

**The evaluation of Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in relation to
the three marks of the church: Discipline in the Southern synod**

by

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Declaration

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I Jurie Billy Pitikoe declare that, **THE EVALUATION OF UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA IN RELATION TO THE THREE MARKS OF THE CHURCH: DISCIPLINE IN THE SOUTHERN SYNOD** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Date 08/05/2016

JB Pitikoe

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Psalm 103:2 "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits"

Abstract

Christian life today has been influenced by countless influences from the external world. Although these external factors have a significant bearing on the church of Christ, the greatest challenge however manifests itself from within the latter. Where the core doctrine of the church constitutes issues of theological and Christian importance, they seem to slowly dissipate and the practices of the secular world seem to take ownership of the church of Christ. The Reformed church has within its confines the three marks of the church whose sole purpose is to ensure that the church of God remains and continues to be the true church of Christ. These Three Marks are: (a) the proclamation of the Word; (b) the correct administration of the sacraments, and (c) the correct exercise of discipline. Among the three marks, discipline acts as a catalyst that enables the survival and proper continuance of the other two marks and thus the true church of Christ.

These Three Marks prescribe the basic fundamentals of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) as a Reformed Church and thereby serve as a primary tool for this church. Discipline, therefore, forms an intrinsic part of this church. However, as a controlling mechanism, its influence and/or instillation appears to be neglected. This quagmire may very well be attested to the overemphasis of democracy (of/or relating to majority rule doctrine) in preference to theocracy (God as the ultimate authority in our lives), where even matters of high religious stature are being compacted to human decision-making processes. These influences needless to say are key in the regression and/or progression of Christian life and life in general. However, their inclusion within the Christian doctrine should not be cumbersome to the latter. The Christian way of life and doctrines should be holistically adhered to without fear or favour.

The main purpose behind the formation of these marks by the Reformed church was to sustain the true church of Christ and the only way to ensure this sustainability, was to be consistent in exercising these marks. The church therefore has an obligation towards God and its members to be consistent in carrying out its mandate from God through the scriptures as the creator and father of the church and the world at large. The premonition that forms the basis of this research is that within the three prevalent marks of the church, there appears to

be certain discrepancies in that they are not all carried out in unison and are not consistent with each other. With the over-emphasis of one above the other, the church of God could be heading towards vanity, and all its efforts could be fruitless. It is also my conviction that the starting point for rolling out these three marks lie with the leadership of the church by the General Synod, Regional Synods, Presbyteries, Ministers and their church councils. If found that any of these key adherents are not protagonists of these marks, then they would have neglected their God-entrusted responsibilities and their accountability towards the entire community of believers. It is in this regard that this research seeks to implement a *litmus test* of where the URCSA stands in terms of executing its mandate with relation to the three marks of the church viz; proclaiming the word, administering the sacraments and more importantly, exercising discipline as these marks form the sinew that binds the entire church together.

The church of Christ as an entity is engaged in service, which is not to be haphazard in nature, but must be structured. This service begins with serving God, serving one another and finally serving the world at large. This will ensure that the church of God maintains its holiness. For this holiness to be ensured, the church of God has to be open to discernment and allow God take charge of His church. Such uncertainties can be verified only by looking into discipline as the sinew that brings these three marks together. The reason for this approach is that, the first two marks are prescriptive with more parameters than discipline has, whereas discipline can be easily influenced. It is to the benefit of this task that much attention be given to discipline as the last mark of the three, as it is prone to abuse, because it relies mainly on human behaviour, attitude and/or approach to the Christian life. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to outline the possible disintegration of discipline as the sinew that binds the three marks of the Reformed Church in general and URCSA in particular within the Southern Synod. It is important to note that discipline in the lower strata of the church is carried out religiously without question. The notion that prompted this topic is that contrarily, those who occupy the highest echelons of the church (leadership in the church, ministers and evangelists) do not appear to be enjoying the same reception regarding discipline. The challenge that faces the URCSA is how to maintain equal treatment of the three marks of the true church in a democratic society in the light of the service of God, one another and the world.

Keywords

Church / Ecclesia

Three Marks of the Church

Discipline

Confessions

Democracy

Theocracy

Church Order

Presbytery

Southern Synod

General Synod

Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

A study of any of the aspects of religious experience, both inside and outside the Church in general, in particular, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), would consist of exercises in gathering diverse data which would require quantitative sifting, ordering and compiling into a scheme of hypothetical data. These seemingly impressive philosophical and theological constructs of data usually present insurmountable impediments regarding the practical utilisation and applicability of religious knowledge in everyday life. Another approach is to collect a large quantity of data in a short space of time, assuming that such data can be directly demonstrated, utilised and applied in the religious life of the people of South Africa in general, and in particular in the URCSA, during this period. The main concerns with the latter approach are not only the quality of skills transferred to religious people, but also the sustainability of empowerment being effectuated in the lives of religious people. The focus of this dissertation falls on the identification of the Christian Church with special emphasis on the three marks of the church relating to the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments and the administration of discipline. The key problem here is that the church as a social organisation has aligned itself more with the preaching of the Word and sharing of the Bread, while under-emphasising the discipline of her members. From a theoretical perspective, the church places greater emphasis on systematic theology (doctrinal teaching through the Word) and under emphasizes the theological ethics in the church. The URCSA in the Southern Synod was the investigative centre for this research study.

