

**The growth model for managing change in African Christianity:
The case of the Reformed Presbyterian Church
in a Cape Town township**

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Abstract

The article defines conversion as a process of change management. The Reformed Presbyterian Church exhibits a growth model which is about organic growth and development whereby new members are mostly recruited among the children of members. Children are groomed from baptism through Sunday school and confirmation classes to membership in full communion. For them conversion is a process of growth and development in which they keep on learning all the time about their faith and who they are.

Introduction

Between 1997 and 2001 I embarked on a research project comparing the practices of African indigenous churches and those of mainline churches. The focus was on two churches that occupied the same religious economy in the township of Gugulethu in Cape Town, the St John's Apostolic Faith Mission and the Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPC). One of my main motivations was that often research on African indigenous churches (AICs) had been ethnographic and that on mainline churches historical. A decision was made to use the ethnographic methodology for both churches in getting an understanding of how each group thinks of conversion, and processes it. The finding of the research confirmed that the AICs have a crisis model of managing change, while the mainline churches have a growth and developmental model for managing change. The aim of this article is to discuss how the growth model operated in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

The growth model refers to a process of gradual socialisation. Growth means attachment and development, both intellectually and experientially. People mature in terms of age and at the same time accumulate experience and knowledge. Ideally, growth would be accumulative; the same principle as

in the school system would apply. In order to understand this model, one can use the analogy of the development of a child. The mother starts feeding her with milk, then soft food, and eventually ordinary food. The reason why she is not given porridge or rice at two weeks is that she is not ready for it. Her body is not mature enough to digest it. In this model, children are gradually introduced into the faith, starting with less complex material and gradually moving to more complex. Based on the idea that *umuthi ugotshwa usemanzi* (a tree is only shaped when still tender), young people must be introduced to the values, vision, and mission of the church at a very early age, so that these will become second nature to them. Thus elders use metaphors like "I mix the gospel into my children's porridge." In other words, the gospel is part of their children's daily lives and experiences. The gospel is supposed to flow in their veins. All this suggests is that religious teaching and the values promoted by the church become part of their primary socialisation. They learn to see and interpret the world around them in terms of established religious models.

Children have to internalise these values in order to act upon them. As they grow older more pieces are added to the puzzle. The focus of this model is the future. The major driving force is the deferral of rewards to the world beyond. There is a strong belief that the church has both current and future relevance. By bringing in young people, the church ensures its current relevance and future sustainability. Various strategies are employed to keep them within the arena of the church's influence. First, infant baptism is a way of claiming children for God. As a sign of belonging, baptism is a mark put on a child's forehead identifying him or her as a member of the family of God or the church. At baptism parents or guardians give an undertaking to bring their children up in accordance with the values, vision, and mission of the church. Baptism marks the beginning of the socialisation process. The practice is consistent with that of early Christian communities in which baptism was a sign of acceptance into the group and "the initiatory rite for the Christian movement from the outset".¹ Second, at Sunday school children are introduced to other children who belong to the same denomination. They are encouraged to make friends; most friendships tend to last beyond Sunday school. Children are taught the basics of the Christian faith, but more importantly they are encouraged to identify with their denomination. Third, confirmation is an important milestone in the development of an individual, when full membership of the church is conferred. It is a stage at which one is expected to be knowledgeable enough to help others learn something about their faith. It is when one graduates from being an associate member to a member in full communion.

¹ Kee, Howard C. 1980. *Christian origins in sociological perspective*. London: SCM Press, 112.

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Most people in the RPC regard it as their “family” church (*icawe yasekhaya*) and for some women it is due to marriage (*icawe yasemzinami*). It is a source of pride for many members to be born Presbyterians. They go as far as saying that they “suckled” (*ndayi ncanca*) Presbyterianism from their parents. One man pointed out that his family has been part of the church for generations. He is a third generation member because his grandfather and his father were very active in the church. The act of suckling implies that one gets something from one’s source. What one gets is therefore authentic. In other words, their parents, who were very good Presbyterians, handed down this faith to them. As heirs to “the soul of the church”, they feel that they have to defend the interests of the church all the time. They will carefully scrutinise the actions of new members, especially those from other denominations, so that they do not bring alien practices into their domain.

