

**The Minister of the Word in the  
Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)  
and party politics:  
A theoretical and practical perspective**

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*Abstract*

This article will consist of five parts: First, definitions of faith and politics will be provided. Second, Regulation 4(3.2) regarding the status of a Minister of URCSA will be discussed in brief. Third, decisions of different synods on the forfeiture of the status of Ministers of the Word in URCSA due to participation in the governing body of the party politics will be discussed. Fourth, the author will look into different well-known reformed ministers and theologians who have influenced the thinking of the URCSA in terms of its confession, the likes of John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper and Karl Barth, in order to make an argument for the relevancy of such regulation's point. Fifth, the motive behind Regulation 4(3.2) regarding the status of a Minister of the Word and party politics and its relevancy will be discussed.

**Introduction**

Since the second General Synod sitting of the URCSA in Mooigenoeg in Bloemfontein in 1997, the issue of a Minister of the Word and involvement in party politics has been a burning issue. There is confusion within the faith community of URCSA about ministers participating in party politics and the involvement of a minister or prophetic voice of the church in politics. In the first church order of URCSA, the word politics was qualified by an adjective, "party" politics; the present church order speaks of "appointment to a political governing body" or availing oneself for election. The question that you and I need to answer in this paper is: What is the motive behind this point in Regulation 4(3.2) in chapter 4 of the Church order of the General Synod of

the URCSA 2012? It will be proper to first define faith and politics in order to clear the ground for discussion.

*Definition and clarification of concepts: Faith and politics*

First, for someone who is engaged and involved in faith activities, the lack of opening up and functioning in the dimension of faith, belief, trust and confidence – all belonging to the faith realm in the sociopolitical – context is highly problematic. Second, a lack of awareness is being detected among Christians regarding the impact their experience of faith, belief, trust and confidence have on their experience of sociopolitical context, their participation, performance and the execution of their skills and know-how in sociopolitical activities.

In these two statements, I strongly allude to the fact that people's experience of faith, belief, trust and confidence is in many instances plagued by an unawareness of the problematic role of religious and church-centred faith which steadfastly considers God to be the only object of faith. The moment self-belief, belief in the neighbours and belief in the physical-organic-environment are being left out of the experiential foursome rolling pattern of faith, the role and experience of faith is paradoxically neutralised and immunised by the faith person's involvement in his/her sociopolitical environment. Religious faith and God are thereby being forced back into and locked up in spiritual spheres and faith communities. Though faith communities are an integral part of people's lives, the important point here is that God's presence is intrinsically part of every social structure, institution and community. God's presence is not explicit in certain social institutions and less explicit in others (Modise 2009:55).<sup>1</sup>

Faith is unlimited; it is not limited to religious people at all. It is a human experience. Human beings can love, they can hope, they can fear, they can hurt and they can have faith. It is one of a human being's attributes. This concept of faith as a human experience of belief is crucial; not as acceptance of a creed or a set of rules laid down by an institution. Faith is a movement within one's being, a conviction, and a commitment – not something one does but something that happens to oneself. It is the experience of believing in something beyond oneself, something transcendent, and something to which one can reach out, that draws one onwards (Mayson 1997:9).

In this sense faith is an orientation of personality, to oneself, to other human beings, to the physical-organic environment (universe) a total response; a way of seeing the world and of handling it; a capacity to see in more than an ordinary level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of transcendent

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<sup>1</sup> Modise, L.J., Reflections on the well-being levels of professionals in rural and semi-rural areas – A faith theoretical perspective. Unpublished DTh thesis. Pretoria: Unisa, 2009, 55.

dimension ... it is the prodigious hallmark of a human being. Faith has to be seen as a societal, not merely a personal concept. It breaks through the restrictions of privatised religion with the vision of a transformed world. Faith is not complete without practice. Faith cannot do without engagement. Faith must be a practical force in life: in caring for the other, in justice for all, in solidarity between people. Faith and life are closely connected, thus faith and politics are connected in the African context.<sup>2</sup>