1.1.1 The approach in the thesis

A qualitative approach was chosen for this research study. The approach followed in this particular study emerged and was developed from a personal involvement and engagement with the Christian religious life as the son of the minister of the Word in the URCSA, also as a full member of the URCSA Mofolo congregation in Soweto South Africa, and finally, as a theological student of the URCSA in the Northern Theological Seminary, with the hope of being a minister of the Word,

pastor, faith leader and faith consultant within the respective church. This involvement and engagement was set in direct relation to the URCSA as the Reformed church that needs to be evaluated in terms of the three marks of the church. The framework for this research study fell within the ethical-ecclesiological approach.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this research study, the researcher wishes to draw the attention of the reader to the spiralling disengagement of the church, in particular, from matters affecting discipline as the sinew that binds the three marks of the church together. Gaillardetz (2010:99) argues that, the medieval political theorists like John of Paris and Marsilius of Padua challenged the view that monarchy was the highest form of government. Their call for the rights of all the people to participate in government would inevitably be applied to the church as a social body. This political situation during the medieval era has influenced the church to adopt the same governance structure as the political government. The papacy was the ecclesiastical monarchy, where the pope held the right and authority to discipline all members and officials of the church without any question.

As time progressed, there was a shift from monarchy to democracy. This shift has also impacted the church governance where the church was governed by God, through delegated powers where God anoints His people to govern the church under His guidance through the Word and sacraments. The church meetings take the place of the pope who used to discipline the church members through consensus or votes in the meeting as the highest decision making body. The central problem here is the over-emphasis of democracy in preference to theocracy in the URCSA as an ailment that has consumed the moral fibre of congregations and their ministers within the URCSA, thus impeding them from performing their role as the representative of the body of Christ. This is an infirmity that has crafted a new setting that has moulded Christians and their beliefs to consider themselves superior to the Word of God. This indisposition has occurred as a result of the misuse of the Bill of Human Rights, which in return has had a far-reaching aftermath regarding the Word of God. With this in mind, the charisma of the church has thus been institutionalised.

This quagmire has inter-alia been exacerbated by the lack of discipline within the church ambits, and the challenge that this creates for the church is that, with the absence of discipline, the fortress of the Word of God could be eroded. Whilst the dominant approach of this church in the use of the Word and sacraments remains, the intended approach of this proclamation could gradually fail when discipline fails to assume the critical role that it is predestined to play. This in itself has created a disconnection and inequality among these three marks of the church, which needs an expeditious intervention if it is to be remedied

so as to prevent the church from being vain or fruitless. In this way, the renewal of the saints is accomplished, and the body of Christ is edified; in this way we grow up in all things unto him who is the Head, and unite with one another; in this way we are all brought into the unity of Christ, provided prophecy flourishes among us, provided we receive his apostles, and despise not the doctrine which is administered to us (Calvin, 2009:701).

The church therefore has a standing obligation to look after God's community irrespective of race, culture, creed, political affiliation, social relations, economic background and thought processes, by ensuring that the Lord's Word is proclaimed at all times, that the sacraments are served within its confines and that discipline is exercised incessantly to its incumbents because God "has appointed pastors and teachers, by whose lips he might edify his people...he has invested them with authority, and, in short, omitted nothing that might conduce to holy consent in the faith and to right order" (Calvin, 2009:672).

The members and ministers of the URCSA, are therefore urged to practise Calvin's proclaimed principle; that as a church they need to fearlessly promote and equally hold steadfast to the three marks of the true Christian church. Arguing from the above stance, there should be an interconnectedness among the three marks of the church, meaning that, the Word is "the flesh (body of Christ)", the sacrament is "the body of Christ" and members are also "the body of Christ". Therefore, the three need to be viewed with the same lens in terms of their influence on the growth of the church. This central problem that arises from this principle can be subdivided into the following sub-problems:

- The over-emphasis of the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments without proper discipline of the members and ministers.

- The democratic way of doing things, as against the theocratic way, where the Word of God is listened to, and the people of God adhere to the Word of God.

An area of concern is whether the URCSA with all its levels of operation and governance is actively involved in preaching the Word of God, administering sacraments and displaying proper discipline to the church and the world. The problem that this research study attempts to address focuses on the following question:

How can the URCSA maintain the equal treatment of the three marks of the true church in the democratic society in the light of the service of God, service to one another and the world?

Several related questions arise from the above question:

- What is a Christian church in the Reformed tradition?
- How does the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments impact on the discipline of the members of the URCSA?
- What is the impact of the leadership style and church governance of the URCSA on the discipline of the members and office bearers in the Church and the world?
- In what way can the URCSA control, reinstate and renew the ethical conduct of its members in relation to the word, sacraments and discipline of members?

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS

The aims of this research study are focused on the research questions formulated as follows:

Aim 1: To conduct a literature investigation to define and clarify the concept of the church in the Reformed tradition within the perimeters of this study.

Aim 2: To determine which types of governance and management style are used in the URCSA and how they impact on the discipline.

Aim 3: To investigate how the impact of the three marks of the church can influence each other to instil discipline in the members and office bearers.