What clearly transpires from the above discussion is that even though the majority of members at the RPC are born-members, there is often a point of crisis in their lives which they would regard as their moment of conversion. One also has to realise that getting people to recognise that moment in their lives does not come easily because the dominant view is that you were born in the church. At the same time, in revival services people say they convert under the Word, which does not mean that they admit to any wrongdoing or sin. This might be interpreted to mean that they have learnt something from the way the preacher did his exegesis of the scripture that day.

There is a school of thought in African Christianity that tends to credit all Africanisation of Christianity in South Africa to the AICs only. This article demonstrates, albeit in a small way, how Africans in mainline churches have embraced and Africanised Christianity through how they conceive and manage conversion. The article aims to demonstrate that in the mainline churches in South Africa there operates a particular model for mediating and managing change. Instead of change being perceived and experienced as radical, immediate, abrupt or instantaneous, it is gradual. The church has in place structures and processes to manage such change.

Reformed Presbyterian Church

The JL Zwane Church (where research for this article was conducted) belongs to the Reformed tradition; before the name changed to Reformed Presbyterian it was known as Bantu Presbyterian. The remnants of that era still remain among people as they often say “*ndiya eBantu*” (I am going to Bantu Presbyterian). The church had connections with the Scottish Presbyterians, who belong to the Free Church of Scotland. The Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa was formed in 1923, and its first general assembly was held at Lovedale Missionary Institution under the moderatorship of Rev. William Stuart Burnshill. The Bantu Presbyterian Church has been fortunate

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in that it was closely related to the United Free Church of Scotland as its daughter.²

This church was not a secessionist church but developed from years of missionary work by the Free Church of Scotland. Elbourne and Ross³ state that there was division among missionaries of the Free Church of Scotland about joining the New Multi-racial Church – Presbyterian Church of South Africa. The minority wanted the union while the majority opted for an autonomous African church. It was the policy of the Scottish missions to develop independent, self-sufficient, and self-governing African churches. This church was totally in the hands of the Africans. It was a culmination of a hundred years of mission work among AmaXhosa. The rationale was that Africans should develop an attraction to Christianity and the only way that would happen was through understanding it as their own.⁴ The BPC continued to have a close relationship with the Church of Scotland for a long time. Wilson and Mafeje also note that the church in Langa received missionaries from Scotland.⁵ In 1982 the Bantu Presbyterian Church was renamed the Reformed Presbyterian Church.⁶

Rituals

David Chidester has theorised ritual as “formalized, repeatable practices that are performed in extraordinary, reserved or sacred times and places”⁷. Rituals serve to inculcate a sense of unity and group solidarity. Through rituals, new and younger members are introduced to the more intricate aspects of the group. At the RPC two types of rituals were identified. First, rituals of incorporation incorporate new and young members into the group by drawing boundaries as to who is in and out. Second, the rituals of celebration celebrate the major tenets and traditions of the church. These rituals play a crucial role in the gradual management of change.

² *Manual of law, practice and procedure in the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa*. 1958:v.

³ Elbourne, Elizabeth and Ross, Robert. 1997. Combating spiritual and social bondage: Early missions in the Cape Colony, in Elphick, Richard and Davenport, Rodney (eds), *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social, and cultural history*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 67.

⁴ De Gruchy, John W. 1979. *The church struggle in South Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip, 15.

⁵ Wilson, Monica and Mafeje, Archie. 1963. *Langa: A study of social groups in an African township*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 93.

⁶ Vellem, Vuyani S. 2013. The native experiment: The formation of the Bantu Presbyterian Church and the defects of faith transplanted on African soil. *Missionalia* 41(2):147.

⁷ Chidester, David. 1991. Primal religions, in De Gruchy, John W. and Prozesky, Martin (eds), *Southern African guide to world religions*. Cape Town: David Philip, 19.

Rituals of incorporation

In order to understand the importance of the rituals of incorporation one has to move from the premise that the church is a social construction. The church is endowed with sacredness and holiness. It has the right to dispense sacraments whose aim is to bring participants to an experience of the divine. The church is also the guardian of divine truth, knowledge, mysteries, and wisdom. These attributes of the church make it “dangerous” to the uninitiated. It is, therefore, important for new members to go through the correct channels in order to avert this danger. Robert Baum⁸ observes that knowledge in many African societies is seen as transformative. That is why the initiation process concentrates on the teaching and sharing of information on the mission, status, and working of the church. Initiation teaches new members how to safely tap into the sacred power of the church through prayer and other forms of communication with the divine.

