacks were not allowed to worship with whites. The point is: a very strong institution was created by a theologically and politically motivated ideology that provided security and prosperity for the white community. It is very difficult to break free from such an entrapment.

The stages of transition and a change in paradigm, described by Roxburgh (2005:53-58), really applies well in the case of the transition process of the DRC. Suffice it here to say that external political and global changes forced the DRC through this crucible. The country was in transition (cf. section 2.1) and the DRC did realize the folly of apartheid long before 1994. It is safe to say that the prophetic voices of individuals and theologians, inside and outside the DRC, dismantled apartheid ideology. The DRC officially denounced the ideology before 1994.<sup>22</sup> The post-1994 disclosures, amongst others during the TRC hearings, of what happened during the apartheid period created a burden of guilt for the DRC. Reformation and restitution are taking place and a new identity is in the process of forming.

Apart from what has already been indicated above, dramatic changes on a congregational level are also taking place. The rank and file members of the church are thinking in a new way about what it means to be church. The best way to illustrate this is by looking at the work done by the Southern Africa Institute for Missional Church (SAIMC), which works in close liaison with the

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21 Cf. Du Preez, A.B. 1959. *Inside the South African Crucible*. Cape Town: H.A.U.M., and Lombard, R.T.J. 1981. *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke en Rassepolitiek – Met spesiale verwysing na die jare 1948-1961*. Silverton: NG Kerkboekhandel.

22 Cf. The General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church. 1974. *Human relations and the South African scene in the light of Scripture*. Cape Town: Dutch Reformed Publishers; Die Algemene Sinode. 1986. *Kerk en samelewing – ? Getuïenis van die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk*. Bloemfontein: N.G. Sendingpers, and Die Algemene Sinode. 1990. *Kerk en samelewing– ? Getuïenis van die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk*. Bloemfontein: N.G. Sendingpers.

international group Partnership for Missional Church.<sup>23</sup> This again is linked to the Gospel and Our Culture Movement (GOCN).<sup>24</sup> These initiatives flow from the work of scholars such as David Bosch (1991) and Lesslie Newbigin (1978, 1986, 1989, and 1995). At present about 10% of the DRC congregations belong to the SA leg of the movement, where they work in close liaison with other denominations (URCSA, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, etc.). At this stage “living documents” are the best proof of what is happening on the ground.<sup>25</sup> This movement can be found countrywide and is organised and driven by BUVTON, which is a unit of the Faculty of Theology at US. A popular MTh programme under-girds this movement. In a way the emerging missional church can best be described by the following quotes from a flyer advertising the MTh programme:

Discerning missional transformation... From Maintenance to Being Missional.... Blogs about: Trinity and discernment – Spirituality – Listening – Missional Culture – Transformational Leadership – Missio Dei. “Jesus ... did not write a book which would have served forever as the unquestionable and irreformable statement of the truth about God. He formed a community of friends and shared his life with them” (Lesslie Newbigin).

The congregations that took ownership of the vision to become missionally engaged are the congregations which are in the process of discovering a new missional identity. This is where things are happening, facilitating a new kind of reconciled and diversified community.

## 1.8 Summary

The purpose of this section was to outline the transformation processes at the Faculty of Theology US and in the DRC to indicate to what extent this led to the acceptance and celebration of diversity.

The remainder of the article concentrates on three comments that explain aspects of the phenomenon of the transition that took place in the Faculty of Theology as well as in the DRC. The first comment is made from a sociological point of view, the second from a church history point of view, and the last from a theological one.

## 2. THE POWER OF IDENTITY

Sociologist Manuel Castells wrote a trilogy on the information age, its economy, society and culture (1996, 2000, and 2003). I want to draw on the argument of the second volume: *The power of identity* (2003). The purpose of this section is to explain that what happened and is happening in South Africa is part of a global movement. There are patterns that can be discerned throughout history. The Bible, the prophets and theologians understood these movements and used them to interpret what is happening and, in a way, going to happen.