Aim 4: To investigate how the URCSA controls, reinstates and renews the ethical conduct of its members and office bearers in relation to the word, sacraments and discipline of the members.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

The purpose of this dissertation is to outline the disintegration of discipline as the sinew of the three marks of the Reformed Church in general and in particular the URCSA within the Southern Synod. These three marks determine the basic essentials of the URCSA as a Reformed Church and thereby serve as a governing apparatus for the latter. Discipline, therefore, forms an intrinsic part of this church. However, as a controlling mechanism, its influence and/or instillation appear to be neglected. This quagmire may very well be attested to the overemphasis of democracy (of/or relating to majority rule doctrine) in preference to theocracy (God as the ultimate authority in our lives), where even matters of high religious stature are being compacted to human decision-making processes. If the community of believers of the URCSA held the belief that they were servants of God and upheld the theocratic doctrine within the church, then even the Lord's appointees would definitely know and relate to the fact that they are not the final decision makers in any matter, for they are only the servants of God. They would also behave in accordance with what has been written in scripture (e.g. Matthew 18:15-17) for those who believe that whatever they do, represent God and accept His presence and final authority.

With the demise of discipline, specifically within the URCSA, this research attempted to uproot the problem that causes this disintegration, though not to reinvent the wheel and create another policy framework. The researcher identified the ambiguities that relate to discipline, which manifest themselves in the broader governance structure of the church. This would thereby rehabilitate and remind those who are in leadership positions of the church of their God entrusted responsibilities and their accountability towards the entire community of believers to ensure strict adherence to the three marks of the church without fear or favour.

1.5 RESEARCH METHOD

This research project followed qualitative and inductive approaches. Data were collected through field work which comprised informal interviews, observation and document analysis as well as the theoretical study of relevant literature in the area of investigation. The investigation was not conducted only in the URCSA within the Southern Synod, but also the URCSA in general so as to trace the behaviour of members and office bearers from the history of this church, looking into the methods used in the church meetings, namely discernment or the parliamentary system of dealing with issues. If discernment is the 'preferred system' to be used in the URCSA church meetings, then the closest form of discernment the church has come close to is found in Article 7 of the Church Order which states that:

Jesus Christ rules his Church through his Word and the Holy Spirit. The office of believers forms the basis of all other offices in the Church. For this reason, the congregation itself elects a Church Council consisting of deacons and elders from among its practicing [sic] members. The Church Council is entrusted with the management (running), supervision and discipline of the congregation and the leadership in the various ministries in the congregation.

Through discernment, the church meeting will discern the will of God through engagement in the word of God, while the Holy Spirit enlightens the members to understand and apply the word of God in order to make decisions that affect the church.

1.5.1 Literature study

Acknowledging that there is very limited research in systematic theology, not only about the lack of discipline in the modern so-called secular world that affects the church life and in particular the URCSA in the Southern Synod, but also about the typical churchist elements in the churches, relevant literature in the area of investigation was explored so as to gain important insights from the findings of other researchers. Informal interviews and observations were also employed alongside the literature study, especially regarding the decision making process of the church meetings, such as Church Councils; Presbyteries and Synods. The researcher's lifelong involvement in this church places him in a privileged position to view the elements of the church, enabling the him to clarify his subject of research, namely: The evaluation of Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

in relation to the three marks of the Church: discipline in the Southern Synod. Primary and secondary sources, which include books, theology journals and newspapers have been thoroughly studied. The DIALOGUE Search at the library in the University of South Africa was conducted using the following descriptors: The Word of God; Church: Sacraments; Eucharist; Holy Communion; Confessions; Discipline; Church governance; Church Order; Theocracy; Democracy; Discernment; parliamentary and Synod. Here, invaluable information on research methods was obtained from empirical research.

1.5.2 Qualitative research methods

The over-emphasis of the Word of God and administration of the sacraments as against the administration of discipline in the URCSA in general and Southern Synod in particular as the investigative epicentre lends itself to qualitative research which allowed for informal interviews and observations to be used in the research, which allowed for rich more in depth data. In other words, it was better for the researcher to conduct one to one interviews with church members, elders; faith leaders and ministers. This relied on the inductive mode of data presentation, analysis and synthesis. The major objective of this research method was to explore or discover the notion that there was possibly an over-emphasis on preaching and the administration of sacraments and an under-emphasis on discipline in the URCSA in general and the Southern synod in particular. The qualitative paradigm in its broadest sense refers to research that elicits participants' accounts of meanings, experience and perceptions while it also produces descriptive accounts in the participant's own written and spoken words (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh: 2006:450).

1.5.3 Interviews

A phenomenological approach was used to collect data through interviews and observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of people from different meetings of the URCSA within the Southern Synod. The questions concerned the history of the URCSA in relation to discipline, their understanding of the use of the Word of God, confessions and church order, while the administration of discipline in the Church and the confession of Belhar is understood in relation to discipline in the church. The problem with the members

of the URCSA is firstly that they are living in the country where human rights and human dignity are emphasised; secondly, this church originates from the struggle for liberation in South Africa (meaning, from the background of black liberation theology as against church theology and white theology of South Africa). It is important to take note that the impact that discipline will or will not have pertaining to the running of the church will be influenced by this perspective. In this research, interviews were conducted to check the level of understanding on the three marks of the church in order to gather data from people with experience in the URCSA within the Southern Synod.