David Snow and Richard Machalek⁹ argue that a convert is a social type; that is, he or she is a product of a social context or social reality. Converts can be identified through their talk and reasoning, in other words through their discourse. According to Paul Ricoeur¹⁰ “faith never appears as an immediate experience but always as mediated by certain language that articulates it”. In other words, faith is couched and cloaked in the language of the faith community in order for it to have any meaning. At JL Zwane new members are introduced to the “talk and reasoning” of the group through being among the believers. There is an official version, which they learn at confirmation classes, and an unofficial version, which is experienced in services and prayer meetings. The existence of two versions can be attributed to the sources from which the church has drawn its resources. The confirmation classes draw teaching materials from a Western Christian background, which is more cerebral. By contrast, services and prayer meetings draw on African sources that are more expressive and performative. The following are some of the terms used by people in public and private prayers when referring to their experience of God: *Bawo onamandla onke* (all powerful Father, or literally Father with all the power), *mzali* (parent), *magxa amakhulu ngokuthwala izoono zehlabathi* (the broad-shouldered One who carries the sins of the world). God is perceived as all-powerful, loving and caring. From

⁸ Baum, Robert M. 1990. Graven images: Scholarly representations of African religions. *Religion* 20:359.

⁹ Snow, David A and Machalek, Richard. 1983. The convert as a social type, in Collins, R (ed), *Sociological theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass:259-287; Snow, David A and Machalek, Richard. 1984. The sociology of conversion. *Annual Review of Sociology* 10:167-190.

¹⁰ Ricoeur, Paul. 1995. *Figuring the sacred: Religion, narrative, and imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 46.

these descriptions an impression is created of a god for whom nothing is impossible.

Baptism

According to the *Manual of law, practice and procedure in the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa*, baptism is a public event whose aim is to incorporate children into the Christian family.¹¹ Like most other mission churches, the RPC practises baptism through sprinkling. Rev. Xapile, however, pointed out that there is a provision in the church statute for immersion, provided one was not baptised before. A baptismal service is organised at least twice a year in the church in Gugulethu. Only children of confirmed members in good standing are baptised. Baptism in the RPC is not a “believer’s baptism” but is done to children “on the basis of a commitment by their parents to raise them in a Christian way”.¹² The parents of the child would approach an elder in their area about their intentions to have the child baptised and give him all the details. In the case of an adult, the *Manual of law* states that “baptism is to be administered ... upon profession of faith in Christ and obedience to Him”.¹³ The elder then presents the names of parents who intend to have their children baptised to the Kirk Session, where they are scrutinised and then accepted.

On the day of baptism the children are baptised and the parents are alerted to the responsibility they have taken on. By bringing children to be baptised, they have made a covenant that they would instruct them in accordance with the teachings of the church. This represents a commitment that they would bring these children to the knowledge of God. Once children are 4 or 5 years old, they may be brought to the Sunday school. Baptism is a mark that children belong to the flock. Following birth, children are born into the church through baptism. It initiates the process of growth and development of a child as part of the church establishment. Parents and guardians make a covenant to instruct their children in terms of the teachings of the church, thus linking them to previous generations of church members.

Confirmation

Confirmation is the acceptance of a member into full communion in the church. Prior to that one is an associate member. Confirmation brings the

¹¹ *Manual of law, practice and procedure in the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa*. 1958:5.

¹² Kraft, Charles H. 1981. *Christianity in culture: A study in the Biblical theologizing in cross-cultural perspective*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books:328.

¹³ *Manual of law, practice and procedure in the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa*. 1958:5

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member into the inner circle, with rights, and one is thus fully recognised as part of the group. Theoretically, this member can contest leadership positions. It has to be understood that the longer one's service in the church, the more respect one attains. In short, confirmation is a public declaration by the church that a member is now one of "us". The congregation witnesses this important moment of yet another group of people who become part of the congregation.