Politics has been taken to mean the essential human activity of deciding how to live together in communities. Politics has to do with the day-to-day lives of people who are governed. In essence, politics has to do with human relationships and how to protect and use the physical-organic environment. Popenoe and Cunningham (1998:348) define politics as “the process by which some people and groups acquire power and exercise it over others”. Political power is a psychological relationship between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised. The former exert it over the latter’s minds. Such an impact is derived from three sources: the expectation of benefits, the fear of disadvantages, and the respect or love for humankind or institutions.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, politics is a social process characterised by activity involving rivalry and cooperation in exercising power, and culminates in the making of decisions for a group. Politics are found wherever power relationships or conflict situations exist. Politics means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state. Politics, like faith, is a human activity. Politics cannot do without engaging with people. Politics must be a practical force in life: in caring for the other, in justice for all, in solidarity between people. Politics and life are closely connected, thus faith and politics are connected in the African context (Thielicke 1969:214).

#### **Regulation four (3.2) regarding the status of a Minister of the Word in URCSA**

This regulation regulates the active participation of ministers of the Word of URCSA in party politics. It is very important to point out that this regulation does not prohibit a Minister of the Word from engaging in politics, but prohibits a minister from taking a position in party politics. One might wonder how one can participate in politics without being engaged in party politics. To respond to that, in South Africa there are many spaces created for constructive political activities or for caring for people or for advocating for justice and equality – forums such as Ward Committees, Faith Based Organisations (FBO), Community Based Organisations (CBO) and the

<sup>2</sup> Peetoom, R., *Faith and Politics*, Johannesburg: Salty print, 1997, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Hulett, L.S., *On Politics and Power*. In Hulett and Gruyter eds. *Christianity and Modern Politics*. New York: Cataloging-in- Publication Data, 1993, 14.

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church. The most important for a Minister of the Word is to stand for the truth and his or her prophetic voice should be heard and respected because he or she is blameless from siding with any political party.

The regulation reads as follows: “The secretary of the Support Ministry for Judicial Matters (SMJM) of General Synod gives notice of forfeiture of status through the official communication channels of the church. A Minister of the Word or ministry candidate forfeits his/her status if: he/she accepts appointment to a political governing body, or if he/she makes him-/herself available as a candidate in a political nomination or election contest.” The following is an extract from the General Synod of 1997, as the interpretation of Regulation 4(3.2) of chapter 4 in the Church order of the General Synod 2012:

*Status of ministers of the Word-political election*

People who avail themselves for a local election, as well as election as members to parliamentary meetings, ministers or members of the Executive Committee in government at provincial or national level, will forfeit their status as ministers of the Word in accordance with the regulation for status of ministers of the Word. Presbyteries and regional synods must first handle this matter and then give notice to the General Synod Actuarius that they have withdrawn the status.<sup>4</sup>

In this article I intend to clarify the position of URCSA with regard to ministers of the Word and party politics. This regulation does not prohibit ministers of the Word of URCSA from participating in politics. Since politics is part of the life of the congregation that ministers are serving, it is not easy for ministers to divorce themselves totally from politics. Regulation 4(3.2) prohibits the active participation of a minister in party politics, but not in the affairs of the city. What made the church prohibit ministers of the Word from being active participants in party politics is postulated by Hunsinger (1976:20):

I would guess that both are represented among us gathered here. The one side is formed by so-called Christian circles in the narrower sense of the term, with which the majority of bourgeois churchgoers is affiliated. If they read or hear that “Jesus Christ and the movement for social justice” have been

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<sup>4</sup> Persone wat hulself vir plaaslike owerhede beskikbaar stel, sowel as verkose lede tot die Parlement/Wetgewende Vergadering, ministers in die regering op provinsiale of nasionale vlak, verloor hulle status kragtens die Reglement vir Status van die Bedienaar van die Woord. Ringe en streeksinodes moet eger in die eerste instansie handel en dan kennis gee dat hulle status ingetrek moet word. (Algemene Sinode April 1997 – Interpretasie van Reglement vir die Status van Bedienaars van die Woord – Reglementsartikel 3.2).