1.5.4 Observation

In this study, observation was used to collect data on the the evaluation of Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in relation to the three marks of the Church: discipline in the Southern Synod. Briggs and Coleman (2007:237) regard observation as the most powerful, flexible, and 'real' data collection strategy because unlike a survey, it is not dependent on the personal views of the respondents, but seeks explicit evidence through the eyes of the observer directly or through a camera lens. It is a holistic approach concerning the observation of 'everyday' events as well as the description and construction of meaning thereof. In this regard, where possible, the researcher was an observer at the church meetings with the special permission from the delegates since those meetings that deal with discipline are conducted behind closed doors, unlike the ordinary meetings.

1.5.5 Documents analysis

The researcher engaged in studying and analysing the following documents pertinent to the study: the minutes of the meetings of the churches; the presbytery and synod; the synod agenda; reports and the Acta (Decisions) alongside the church order and supplementary regulations, as well as all the documents used when a disciplinary hearing or an appeal to the presbytery or the synod is held

1.5.6 Population

The population for this study comprised the URCSA members of the church meetings, elders, ministers and the leaders of the church. The focus of this research fell on the URCSA Southern Synod in particular. The samples were

drawn from the members of the Moderamen, Synodical Commission and the Support Ministry for Judicial Matters (SMJM), who deal with discipline or cases first hand. The SMJM reviews all the cases referred to it in relation to the church law and the Word of God and the Moderamen facilitates the meeting that handles the cases or discipline of the members in the form of an appeal. The synodical commission is the decision making body which acts on behalf of the synod during the recess, because the synod convenes every four years as prescribed in the Church Order. The researcher focused on two case studies that were handled by the synodical commission of the Southern Synod. One case was based on the ethical life style of the minister of the Word and the other one was based on administration within the office of the synod.

1.6 VALIDITY OF THE STUDY

The validity of a measurement is the extent to which the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. A test is valid if it measures what it purports to measure. Validity is a degree to which a test is capable of achieving certain aims. The instrument will be valid if it is capable of achieving the aims of this research study. Validity in qualitative research is concerned with soundness and the effectiveness of the measuring instrument (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001:31).

Earlier versions of validity according to Cohen, Manion & Morison (2007:132) and Ary, et al. (2006:243) were based on the view that it was a demonstration that a particular data-gathering instrument in fact measures what it is supposed to measure. The focus of recent views of validity does not fall on the instrument itself, but on the interpretation and the meaning of the scores derived from the instrument.

In qualitative research, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:407), validity rests primarily within the honesty, depth, richness, and scope of data collection and data analysis techniques. It means that if the above processes are adhered to from the beginning of the study, validity will be enhanced.

The strategies advocated by Johnson and Christensen (2004:249-256) and McMillan and Schumacher (2001:407-410) to enhance validity in qualitative research are participant review, mechanically recorded data, persistent field work,

participant verbatim language (the words of the interviewee as they are), multiple researchers, member checking, low-inference descriptors, and triangulation. Triangulation allows for cross-validation among data sources and data collection strategies, time periods, and theoretical schemes (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:478). To find regularities, the researcher compares different sources, situations and methods to see whether the same pattern keeps recurring.

A language that was easily understood by the participants was also used, which aided clarity in the interviews. For this study, the above mentioned strategies to enhance validity were employed.

1.7 RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY

Reliability of the measurement instrument is the extent to which it yields consistent results when the characteristics being measured remain unchanged throughout (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001:99). Reliability is the ability of a test to achieve similar results under similar conditions and measure whatever it is supposed to measure in order to produce equivalent scores. Reliability deals with matters of accuracy. In qualitative research it requires and embraces the truth and neutrality of the setting being observed.

These elements of reliability were taken into consideration during this investigation. The multiple methods of data collection and data analysis enabled the researcher to record the actual, natural, and comprehensive meaning of settings and to eliminate any researcher bias, thereby rendering the findings more accurate and reliable.

1.8 RESEARCH ETHICS

Whenever human beings are the focus of an investigation, the ethical implications of what the researcher proposes to do must be considered. Most ethical issues in research fall into one of four categories, namely: protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001:107). Research ethics, according to Johnson and Christensen (2004:94), are principles and guidelines that help researchers to uphold the things

researchers regard as valuable. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:420) state that the qualitative researcher needs to be sensitive to ethical principles because of their research topic, face-to-face interactive data collection process, an emergent design, and reciprocity with participants.

Emergent designs require that ethical principles be considered throughout all phases of planning and data collection. Most ethical situations require the researcher to determine situational priorities, which involve discussions with the participants. Ethical guidelines include, but are not limited to, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and privacy. In terms of the topic that underpins this research study, it was of paramount importance to uphold ethical issues due to the sensitivity of the topic and the documents that were analysed. Dealing with discipline in the church is very critical because moral and ethical issues are at stake and the researcher was aware that he was dealing not only with church documents, but also with the unique dignity of the people involved in these matters.

Confidentiality, trust, respect, anonymity, care and love were maintained on the basis that all human beings are created in the image of God, despite their sins. These are the ethical values that the researcher maintained throughout when conducting this research and writing this report. The researcher issued a consent form to the participants, which assured them that their information was confidential and their names would not be revealed in the research study. There were no financial benefits, but the researcher is sure that the participants grew in knowledge concerning cultism and Christianity. The researcher was aware of the difficulties in changing the views and the mindset of people who have blind faith or irrational faith.