Two categories of people take a confirmation class, the new recruits as well as youngsters who are no longer of Sunday school-going age, whose aim is to become members in full communion. Membership in full communion is important in that one is then able to join organisations of choice in the church, get support from the church in times of crises, and take part in the Eucharist. The class goes on for a year. During the process candidates receive instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian faith, the Bible, and the constitution and structure of the church. For those who went through Sunday school, this would be a consolidation of what was learnt, which is the addition of another layer, while for those who are new recruits, this is an opportunity to get an understanding of their new faith. Confirmation classes provide an environment where new members are socialised into the Christian ways, including appropriate behaviour for a Christian child (*ukuziphatha komtana waseNkonzweni*).

Candidates of the confirmation class gave a variety of reasons why they wanted to be confirmed. Firstly, the common explanation among the youth is that *ndizozigcinisa ecaweni* (I came so that I could be shepherded in the church or to take refuge in the church). It sounds as if one is a refugee fleeing the world of darkness into the safe haven of the sanctuary. The church appears to be a place of safety, different from the dark and dangerous world of the township. The church is a place so charged with the sacred that her influence is life-giving and life-changing. Anyone who wants to stay alive should keep away from the negative influences prevailing in the township and join the church. The phrase "*icawe izondakha*" (the church will mould me or build me up) is used by many young people. Jean and John L. Comaroff,¹⁴ in their discussion of personhood among the Southern Tswana in the late colonial period, allude to the concept of "building oneself up". The church, in this case, has the important role of encouraging a positive "self-building" process. People believe in the ability and capacity of the church to mould and develop them into responsible individuals. The assumption made is that the church has social and spiritual resources to mould an individual into a moral and responsible citizen.

¹⁴ Comaroff, John L and Comaroff, Jean. 2001. On personhood: An anthropological perspective from Africa. *Social Identities* 7(2):267-283.

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Secondly, there are those who have heard about or experienced the good work done by the church in the community and then decide to be part of it. A young woman who had not taken the church seriously saw and heard the church youth singing at a funeral at her home. Their commitment and how well they sang impressed her. These reasons convinced her to seek confirmation.

Thirdly, there are those who say *ndifuna ukufunda ukushumayela nokuthandaza* (I want to learn how to preach and how to pray). Preaching and praying are important components of church practice. People show that they are serious about participating fully in the work of the church and furthering her mission by wanting to know how to do these two things. Learning how to preach and pray implies learning the language of delivery. You also learn what some people call *isiRhabe* (ways of the Presbyterians).

In the teaching, a distinction is always made between “inside” (*ngaphakathi*) and “outside” (*ngaphandle*). The church is perceived as a place of refuge, and outside the church is a place of destruction. The “inside” is the church with her moral and ethical teachings, her view of the world and how it should be ordered. It is about how to behave, and what not to do. The “outside” is said to be dangerous and has the ability to hook people. It is very difficult to survive once the outside captures you. The outside is depicted as a dangerous world of sin, murder, rape, and drugs. This world is known for its attractiveness and appeal, especially for young people. Often the adults warn about *ubunewunewu beento zangaphandle* (the pleasures of the outside world). The “outside” is painted as a beautiful and glamorous world, which can seduce people into sin. This metaphor of the “outside” is mostly used as a reference to sexual misconduct and to warn people about the form evil takes before it devours someone. Continually, a convert has to guard against the tricks of the evil one.

At the end of the training process full membership is conferred on all the participants. A special service is arranged where membership is conferred. Such a service is only done once a year just before the Good Friday and Easter festivities. Only an ordained minister can preside over this service. During the service the names of all new members are read out by one of the leading elders. New members proceed to the front, where the minister and a few designated elders confer membership in the form of a handshake. From the day of the service, these people are regarded as members in full communion. Each of the new members is handed over to a leader in their area for continued support and encouragement.

During the confirmation service the church celebrates numerical expansion and individual growth, which are significant events in the life of the church. First, confirmation means that more people are added to the inner circle of the church and to the church’s arena of influence. Numerical strength is crucial for effective evangelical work and financial viability.

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Second, the service celebrates individual growth, which means that the candidate has come of age. They have acquired the knowledge and maturity necessary for them to be promoted to the next stage. Such individuals are expected to make contributions to the project of the church. Third, it is a celebration of the future of the church. Through different growth stages the church ensures her future relevance and the sustainability of her projects. Candidates are exposed to different levels of knowledge that are accumulated over a number of stages. The confirmation service, therefore, marks the symbolic inclusion of new members into the community.