Castells explains how the world is changing at this stage of late modernity through the combined impact of: globalisation, informationalisation and technology. This led to a new

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23 For the Gospel and Our Culture Movement, see: <http://www.gocn.org/main.cfm> and for the Partnership for Missional Churches in South Africa, see: <http://www.missionalchurches.org.za>

24 Books associated with the GOCN are presently very popular: Guder 1998, 1999, 2000; Hunsberger 1996, 1998; Van Gelder 1999, 2000 and others. For books giving an overview on the life and influence of Lesslie Newbigin, see Goheen (2000) and Foust (et al) 2002.

25 With “living documents” I refer to the life and work of Dr Frederick Marais of the DRC and Dr Gordon Dames of URCSA. People like them, and there are many, played a major role in consulting congregations and driving the transformation process countrywide.

networked society where power, space and time flow (1996). This is leading to the demise of the nation-state and its power of legitimizing identity. The reason: power is being siphoned away towards networking capitalism, globally structured powerbrokers (EU, G7, NATO, WB, IMF, and WTO), local authorities, the media and crime. Power has moved from *Macht* (the power of physical strength, men and weapons) to *the mind* – information.

The new power lies in the codes of information and in the images of representation around which societies organize their institutions, and people build their lives, and decide their behaviour. The sites of this power are people's minds... Whoever or whatever wins the battle of people's minds will rule... (2003:425).

Castells's hypothesis is (2003:7-8):

I propose, as a hypothesis, that, in general terms, who constructs collective identity, and for what, largely determines the symbolic content of this identity, and its meaning for those identifying with it or placing themselves outside of it. Since the social construction of identity always takes place in a context marked by power relationships, I propose a distinction between three forms and origins of identity building: legitimizing identity... resistance identity... project identity.

In short: apartheid was a form of legitimising identity formation orchestrated by the National Party and supported by the DRC – for some time. However, in the context of informationalisation and the formation of social and political movements in our country, the apartheid ideology and its lies were gradually dismantled. For quite some time the identity of URCSA was formed by its resistance against apartheid. However, in the new SA with the DRC confessing its guilt, asking for reconciliation and actively engaged in restitution, resistance identity cannot be sustained. At a given point in time the racially separated groups who are sharing the same theological tradition began refocusing on the obvious missional challenges it is facing in SA and Africa. A new form of identity formation, in sociological terms, project identity, is beginning to take place. A missional identity is emerging.

### 3. THE CROSS-CULTURAL PROCESS IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY<sup>26</sup>

Andrew Walls published *The cross-cultural process in Christian history* in 2002. In his discussion of KS Latourette's phenomenal seven volumes on *A history of the expansion of Christianity* (1937-1945), he made the important observation that the expansion of Christianity, unlike Islam, has a serial nature (2002:27-48). "Christian faith must go on being translated, must continuously enter into the vernacular culture and interact with it, or it withers and fades" (29). In the wake of the expansion of Christianity, the recession of the former Christian heartlands took place, the church "died" there. What is left of the church in Jerusalem, of the seven congregations founded by Paul in Asia, of Alexandria and the other centres of Christianity in Africa, even Europe today? Walls concludes (32):

There is a significant feature in each of these demographic and cultural shifts in the Christian centre of gravity. In each case a threatened eclipse of Christianity was averted by its cross-cultural diffusion. Crossing cultural boundaries has been the life blood of historic

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26 In 2003 the researcher wrote an article in which he discussed the relevance of Walls's thesis for the church in South Africa and Africa. The article argued that a missional renewal of the church is integrally linked to its cross-cultural diffusion.

Christianity. It is also noteworthy that most of the energy for the frontier crossing has come from the periphery rather than from the centre.

In a way the following conclusion that Walls draws shows congruity with what Chris Brink said above (Walls 2002:79).

None of us can reach Christ's completeness on our own. We need each other's vision to correct, enlarge, and focus our own; only together are we complete in Christ.

The biblical principle can be illustrated from Acts 15 and what Walls calls (2002: 72-81) "The Ephesian Movement." The researcher believes that this is what is happening in South Africa in general, but also in the DRC in particular. The Faculty of Theology at US (and the University as such) and the DRC are experiencing the crossing of cultural and other boundaries – a process that challenges it to redefine its identity. The church is rereading the Bible with other people and in the process its identity is changing as well as its mission in this world.

The last point to make is that the transition that is taking place is under-girded by the way in which theology is done.