1.9 THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

CHAPTER 1: This chapter introduces the thesis and furnishes a background thereto. The problem statement, research aims, research method, population and sample of the study are discussed in brief and offers direction to the journey throughout the research study.

CHAPTER 2: In this chapter the researcher journeys through the relevant literature to find out how other researchers have approached the church identification in relation to the three marks of the church and how the society and the philosophy of the day influence the church in terms of its affairs, moreover, in administering discipline to its members. The over-emphasis of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments in the context of discipline are discussed in this chapter as the key research problem.

CHAPTER 3: This chapter focuses on the research design and the research method of this study as the ways of augmenting the limited information in the literature study in terms of over-emphasis of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments in preference to discipline within the three marks that identify the true church of Christ in the Reformed tradition. The validity and reliability of data and research ethical consideration are also explained. The research design of the current investigation is clearly infused and fully elaborated on throughout the discussions in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: In this chapter, the researcher presents the information that was collected from informal interviews, observations and document analysis. The information is analysed and interpreted in terms of the three marks of the church as discussed in Chapter 2 by various authors. The researcher notes that there are imbalances in the functionality of the three marks of the church and these imbalances allows for the amplification and exercise of other marks above the others.

CHAPTER 5: Finally, in this chapter the researcher presents the findings based on the aims of the research study and the research questions. These findings allow the researcher to forward the recommendations to resolve the existing problem. The chapter concludes with a summary in the form of a future solution to the problem.

1.10 SUMMARY

Christian life today has been influenced by myriad external influences. These influences are key in the regression and/or progression of Christian life and life in general. However, their inclusion within the Christian doctrine should not be cumbersome to the latter. The Christian way of life and doctrines should be

holistically adhered to without fear or favour. The Reformed church identified these three marks as a guiding tool towards its upkeep and sustainability, and in so doing the key principle in this matter is consistency. The church therefore has an obligation towards God and its members to be consistent in carrying out its mandate from God through the scriptures as the creator and father of the church and the world at large. The basis of this research is that within the three prevalent marks of the church, there appears to be some discrepancies in that they are not all carried out in unison and not consistent with each other. With the over-emphasis of one above the other, the church of God could be unbalanced deeming its efforts fruitless. It is also the conviction of the researcher that the starting point for rolling out these three marks lies with the leaders of the church from the general synod, regional synods, presbyteries, ministers and their church councils. If it is found that any of these key adherents are not protagonists of these marks, then they would have neglected their God entrusted responsibilities and their accountability towards the entire community of believers. It is in this regard that this research sought to implement a *litmus test* of where the URCSA stands in terms of executing its mandate in relation to the three marks of the church, namely proclaiming the word, administering sacraments and more importantly, exercising discipline as these marks form the sinew that binds the entire church together. Much attention was paid to discipline as the last mark of the three, as it is prone to abuse, because it relies mainly on human behaviour, attitude and/or approach to the Christian life.

CHAPTER 2

THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE URCSA IN TERMS OF THREE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), together with all other denominations of the church of Christ, has the purpose to minister to the holistic life of all human beings by preaching, instructing, and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God, and lastly, by being of service to others and the world. This purpose is achieved most effectively when good order and proper discipline are maintained by means of certain offices as well as theological and liturgical standards. The church order provides a way for members of the URCSA to live and work together as the body of Christ in an orderly manner, following the admonition that

all things be done decently and in order. Order is a way to express church unity and achieve cooperation and harmony in the body of Christ as the church seek to fulfil its mission. It is in doing our theology to live out in the manner we live and work together to testify Jesus is Lord (Church Order of the URCSA, 2012:5).

The basic functions of the URCSA as per Article five (5); Article seven (7) and Article nine (9) of the Church Order of the URCSA are to proclaim the Word; administer the sacraments, and deal with disciplinary matters in the church and the world. This church as the rehabilitated church of Christ has always been encircled by these basic essentials of faith that marks the true ascendancy of the church as they are mentioned in the above articles. These three inscriptions consist of

- (1) the word of God (and the Gospel) that is preached and taught,
- (2) to ensure that the sacraments of the church are rightly administered (namely baptism and the Lord's Supper) and (3)
- church discipline is faithfully exercised (Samson, 2012).

Discipline, therefore resembles a contrivance, which guides the church towards a true religious harmony within its confines. It is in this regard that proclamation, administration of sacraments, and ministry are closely related doctrines (Migliore,

2004:274). Taking this relatedness seriously, it is therefore, imperative that this faith community enacts upon these intrinsic marks of the true church without fear of favour putting the URCSA to the test.

If this ill representation of certain aspects of the three marks of the church manifests and endures, the outcome thereof will certainly be detrimental to the faith of all believers and thus lead to the demise of the church. Hence, this doctrine perpetuates the notion that the faith community must be active and socially responsible both in faith and towards fellow believers. Therefore, exercising this character will facilitate good citizenry among this faith community, as taught by John Calvin in Konig and Lederle (2005:24) that a faith which does not produce external works and the progressive sanctification of the whole human being cannot justify human being. This notion is accentuated by the discipline of believers as outlined in St. Matthew 18:15-17, where Christ amplifies the aspect of discipline among believers and the church alike. In this study, the researcher conducted an investigation into the extent to which the URCSA as the church of Christ and the church of order adheres to these three marks of the true church.