Rituals of celebration

Sunday service

A normal service starts with a procession of elders (including ministers) from the vestry through the main entrance to the stage where the pulpit stands. As the procession enters the main entrance, the entire congregation stands while singing as they were before. Someone carrying a large, open Bible leads the procession and at the tail is the preacher. Once the procession reaches the stage, all the elders take their seats and the preacher ascends to the pulpit. While the congregation is still standing he reaches out and takes the big Bible, reads one verse, and then hands it back to the bearer, who puts it on a stand and then takes his seat as well.

At this point there is silence in the sanctuary, and the service leader, in a loud voice, announces an opening hymn. All members are supposed to bring their own Bibles and hymn books. It is a common occurrence to find people sharing these texts, especially with visitors and new members. The congregation stands to sing the opening hymn led by *umhlabeli* (the precen-tor). *Umhlabeli* is someone who has a good voice, knows many tunes, and is innovative and creative. She or he has to be alert during the service so that whenever there is a minor disturbance an appropriate piece of music can be introduced. She or he must be able to read the mood of the service and the theme of the sermon so as to introduce appropriate choruses. In this church, as in many other Black churches, there are no musical instruments. However, people have come up with innovations: there is a pillow-like leather bag stuffed with wool, with a handling strap called *umpampam*, which sounds like a drum; a horn (made of old plumbing pipes); and a bell (two pieces of metal that are hit against each other to make a sound). All these instruments are beaten to the rhythm of the song to make a vibrant sound. All the verses of the opening hymn are sung and then the last verse is repeated a number of times before *umhlabeli* signals that it must be ended.

Music is the cornerstone of African worship. As John Mbiti observes,

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God is often worshipped through song, and African peoples are very fond of singing. Many religious gatherings and ceremonies are accompanied by singing which not only helps to pass on religious knowledge from one person or group to another, but helps create and strengthen corporate feeling and solidarity.¹⁵

At the end of the opening hymn, the preacher asks someone to lead the congregation in prayer, which is followed immediately by the Lord's Prayer (Our Father). The first of the two scripture readings will be taken, usually from the Old Testament. The two readings have to have some connection or a common theme. A hymn is sung before the second reading from the New Testament. After the second reading it is time for notices to be announced by one of the leading elders. Notices range from church activities to deaths. A moment of silence is observed in honour of those who died during the previous week. At the end of the moment of silence an appropriate song or chorus is sung. During this time visitors and new members are welcomed and asked to identify themselves. The deacons take the offerings and bring them to the altar for blessing. The preacher can bless the collection, but sometimes he asks a minister or one of the elders to do it.

The service continues after the collection with a hymn, *elitshayeleda intshumayelo*, which precedes the sermon or introduces the sermon. This hymn opens the way for God to speak to the people. The term *intshayeleda* comes from the word *ukutshayela*, to sweep. The hymn before the sermon is meant to sweep away all the "dirt" and obstacles from people's hearts and minds, in order for them to be receptive to the sermon. The sermon is taken seriously to mean *ukwabiwa kweLizwi likaThixo* (sharing of the Word of God) or *ukuphakwa kwelizwi* (the dishing out of the word). This means that people have to prepare themselves to receive what God has in store for them. For the preacher, this hymn is a launching pad for his missiles. It paves the way for the reception and at the same time it prepares him to deliver the message appropriately. The preacher has to be *emoyeni/kumoya* (in the spirit) when delivering the message for it to have any impact on the congregation. This is a time when the whole congregation receives teaching on a Christian principle or an aspect of Christianity. The sermon is delivered with energy and enthusiasm. Sermons tend to deal with a wide range of issues that affect people as individuals as well as communities.

A prayer follows the sermon. During the sermon, a preacher will often speak of something which troubles people, for example children who disobey or abuse their parents, children who abuse drugs, people who are jealous, and so on. Some of these people, especially women, cry during the sermon, and

¹⁵ Mbiti, John S. 1969. *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 67.

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prayer time is the time to commit their problems to God. There is no set rule for doing this; some ask one person to pray, while others prefer to have the whole congregation pray.