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linked together, they will protest more or less energetically that Christ is being made into a social Democrat. “But please don’t paint the Saviour too ‘red’ will you?”... Then the assertion customarily follows, almost with a certain enthusiasm, that it is completely impossible to associate Jesus with a political party. His person remains nonpartisan, above social conflicts, indeed, indifferent to them. His significance is eternal and not historically limited like that of the Social Democratic Party.

In terms of the above argument, this will bring tension between the Minister of the Word and the congregation, because the congregation believes that the Minister of the Word represents Jesus Christ on earth. Djupe and Gilbert (2003:8) state that the life and the work of Jesus Christ can be perceived as offering revolutionary ideas and challenging so-called societal norms, and many Christians; ministers of the Word view their task as translating and broadcasting such counter-cultural claims of congregation members and the larger society. At the same time, members want a spiritual guide – comforting in good times as well as in periods of grief and hardship. A Minister of the Word who fills this role also conveys core messages of their faith traditions. Some congregation members see problems of society as existing outside the church’s walls and range of vision, while others believe their faith calls them and their church to act in the world. How does a Minister of the Word navigate the potential conflicts inherent in these differing visions? In URCSA these differing visions are addressed in Regulation 4(3.2) where a Minister of the Word will forfeit his/her status as a Minister of the Word for the sake of the congregation’s welfare and wellness. Djupe and Gilbert (2003:8) address it by providing a possible solution borrowed from political science: the concept of two basic roles of representatives, namely the delegate and trustee. Djupe and Gilbert (2003:8) distinguish between the two roles:

Delegates are sent to the legislature or some other political gathering to follow the will of the people, often explicitly. For example, delegates to a party convention are typically bound to express formally the will of some prior convention or a state’s primary election voters... Trustees on the other hand, are exemplified by Theodore Roosevelt’s self-described role as “steward of the people”: it was not only [a representative’s] right but his duty to do anything that the needs of the nation demanded unless such action was prohibited by the constitution or by the laws.

Djupe and Gilbert (2003), quote the philosopher and theologian Cornel West reacting to this concept of two basic roles; he used the metaphor of thermometer or thermostats for the role of a Minister of the Word or public officials. Reflecting on delegate models, he states that a thermometer presents the temperature of its location – representatives or clergy/ministers of the Word simply reflect what they see in their surroundings, seeking not to change conditions or opinions, but only to report to them whenever and wherever called upon to do so. In contrast to thermostats – akin to trustees – a thermometer not only reads the temperature, but also reacts to it. West's metaphor captures the interrelationship of representatives or a Minister of the Word and constituents or congregations more subtly than the usual delegate-trustee model.

West also points out (referring to the metaphor of temperature) what congregation members are thinking and how societal norms and prevailing attitudes affect a Minister of the Word's decisions about participation in political and civic activities (Djupe and Gilbert 2003). In many respects, ministers of the Word cannot resist fulfilling the thermometer role. They cannot afford to be unaware of what their members think, especially if members hold the power to hire and fire them. But a Minister of the Word also serves important prophetic roles, to remind or sometimes tell members what the denomination teaches about a particular issue, strengthen the shared identity that binds people to a particular congregation or denomination, or simply be present with the congregation in times of intense struggle and unrest. In this sense, ministers of the Word should be very careful whenever getting involved in party politics, moreover in URCSA because ministers of the word identify themselves with a particular political party and, if their thinking is not aligned with the thinking of their congregation, then they might divide the congregation. In that sense the URCSA that strives for unity, reconciliation and justice urges ministers of the Word to refrain from party politics, not from the day to day life affairs of the congregation. Hence, Regulation 4(3.2) in the church order discourages ministers of the Word in URCSA to avail themselves for party politics.