2.2 THE OVERVIEW HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The URCSA is the offspring of the two Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) daughters as the result of various foreign mission organisations which started working in South Africa, and subsequently led to the formation of a number of denominations among those people who otherwise would have been excluded from the main churches. This process motivated the DRC in South Africa to start its own independent mission work. In 1857 the NGK (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) synod decided to have separate services for coloured members. The origin of the URCSA is derived from the DRC mission work via the establishment of DRMC (Dutch Reformed Mission Church) and DRCA (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa) that united on the 14 April 1994 to form the URCSA. They were, and are, both black and white churches in the Dutch Reformed block. These were:

The DRC, with two-and- half million white members, was the largest of the three. This was, in fact, the oldest, autonomous denomination in South Africa, having become independent of its mother church in the Netherlands in 1824. It commenced mission work among the

indigenous peoples of South Africa in 1826, among the black people of South Africa in 1826, as a result of which the three black churches of this block were created.

A separate church, the *Dutch Reformed Mission Church* (DRMC) was formed in 1881 which comprised people of mixed race, known both officially and popularly as coloureds and with a membership of 573 400 in 1970.

The DRCA for African people, founded in 1963 as an offshoot of the DRMC with a membership of 924 000. In 1994 it should be known, these two churches attempted, once more, to join together with the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).

The Reformed Church in Africa for Indian people, founded in 1968. Its membership totaled only a few thousand (Best, 2002: xxii – xxiii).

From since 1957 onwards, these churches were linked to a Federal Council of the Dutch Reformed Church, who met once every four years for consultation. In 1982, this body was transformed into a General Synod with some limited jurisdiction and which, from then on, met every two years. Its member churches were separated on ethnic lines, which was very much in line with the doctrines of apartheid, although these ethnic divisions were also in line with that strand of thinking in the international missionary movement which favoured the creation of three-self churches. Although they were born of apartheid thinking, in time, the black Dutch Reformed Churches were to reject it decisively. This was expressed in the 1994 formation of the URCSA which brought the DRMC and DRCA together in one united body. However, earlier than this, these churches had made clear their rejection of apartheid by becoming members of the South African Council of Churches (SACC). They were to play a crucial role in forcing the abandonment of apartheid in both Church and state in the last two decades of the twentieth century (Best, 2002: xxii – xxiii).

The URCSA consists of approximately 1,230 000 members of which approximately 500,000 are confessing members, excluding all those who are only baptised, and 683 congregations. Its name, which is in the continuous tense, and its logo, which is an incomplete circle, reflect the Church's emphasis on unity, and its hope for an even greater church unity within the family of God.

The Church consists of hundreds of congregations who belong to the regional presbytery and the several presbyteries to form a synod. The URCSA consists of

seven regional synods, namely Namibia, Northern Synod, Southern Synod, Phororo (Northern Cape), Cape, and Kwazulu-Natal, as well as Free State and Lesotho (as one region). Each region has its own moderamen, and every congregation is represented at these synods. Congregations are grouped together in presbyteries. At the general synod level congregations are only represented through their presbyteries. The general synod determines the Church's policies, and the regional synods ensure that these policies are reflected in their various activities.

2.3 CLARIFICATION OF WORDS, CONCEPTS, BELIEFS AND NOTIONS OF THE CHURCH

The researcher finds it important to clarify the words, concepts, beliefs and notions that he has pondered upon during this research study. This will help support the arguments advanced and circumvent any unintended misunderstandings and misconceptions that may surface. Words that need this dissection are Church, ecclesia/ ecclesiastical, presbytery, regional synod, general synod, reformed / reformation, three marks, creeds and/or confessions and church order.

2.3.1 Clarification and Definition of the Concept of Church in General

The concept of church tends to be based on tradition. Firstly, the church is a social institution. A church as a major social institution consists of all organisations that directly seek to kindle, renew, and guide the religious life of the people. The church includes the roles and statuses of activities and all the social structures and processes related to religious worship, prayer, association, and other activities in the ecclesiastical organisation. The church represents organised religion (Moberg, 1984:1). The church as a social institution is open to social influence, and as a living organism, it can easily adapt to the environment it finds itself like any living organism. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the church should be defined within a particular tradition as in this research study. The church is defined within the reformed tradition in terms of the three marks of the true Christian church.

The word church can refer to the community of Christian believers throughout the world, a local community or congregation, or to a building used for worship (Kritzinger 2004:40). Harper and Metzger accentuate that “the church is the

people of God (1 Pet. 2:10), the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16), and the body and bride of Christ (Eph. 5:29-32)” (Harper & Metzger 2009:19).

Ecclesiastical is the Greek original word that refers to the church. Here, according to tradition it is a collective word for a distinct theological approach or religious group, which was formed over a long period (Kritzinger 2004:63). Each of these traditions has established doctrines and views of the church, though it must be noted that, especially during the last century, a proliferation of ideas in each of these established traditions has occurred (Kärkkäinen, 2002:15). This tradition was meant to identify the different views and different groups of people based on their belief, trust, and confidence in God, human beings and the creation.