The prayer is followed by a closing hymn, after which there is benediction. The Bible bearer then takes the Bible from the stand and hands it to the preacher, who closes it and says *oneendlebe makeve akutshoyo umoya emabandleni* (He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches) (Rev. 2:29). The procession leaves the sanctuary with the preacher following immediately after the Bible bearer. The big Bible leaves the sanctuary closed. The rest of the congregation remains standing until the procession has left the sanctuary and then they disperse.

For the elders, ministers and preacher, the service starts and ends in the vestry where prayers are said. Before they move into the sanctuary, elders discuss important notices and other issues that need to be brought to the attention of the congregation. The formation of the procession, with the Bible in front, is an act of sacralising the sanctuary, making the presence of the Word of God visible. The leaders of the church are the custodians of the Word in the community. They come across as people who are serious. This procedure is followed every Sunday.

Good Friday and Easter

Good Friday and Easter mark the major festival in the life of the church. This is a culmination or climax of the festivities and celebrations of the Holy week which would have started the preceding Sunday with *Inkonzo yamahlamvu* (Palm Sunday) and a series of revival services during the week. The festival starts on a Thursday evening with a night vigil. During the night vigil congregants trace all of Jesus' activities, Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus, his trials, Pilate finding no fault in him, Pilate washing his hands, and his eventual condemnation to die on the cross. This service ends in the early hours of the morning. People then go home to get ready for the main service later that day.

The main service is called *indlela yomnqamlezo* (the way of the cross). Seven different preachers present the seven utterances by Jesus on the cross. The service starts with the minister delivering an introductory message, which opens the way for the preachers. He gives a context for what the preachers will be saying later. After the minister's message each of the seven preachers stands up to give an explanation of the word they are responsible for. They give interesting interpretations that involve contemporary application. Mbiti notes that African preachers situate Biblical texts within the experienced reality of their congregations:

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Horst Buerkle has made important observations: that for the African preacher, “the persons and the events of both Testaments are always near to the preacher and his congregation, as if they were part of their own time”; the “attempt to reproduce biblical history through illustrations drawn from local African scenes is a common practice”; and that “the African preacher confronts us with the relevance of the symbol”.¹⁶

Before making a presentation, each preacher requests that his favourite hymn be sung, to help him get into the spirit. The majority of people believe in being inspired by the spirit and so the singing can go on for some time. After the hymn, the preacher introduces the utterance that he will be talking about and then gives an explanation. As the preacher delivers his message there is support from those in the congregation in the form of shouts of AMEN! EWE! (Yes) or KUNJALO! (It is true). Such interjection is observable in the performance of African oral poetry. According to Opland,

Amongst the Zulu the audience may compliment the performance by interjecting encouraging shouts like “*Musho!*” at the end of each rhythmic utterance of the imbongi, but this encouragement is not necessary to the performance in the way that the involvement of others apart from the lead singer is necessary to certain choral songs.¹⁷

After all the preachers have made their presentations, an altar call is made by *ugqogqa*.¹⁸ The person who does this job would have been designated before the service by the elders in the vestry. The altar call takes its own direction depending on the skills of *ugqogqa*. He stands up to call on all those who are *ngaphandle kofefe lukaThixo* (outside of the grace of God) to make a commitment to join the church. He goes on to ask people to join church organisations, for example *amadodana*. A lot of singing happens during this time to give the undecided people a chance to make their decision and be part of the church community. All these people are supposed to go and stand in front of the altar as a public pronouncement that on this day they have made a decision to join the church. It is appropriate to recruit during this service because many people attend, including those who do not attend church

¹⁶ Mbiti, John S. 1979. The Biblical basis for present trends in African theology, in Appiah-Kubi, Kofi and Torres, Sergio (eds), *African theology en route*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 87.

¹⁷ Opland, Jeff. 1980. Southeastern Bantu eulogy and early Indo-European poetry. *Research in African Literature* 2/3:296.

¹⁸ Uggogqa is a person who is tasked with the responsibility of inviting people to respond to the preaching. He makes a general invitation for those who want to convert (new and old members), those who want to join various church organisations, and those who need prayer.

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regularly. *Ugqogqa* makes a signal that the singing should stop and then hands over to the minister, who leads the congregation in prayer. The whole congregation prays and the new members are advised what to do. The service is then closed.