#### 4. DOING MISSIONAL THEOLOGY

Klaus Fiedler of Malawi talks about "Theology cooked in an African pot" (1997). Since its inception in 2000 NetACT has asked the question: "How can we train leaders at our seminaries that will be able to contextualize theology so that we can escape from the bondage of colonialism and other forms of imperialism? How can we train ministers that will be able to empower congregational leaders and members in such a way that they live a value-driven life and are able to read the Bible and discern the will of God?" (Hendriks 2004:11-12; 2006). This eventually led to a methodology of doing theology that we believe is congruent with that of David Bosch, Lesslie Newbigin and Andrew Walls. It is this methodology that is taught at all the NetACT institutions and that has contributed, with other factors, to the change in the theological paradigm at Stellenbosch and in the DRC.

† We believe that theology is about discernment (Phil 1:9-10). It is a correlational and hermeneutically active dialogue in which the following aspects act as the parameters of the dialogue:

We first of all ask about **God**: who is this relationally oriented triune God that reveals himself to us in and through Scripture?

† The second question is about **identity**: this God who created humankind in his image and likeness puts us as his stewards and custodians on earth. Since God is revealed as our Creator, as a missional God, the church, Christians, all people, should be seen in that light. God's character and mission form the basis of ecclesiology and anthropology.

† God loved this **world** and gave his Son to save it (Jn 3:16). God is focused on this world and as such we should teach our students and church members to be actively engaged in understanding this world and serving it.

† To understand God truly (Kelsey 1992:131-160) the faith community should know its own story in order to understand its identity. The Reformers called this *sola scriptura*, implying that **Scripture** should be normative over and against all ideologies.

† The church's mission is that of the **Kingdom of God**, which Scripture describes as a situation where peace and righteousness will reign supreme.

† Theology thus implies a process of discernment that takes place when we obediently participate in transformative action and service at different levels: personal, ecclesial, societal,

ecological and scientific (a doing, liberating, transformative theology that leads to **strategy formation, implementation and an evaluation** of progress; a theological praxis!) (Hendriks 2004:19-34; 211-234).<sup>27</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The descriptive part of this article revealed that change and transition towards crossing racial boundaries and celebrating diversity took place because:

- † Changes in the environment created opportunities;
- † Visionary leadership utilised opportunities;
- † Power issues were always at stake and one needed to understand and deal with them;
- † Boundary-crossing experiences broke stereotypes and subverted? undermined? propaganda. “The other” became known as people whose stories revealed realities not known before. Alternative futures became “dreamable”;
- † Personal relationships and trust, built over time, in a variety of settings, changed attitudes, formed networks, and implemented change and transition;
- † The world scenario changed. Information became available, social movements grew stronger and influenced one another and new forms of identity formation took place;
- † Identity is changing based on rediscovering the missional nature of God, and as such the church. The paradox in the DRC was that it always had a strong missional identity. It was, however, malformed by apartheid ideology;
- † Theology became practical with a praxial nature and with a participatory action research dimension. It became a hermeneutically sensitive exercise in discernment. In a correlational dialogical way it asked the basic questions about identity to Scripture and tradition. This dialogue was informed by looking in a methodical way at the present situation as well as towards an anticipated future. In a post-modern way it is modest about its truth claims and realises that discernment can only be found in diversified settings, where listening to the ecumenical witness of the faith community is a prerequisite. It is more open to, and dependent on, the triune God.

A somewhat despondent Jeremiah once asked if a leopard can change its spots (13:23). It often seems as if human nature is basically so self-centred that it will never take “the other” into account. Even Levites and priests walked past a man who had been mugged and wounded. The good news is that crossing racial boundaries leads to a celebration of diversity and to new life. It is, however, a long walk, a road less travelled in the apartheid era, but one that is becoming familiar now.

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27 Compare this with what Walls says in the context of the necessity for diversity and the crossing of boundaries (2002:79): “The purpose of theology is to make or clarify Christian decisions. Theology is about choices; it is the attempt to think in a Christian way. And the need for choice and decision arises from specific settings in life. In this sense, the theological agenda is culturally induced; and the cross-cultural diffusion of Christian faith invariably makes creative theological activity a necessity.”

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### **KEY WORDS**

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### **TREFWOORDE**

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