The Christian Church as we now refer to it was established in the latter epoch of the first century. A significant number of Church models (including the one that the URCSA subscribes to) have developed over the years. They drew their inspiration from life as the early Church characterized it. The perception of the Church in the eye of an ordinary individual is entrenched in the aspect of *service*, which is the service towards God, service to one another and the world. However, being in a public fraternity, the Church has and will always be viewed as an institution that brings light to the world we live in. It is important to note that “there were times when it appeared tepid and even unfaithful; times when [the Church] was too legalistic, too worldly or too other worldly” (Keane, 2005:155). With this in mind, it is safe to mention that the Church needs to reform from its timeworn customs and focus on competing with the ever-changing times. “It is [therefore] important to remember Luther’s dictum ‘*Ecclesia semper reformanda*’” (Keane 2005:157), loosely translated to mean that the Church needs to continually reform; hence the survival of the Church fully relies on this process of reformation. The socio-political and economic life of South Africa is gradually diminishing; hence, the public office the Church needs to rise above this morass that slowly dissipates the good standing of our God given country and raise the bar to become an institute “to be reckoned among the faithful people of God” (Dulles 2002:31).

This fact leads us to the purpose behind the establishment of the Church. The Church therefore has arrived at an in-depth understanding that “the Father of Christ, the founder of the Church is God of Israel. Like Israel, the Church is a journeying people, constantly wandering in the wildernesses and being delivered from bondages, always in hope of reaching the (sic) promised land” (Keane

2005:14). This clearly spells out the rationale behind the establishment of the Church, and that the Church as the offspring of God has the lifelong obligation to carry itself along with the principles that God has set. This allows the Church to take stock, engage in introspection and continually reflect on its origins and never deviate from the doctrines that led to its establishment. The Church can also be summed up as being the people of God, the fellowship of the Holy spirit, the body of Christ, the building, the sacrament and the servant, as attributed by Keane in her study guide *Ecclesiology - The Church*. For the purpose of this exercise, we briefly take the liberty to ponder upon the attributes of the Church.

2.3.1.1 The Church as the Servant

The protagonists of this model of the Church sternly believe in the notion that it is inadequate for the Church to merely proclaim its faith in Christ and hope that those who hear that message will confess their faith in him (Keane 2002:45). It is in this regard that the Church has to ensure that she becomes exemplary in servant funded activities, by being an institution that takes care of its member's and non-member's spiritual, social, cultural, economic and political desires without fear or favour. This would lead the believers and the non-believers alike to take note of the fact that the Church does not become effortlessly influenced by the outside world, and thus, she would recognise her subjects. This brings about the argument that the church cannot begin from a point of authority and revelation, but must rather act with sympathy, compassion and concern, just as Jesus himself did (Keane 2002:45). As it has been explicitly stated in the gospel of Mark: "[f]or the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). In short, part of the responsibilities in the life of Jesus Christ was to become a servant to the world at large; hence the church needs to follow in His footsteps of becoming a servant of God, a servant to the community and finally a servant to the society at large. This can be achieved only when the Church carries out its mandate as a Church of God which was founded on the attributes of Christ. As Paul attests to this as Christ is the head of the body, the Church: "who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have pre-eminence" (Colossians 1:18). This scripture accentuates the authority that Jesus Christ has over the Church; hence the Church can by no means overrule the responsibility that Christ himself has embossed upon His Church and that is, that of being a servant.

The servant Church therefore has an obligation within its parameters to announce the coming of the kingdom not only in word, through preaching and proclaiming, but particularly in work, in its ministry of reconciliation and comfort. It must be a community marked by fellowship and love where members gladly bear each other's burdens (Keane 2002:46). Evidently, the servant Church has more to deal with than preaching and proclaiming the word. It has other responsibilities to address which are caring, sharing, loving and more importantly, carrying one another in their afflictions. For if the URCSA held the belief that they were servants of God and upheld the theocratic doctrine within the church, then even the Lord's appointees would definitely know and relate to the fact that they are not the final decision makers in any matter, for they are only the servants of God. The question that arises therefore is that: Does carrying each other's burdens refer to turning a blind eye or does it mean that, when the word of God has been proclaimed and sacraments have been served and when matters which require disciplinary interventions surface, they should be treated with contempt? That being said, the Church needs to stand firm in upholding its three marks, as these can neither be separated nor neglected in anticipation of carrying out its servant mandate, which is morally inclined in nature.

2.3.1.2 *The Powers of the Church*

The Church also acts as an apparatus that promotes the values and the powers of spirituality, morality, ethics and good standing within its community and the society at large, in that it is seen as being holistically holy and must therefore act as such. God has bestowed this position of being holy upon the Church and this holiness is expected to be an intrinsic aspect within the confines of the Church at any given time. It is therefore incumbent upon the Church and its Powers to act in a manner in which its beliefs coincide with the beliefs of the outer world. The only way that this can be fulfilled is when there is a consistent unison among the three marks of the Church, for these marks carry the essence of the Church's survival and are the governing apparatus of the Church to carry its mandate forward as it represents the body of Christ. These powers have been given to the Church as a privilege and therefore as a duty to take towards the powers, restrained as they are by God, yet still seductive and menacing, a definite stance. This stance is grounded in the fact that, by virtue of their fellowship with the Lord of all Powers, believers have been able to see through their anti-Christian dimension. In particular, this involves

the discerning of the powers which hold the hearts and actions of men under their sway in specific times and places (Berkhof, 1984:47). These powers may very well be purgatory and/or reconciliatory in nature.