#### **Decisions of General Synods in relation to the implementation of Regulation 4(3.2)**

It is of paramount importance to indicate that from the General Synod of Mooigenoeg, Bloemfontein 1997 to the General Synod of Okahanja, Namibia 2012, ministers who have availed themselves for political election at local, provincial and national level have forfeited their status. In Mooigenoeg, a decision was taken that two ministers of the Word of URCSA would forfeit their status due to their participation in party politics. At that synod, what is very interesting, is that the two members who forfeited their status were not

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involved in party politics, but were independent candidates for the local election. An independent candidate has his or her own political ideology, and he or she is convinced that he or she will have people to vote for him or her. An independent candidate is a legal political entity as an individual in his or her own right. The problem is that as a Minister of the Word, his or her political ideology might differ from the majority of his or her congregation and that might split the congregation. Hence, the extract mentioned above is drafted to control such a situation (Agenda 1997:766-767).

In the General Synod of Upington 2001, it is reported that one of the ministers of the Word who had forfeited his status during the Mooigenoeg General Synod sitting had taken the church<sup>5</sup> to court based on the decision of Mooigenoeg. It was reported that The GSC takes note that Rev CAT Smit lost his status as a Minister of the Word after he had availed himself to stand for election as a candidate as an independent in the local election. The GSC also takes note that the said brother has also sued the Presbytery and the Regional Synod of the Cape for unfair dismissal. Furthermore, the GSC resolved that ministers of the Word who are involved in local, provincial or national government will forfeit their status as ministers of the Word, as they can never be an independent or not fall under a political party. The GSC took a decision that the involvement of ministers of the Word in party politics needed to be discussed in the meantime (Acta General Synod URCSA 2001:115). A similar decision was taken by the General Synod of Okahanja, Namibia 2012 that this matter needed to be discussed in depth by Proclamation and Worship together with the Support Ministry for Judicial Matters.

In the General Synod 2005 Pietermarisburg the synod also approved the forfeiture of status by ministers who have availed themselves and accepted the appointment or being elected into party politics. One such minister from Namibia regional synod in the name of Rev S Mbambo was appointed the Ambassador of Namibia in Russia, and the other one from the KwaZulu-Natal regional synod by the name of Rev H Mbatha was joint Independent Democracy Party as a possible candidate for election in the national and provincial election (Acta General Synod URCSA 2005). What is very sad is that quality ministers were lost by the church to party politics. In the General Synod of 2008 Hammanskraal there was a similar case where the synod approved the decision of the SMJM to withdraw the status of a minister due to party-political involvement or election from the Phororo – Rev Matseketa – who was involved as a candidate for a political position (Acta General Synod URCSA 2008:18 & 113). The General Synod reaffirms its decision of 2001 in the Acta of 2001. Dr AA Boesak also forfeited his status as a minister of URCSA when he joined the Congress of the People, and availed himself as a candidate for election; his forfeiture of status was

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<sup>5</sup> Church: Presbytery, Regional Synod and General Synod.

approved by Okahanja General Synod (Acta General Synod URCSA 2012:14). I have attempted to highlight the decisions of the General Synod regarding Regulation 4(3.2) regarding the forfeiture of status by ministers of the Word that, if they avail themselves for party politics, such ministers will forfeit their status as ministers of the Word.

In most of these cases there were complaints about inconsistency in the implementation of this regulation. A mention of ministers of the Word who were actively involved in politics and party politics before the establishment of URCSA on 14 April 1994 was as follows: "It is proper for me as the Actuarius of the General Synod of URCSA to bring to the attention of all ministers who wish to follow in the footprints of these ministers that, during apartheid, it was different. During the apartheid era the people of South Africa had to use everything at their disposal to fight apartheid to its end. Some of these ministers have even served in the parliament of National unity or the first democratic parliament of South Africa. The DRMC also has this regulation in its church order, namely Regulation 132 1.1.4 (Church Order and Supplementary Regulations of DRMC 1990). Ministers of the DRCA were aware of Art 9 and Regulation 12.3.2 of the GS of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) which clearly states that ministers of the Word can forfeit their status if they avail themselves as candidates for a political party (Church Order and Supplementary Regulations of DRCA 1991). Based on the above argument, both the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the former DRCA as well as URCSA worked with the same premise with regard to ministers availing themselves as candidates for a political party. As clause 3.2 regarding the status states, specifically the forfeiture of status in terms of involvement in party politics, it was discussed during the April 1994 synod for approval to become regulation for URCSA ministers, but in the same breath the list of candidates was long completed before the regulation was in place. It is a fact that ministers from DRCA and DRMC were aware of the situation, but the candidates from the ranks of ministers of the Word of URCSA did not know what the decision of the April 1994 synod would be regarding ministers and party politics. Second, it is important to note that the two sister churches decided before 14 April 1994 to become one church. Hence I maintain that the list of all candidates for political appointments after the national election of 27 April 1994 was complete before the establishment of URCSA on the 14 April 1994. According to the rule of law, the new law cannot be enforced on the person who was in the system before the law or the regulation was introduced. This is called the transitional provision; based on this provision the said ministers should be exempt from Regulation 4(3.2). The following section will discuss the reformed thinking around faith and politics to justify Regulation 4(3.2).