Easter Sunday is a joyous day because people celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. The spirit of *uvukile* (he has risen) pervades the whole church. The message delivered by the minister centres around the meaning and significance of resurrection. The singing is still as inspired as it was on Friday, although the tense atmosphere is gone. The service ends like a normal service and people disperse.

Tradition

Ecclesiology

The church stands for moral purity, goodness, charity, good neighbourliness, and other noble values. These values are premised on the teachings of the Bible and the founders of the church. Because of the stand taken by the church, the community has certain expectations of the members of the church. Members are expected to uphold the values of the church and set an example in the community. The church teaches its members what is expected of them through various platforms, including sermons, confirmation classes, the Sunday school, and church organisations. The church has a policy of instituting disciplinary actions against members who breach the code of behaviour by acting in a manner that causes embarrassment to the church.

The Kirk Session, which is composed of the minister(s) and the elders, is the highest decision-making body in the church and the guardian of the image of the church. They are the protectors of the collective *seriti/isidima* of the church, the image and reputation of the church. An elder is a lay person who is elected by the congregation and is inducted by the session through the imposition of hands. This appointment is made for life. An elder can be removed or excused from office only if he has committed an act that is in contrast to the teachings of the church or if he has compelling personal reasons to step down. The Kirk Session is responsible for setting up policy for the congregation, and nothing should happen without their endorsement.

The minister is someone who has responded to the call to the ministry and has gone through theological training. He is the pastor of the congregation, looking after their spiritual welfare. He is the shepherd looking after the flock. He is supposed to provide strong leadership to the Kirk Session and the congregation. He simplifies the codes of behaviour and trains the leaders. He also oversees the maintenance and improvement of the church property.

The elder in the area makes sure that members uphold the good image of the church. He teaches and advises. Any case of breach of the rules by one

of the members is reported to him, who in turn takes the matter to the Kirk Session, where an investigation will be conducted. The member concerned will be given an opportunity to make a representation before the ruling is made on the matter. If a member is found to have done something wrong, she or he will be handed due punishment. There are instances where members are excommunicated (*basikwe*, which literally means being cut off). This is a strong statement by the church, distancing herself from the wrongdoing of one of her members. The church takes firm action to protect its *isidima* (dignity). The message sent to the community is that the church does not tolerate actions that lead people into sin and destruction. This action is taken to protect not only the church but also the individual concerned. By taking quick and decisive action, the church helps to rehabilitate this individual. She or he will not be banished from the church but will be stripped of his or her full membership, which extends to the membership of church organisations, and may not participate in the Lord's table (*umthendeleko*). The member then returns to being an associate member. For him or her to regain membership, he or she has to prove to the leadership that he or she recognises the mistake made and is willing to correct that. The term used for someone who has breached the code is *uwile* (she or he has fallen).

The church clearly distinguishes itself from the unchristian community. The most prominent feature of the church community is the fellowship of the believers (*ubunkonzo*). It draws all of them to a common vision, purpose and destiny. They all see themselves as warriors in the war against evil. The world of the church is the world of goodness and is at loggerheads with that of evil and malice (outside).

Abantwana basenkonzweni (children of the church) are cultured and well behaved. They can clearly distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil. They are brought up to internalise all the values that the church stands for. They are the "light of the world" (Matt. 5:14); the salvation of the world is their prime mission. They are supposed to lead exemplary lives, as their actions should not betray the collective image of the church. *Abantwana bangaphandle* (children from outside) are said to be uncouth, uncultured and badly socialised or oriented. Their actions are the antithesis of the work of the church. The church must work very hard to bring them into the fold and re-socialise them. The moral infrastructure is premised on the teachings of the church and the Bible. The church is supposed to extend its authority beyond its gates to the rest of the community. Such action is based on the belief that the central mission of the church is the salvation of the world. Before the local community self-destructs through crime, drugs, prostitution and lack of knowledge, the church must step in and be the light.