### **Reformed tradition's understanding of faith and politics**

Within the reformed tradition, we find different approaches. Like Luther, Calvin distinguished between a civil and spiritual regiment, but at the same time he differed from Luther, stressing the inner coherence of two regiments. This coherence corresponds with the coherence between law and gospel in Calvin's thought, and consequently with the characteristic reformed belief in the sovereignty of the law of God over life in its totality. Within this context the Word of God gets an all-embracing function.<sup>6</sup>

Through the Word the spiritual regiment should bring the worldly regiment in submission to the regiment of Christ. This is the unique contribution of Calvin to the very difficult problem of the two regiments. The two regiments are bound together by the sovereignty of Christ, but the first regiment and therefore the faith community retains priority. For in the faith community Christ reigns directly through Word and Spirit and only through the proclamation of this same Word does his reign extend to government and society. From this follows the conviction that the faith community as the bearer of the Word has a prophetic task vis-à-vis government.

This sounds rather straightforward to those who accept and share the Reformed belief in the sovereignty of Christ in all spheres of life. There are, however, two basic problems that have to be faced before speaking too glibly about the prophetic voice of the faith community in matters that affect government and society. The first problem is the fact that within the reformed tradition the inner coherence between the regiments never annihilates the distinction of the two. Accordingly, both the faith community and the government as embodiments of the two regiments have their own functions and power – each within its own sphere. The question therefore is: In what way should the prophetic voice of the Church be heard in view of the sphere-sovereignty of government? The second problem is even more serious than the first. It concerns the method in which the faith community should proclaim the Word of God vis-à-vis government, bearing in mind that the faith community cannot proclaim the Word without first having understood the Word of God for a concrete and specific situation. In other words, we are faced with the most difficult of all theological problems: the hermeneutical problem.

In combination, the two problems should be read as follows: How are the ethical norms of the Scripture to be understood in a specific political situation? And in which way should the faith community confront government and individual politicians with these norms without over-stepping their boundaries into the political arena? Based on the nature of these problems we should not be surprised that, in the history of the reformed faith, different

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<sup>6</sup> Durand, "The prophetic task of the Church vis-à-vis the state", 5.

answers have been given and different systems have been developed, although all of them understood themselves as legitimate continuations of the original starting point of Calvin. There are three important Calvinistic models: the Kuyperian model, the Barthian model and the Van Ruler's model. In this paper the author will attempt to find the solution from the Kuyperian and Barthian models.

Durand (1981), referring to Kuyper, states that the faith community is more than an institution. The faith community is not even an institution in the first place, because if it was an institution, then it would compete with other institutions like government and school. More than anything, it is an organism, consisting of regenerated human beings who move and live in all spheres of life. This is the truth faith community. Kuyper even identifies it with the invisible faith community (Durand 1981:7). Living in all spheres of life, this rebirth of human beings has to exercise its influence even by means of Christian organisations (in the South African context faith-based organisations under a department of social development). With respect to the life of government, this implies the formation of a Christian political party, by means of which the invisible faith community of true believers exercises influence.