In the mind-set of the church, there is a strong belief that eventually evil will be defeated. No one believes that this will be easy. Evil comes in the most beautiful guise. Beware of "the wolves in sheepskin" (*Lumkelani*

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iingcuka ezembethe ifele legusha) is the warning by those entrusted with the responsibility to teach. They warn that evil is sly and seductive and once one is seduced it is difficult to escape. The example often used is that of drug dealers who have flashy cars, clothes, and money – they are often popular because of what they can offer their “friends” materially. The church deploras such unlawful and immoral ways of acquiring money and wealth. Values of hard work and honesty are central to its teaching on this matter. Such teaching is consistent with that of early missionaries.

History is very important in the formation of the RPC identity. The members take pride in the work and successes of the past and keep a memory of those things. The naming of churches in memory of past ministers bears testimony to this. The church in Langa is named after Tiyo Soga, one of the first black Presbyterian ministers. The church in Gugulethu is named after Rev. JL Zwane, a minister from Natal, who was brought to Cape Town in 1952 to deal with the crisis faced by the church in Cape Town. He is described as a very dignified man who did not waste time but carried out his task efficiently. Those who were part of this experience feel very privileged to have been part of that good history. It is also a source of pride for people, especially the older generation, to belong to a congregation in memory of such a man.

History is very important because it gives one a sense of who one is, the achievements of the past, and the road still to cover. It is an inspiration for people to work harder because they realise how much their forebears had to contend with in order to achieve a certain degree of success. History gives people a sense of who they are by looking at their heritage.

Recruitment

Most new members are recruited from children and relatives of existing members. Pauw points out that “on marriage a woman automatically transfers her membership to the church with which her husband’s family is associated”.¹⁹ Thus married women would refer to this church as *icawe yasemzinami*. The husband does not necessarily have to be an active member of the church, but as long as the mother-in-law is involved, the new wife would have to abide by this custom. The Sunday school is where future members are groomed and children are introduced to the church procedures at an early age. In addition to there being a Sunday school, other recruitment strategies are employed periodically to tap new membership from the ranks of the unbelievers.

¹⁹ Pauw, BA. 1975. *Christianity and Xhosa tradition: Belief and ritual among Xhosa speaking Christians*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 47.

Uhlaselo (crusade)

Consistent with early Christianity, the vocabulary of the RPC is full of warfare imagery. The term *Uhlaselo* literally means an "attack". The church launches an attack on the enemy territory (crusade). *Uhlaselo* gives an impression that people are involved in a war. This war is between the forces of goodness (represented by the church) against the forces of evil. The township is understood to be full of people *abakude nofefe luka Thixo* (who are far from the grace of God). The township appears as an enemy territory, and the crusade is an attack launched by the church. The march through the streets of the township is reminiscent of the Israelite army under Joshua's command around the city of Jericho. It is a triumphalist march claiming victory in Jesus Christ. The idea is to bolster the numbers in church while at the same time spreading the influence of the church in the township. The RPC is not the only denomination to do the crusade; other church groups such as the Methodists do it as well.

There is a Christian commandment to go out into the world and make disciples (Mark 16:15). This practice is in line with that commandment. It is announced in good time that the church will be involved in *uhlaselo* and people are urged to be there. People congregate at a certain spot in the township, open the service, and open the text to be used for the crusade and then start the march in the township streets. This moving group of people is called *inqwelo* (wagon). The *inqwelo* has a number of stops along the way, where the preacher starts talking to those who are watching and asks them to make a decision to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. A number of people will jump onto *inqwelo*. When they finally get to church their particulars are taken down and they are advised to come to services and join the confirmation classes.

Conclusion

In this article we have demonstrated gradual and carefully managed change. In Travisano's²⁰ language this is an alternation because all the changes that a person undergoes are catered for in both the discourse and the practice of the church. An individual grows and develops from one stage to another until being confirmed as a member. Growth and development does not end at confirmation; a person continues to learn different things from other people. One can even be elected to a leadership position. At each developmental level one is constantly taught about what it means to be part of the church. The core of the membership is drawn from within, that is from those born within the

²⁰ Travisano, R. 1970. Alternation and conversion as qualitatively different transformations, in Stone, GP and Garvern, M (eds), *Social psychology through symbolic interaction*. Waltham, Massachusetts: Gunn-Gloisdell, 594-606.

church and those who marry into the church. Even though the majority of members are born into the church, there are cases where the church has to manage radical change, especially for those who come from other faiths or even denominations.

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