The institutional faith community has no direct function in this respect. The influence of the institution on the life of the people, society and government will always be indirect, via the faith community as an organism of believers. This fact implies, furthermore, that in Kuyper's view the prophetic calling of the faith community in political matters is not primarily that of the institution, but of the organism (Durand 1981:5). The tension between the faith community and government is reduced to a minimum. The struggle to maintain Christian norms in the political sphere is to be waged by the Christian political party as the prophetic mouthpiece. This kind of conclusion can be drawn and has been drawn by some of Kuyper's epigones, especially in South Africa. Throughout the ages the followers of Kuyper in South Africa have had the problem that, due to historical and other circumstances, only one part of the Kuyperian model has been copied in South Africa. The formation of a strong Christian political party was never realised until the democratic election of 1994 where political parties like the United Christian Democratic Party and African Christian Democratic Party were formed, but with ulterior motives.

According to Durand (1981), Barth in his model uses the image of two concentric circles to explain his line of thought. The Christian congregation forms the inner, smaller circle, and the civil congregation the bigger outer circle. The common hub of these two circles is Jesus Christ and the proclaimed Kingdom of God. What then is the relationship between the two concentric circles and their common centre, and between the two circles themselves? Barth's answer is that the light of God's kingdom falls on the

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faith community and from there is reflected onto government. The relationship is analogous by nature. By virtue of the common centre, government has the right of existence as a paradigm, as an analogy of the kingdom of God as it is proclaimed in the faith community. In this respect the political responsibility of the Christian congregation emerges. Through its existence and through its proclamation of the Word, the faith community must remind government of the kingdom of God, so that government can become a mirror-image and paradigm of the kingdom of God. The true and successful government finds in the true and successful faith community its primordial example.

According to Durand (1981), Barth does not align himself with the notion of the establishment of the Christian political party. He asked whether there can be any other Christian "party" in the government apart from the Christian congregation itself, whose task embraces the totality of government and society. He argues: that which is Christian can never become directly visible in the political sphere. It can only do so as a mirror image and a paradigm. In practice, it may well happen that the Christian message can become an embarrassment for a Christian political party if it is not able to find political room for that message. It is therefore possible that a Christian political party may compromise the Christian congregation and its message. Therefore, Christians must always act anonymously in the political field.

The anonymity of the Christian in the political sphere, however, finds its pendant in a speaking faith community. In the faith community the preaching becomes a political act and a good congregation will understand the political sense even though no word is said about politics. But the faith community does not only speak through its preaching. It is part of the duty of the faith community to make its political decisions known by means of notification from the pulpit and other official channels. In this regard the faith community should see to it that it does not awake from its apolitical sleep only when the government lotteries and desecration of a Sunday are at stake. Even more important than all these is the necessity for the faith community to be truly a faith community. Within government the faith community speaks loudest through what it is. In this sense the faith community as such is a political factor.

When the two models of Kuyper and Barth, both of which claim continuity with the original idea of Calvin, are compared, it becomes evident that whereas the Kuyperian model combines the active Christian witness in the political field with an almost silent faith community, the Barthian model does almost the opposite: a speaking or prophetic faith community is combined with silent Christians as Christians. Their political actions and witnessing, they do anonymously. Christians should strive to be the salt of the earth on Monday, politically, socially and economically. For that matter, he may even organise a political party. But the voice of the political party can

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never be a substitute for the prophetic voice of the faith community or a Minister of the Word.

**The motive behind Regulation 4(3.2) on the status of ministers of the Word**

In this article I have chosen to follow Djupe and Gilbert (2003) to measure the effectiveness of ministers of the Word participating in politics. They mentioned four measures to evaluate these effects on ministers of the Word's political efficacy, frequency of church-based political activity and approval of political activity:

- Perceived congregational approval of the political activity;
- Discouraging attitudes of the congregation towards clergy's political activity;
- Discouragement based on the reactions of potential members;
- General ideological differences between clergy and congregation as perceived by clergy.

Taking the above measures into consideration then, there is a question which remains: Do ministers of the Word represent their denomination or faith tradition for themselves, their congregation or a combination of these? Which set of interests dominates and on what issues? Djupe and Gilbert (2003:11) argue that:

Few clergy approve of direct involvement in the electoral politics by religious institutions (on theological as well as constitutional and legal grounds), but many more clergy approve of and justify actions that are more civic in orientation. As we will see, these clergy place heavy, though not exclusive, emphasis on discussion of issues and activities that inform constituents of all kinds.

Moreover, ministers of the Word at times see themselves as working in the interests of their congregations. This is generally what Blizzard (1958:374) referred to as an integrative role. However, previous studies of ministers of the Word and political action have largely missed this aspect, assuming that political activity is issue based rather than interest based. If one views, from an interest-based perspective, a black minister protesting racial discrimination in part because of strong civil rights convictions, but also as a way to advocate for the interests of the congregation in ending discrimination. To avoid the minister from being attached to a political party the church chose to be the salt and the light of the world and ministers need to be salt crystals or light rays

that penetrate through the world in all directions without limitation or political party boundaries.

The author also needs to look into the attributes of a Minister of the Word while dealing with the motive for Regulation 4(3.2). Some of the direct conflict between ministers of the Word and their congregations is mitigated by the Minister of the Word's attributes such as tenure on the job, the duties of the position, and denominational affiliation. For instance, one new Minister of the Word suggested that politics is not a high priority: "I have not been at this church that long and have other more immediate issues to address." But these factors are not always consistent predictors, and the direction of the relationships cannot be easily assumed. For example, ministers of the Word who have long service experience in the ministry are more politically active, but believe they have less capacity to influence their congregation. Ministers of the Word with long service in their present congregation are also more politically active in the church, but long-serving ministers of the Word are less approving of a Minister of the Word's political activity (Djupe and Gilbert 2003:62-3). In this sense the attributes of a Minister of the Word contribute positively towards the prohibition of a Minister of the Word to be actively involved in party politics. Serving in a church is thought to allow ministers of the Word to build credit or political capital that they can then expend on political activity, but being linked to a political organisation might discredit a Minister of the Word.

Furthermore, the research of Djupe and Gilbert (2003) illustrates that this is exactly what occurs, even as ministers of the Word (Clergy) become more sceptical of political activity and of their own ability to affect congregational attitudes. Moreover, decreases in political efficacy, political activity, and Minister of the Word approval of political activity are associated with minister beliefs that the duties of their position discourage political action, indicating that ministers of the Word are busy people but also probably reflecting an underlying belief that politics and religion should be mixed with caution.

There is also a need from the author to look into the congregational characteristics while dealing with the motive for Regulation 4(3.2) in the Church Order and regulations of the General Synod. Ministers of the Word should be made to understand and appreciate the internal dynamics of their congregations. Internal conflicts can be exposed and exacerbated by a Minister of the Word's political activities. Horror stories abound about congregations dividing over minor or major theological issues, splitting over political issues such as homosexual rights, and falling to pieces because of the actions of a Minister of the Word or other church officials. Therefore, it is expected that a Minister of the Word should avoid politics when the congregation is divided (Djupe and Gilbert 2003:63). In that sense, URCSA as a church that confesses Belhar Confession, which emphasises unity, recon-

ciliation and justice, cannot afford to promote divisions or splits within her congregations by allowing her ministers to be actively involved in party politics. Hence the General Synod Church order and regulation of URCSA enforcing Regulation 4(3.2) on the forfeiture of the status of Minister of the Word in terms of availing or accepting party political responsibilities.

### Conclusion

I want to conclude by saying, based on the workload of a minister, the congregational characteristics and a minister's attributes, it is very complex for a Minister of the Word to be actively involved in party politics. Reformed theologians have also shown that it is not easy to belong to a political party, hence Abram Kuyper suggests the Christian political party and Karl Barth question the notion of Christian political parties by saying that there is no better Christian political organisation than a congregation and Christians, let alone ministers of the Word. Their political actions and witnessing, they should do anonymously.

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