This process, however, depends entirely on those who have been entrusted with exercising and ensuring obedience to these powers, who by virtue of being in leadership positions are being perceived to represent the powers that may be. This is not always the case, as the Church may very well be under siege in that it may have true prophets and false prophets. The true prophets are those who are guided by the Holy Spirit in whatever they embark upon in leading the Church of God, and their counterparts are those who are being led by their self-proclaimed omnipotence and atrocious egos. The Church of God can survive and perform its duties to her utmost only when the 'chaff' of pretenders has been eradicated because the rule of the Holy Spirit requires that the Church which lives in true fellowship with her Lord can distinguish between the shepherds and the hirelings. This rule is manifest when false prophecy withers away, while the truth becomes fruitful in the church and in the world (Berkhof, 1984:48). It is apparent from this discernment that not all powers bestowed upon the clergy are being exercised in accordance with the true fellowship of the Lord. In their practice of exercising their powers, the human aspect at times precedes the servant facet. As Berkhof indicates:

[W]hen the Powers are unmasked, they lose their dominion over men's souls and the jubilant exclamation arises, 'Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus!' Yet this rejoicing is also broken, ambiguous. The believer is 'still a man.' As a sinful man he senses in his own flesh the seduction and the threats of the Powers, and, still worse, he feels himself an unbeliever, going unwittingly the way of all men. Yet by the might of the indwelling Holy Spirit the strength of the Powers is limited, also, in the life of the individual believer. Somehow he escapes the temptations and the treats. Somehow his Christian liberty bursts through their servitude. In critical times this liberation can be so mightily manifested as to be externally tangible, as, for example, when a Christian church must live in the midst of a demonically nationalistic society, or in a communistic world poisoned by terror and espionage (Berkhof 1984:48).

2.3.1.3 The Institutionalisation of the Church

The URCSA as an *ecclesia* has also been founded along the universal rules that witnessed the institutionalisation of the Church, as we know it. This has also sanctioned the Church as an institution to be more visible and become a public institute. As Dulles (2002:26) contends that the Church is a society, a 'perfect society', in the sense that it is subordinate to no other and requires nothing for its own institutional completeness. He therefore amplifies his argument by contrasting the Church to the complex organisations of society, which have their own constitutions governed by a set of policies and members who are subjected to these policies and regard them as binding on their consciences.

Dulles (2002:27), when defining the church as a society, contends that:

The notion of the Church as society by its very nature tends to highlight the structure of government as the formal element in the society. Thus it leads easily, though not necessarily to what we shall call... the institutional vision of the Church – that is to say, the view that defines the Church primarily in terms of its visible structures, especially the rights and powers of its officers.

This perception clearly ascribes certain powers to the leaders of the Church, and therefore grants them the latitude to exercise austerity with regard to entrenching the three marks of the Church which are proclamation of the word, offering sacraments and exercising discipline. The purpose of all this is to accomplish ecclesiastical unity as this represents a true Church. The unfortunate part is that the URCSA as a Reformed church utilises the presbyterial governance system, where its officers do not possess absolute power, but only delegated power to implement the decisions made at meetings. In this sense, Dulles' notion of the church as a society with officers that possess rights and powers is very limited in the URCSA due to its governance structure. This is stated in the introduction of the Church Order (2012) of the URCSA as follows:

The URCSA follows the church model of the early church, where we believe that the decisions should be made by gathering people together to discern the will of God. Since the whole church cannot meet together at one time and place to make decisions, representative governing bodies made by those who hold an office within the church are established to carry out the work of the church at various levels. At all times the unity of the church is preserved

when we accept the decisions made by those who serve in the assemblies of the church.

Unity in this regard does not only relate to a harmonious existence within the Church. For this unity to be instilled an element of discipline still needs to be exercised to ensure the ecclesiastical survival and the continuation of the doctrinal stance of the Church. When he defines the stance of the lay people as opposed to the leadership, Parent (1989:158) makes a point that:

[t]here is an 'inside' defined in minute detail and thus an equally evident 'outside,' which has the particular advantage of permitting 'the authority' to excommunicate quite expeditiously. Appealing now to a church of which they are the subject, lay people must learn... that the church only exists where all, favoured with a communion that debars none, are in the process of *making community, of building community*. From this perspective, it is not the only possible excommunication that which recognizes that a person or a community which has ceased to *become* a church member has excluded itself from ecclesiastical unity? ... In particular, the ministerial service of the priests... seems illuminated in a new way. They are not the absolute and tyrannically masters of the norms, no more that they are responsible for their application or judges of an orthodoxy that they have defined a priori themselves. They are there to *serve the ecclesiastical genesis of persons and communities*.

This is because the Church is a complete society, which hails its perfect enduring constitution as that which has been conferred upon it by God and none other. Hence, during this institutionalisation process of the Church, people are taught and a declaration is made that the Church has all the marks of a true society. Christ did not leave this society undefined and without a set form. Rather, He created it and His will determined the form of its existence and accorded it its constitution. The Church is not a part of nor a member of any other society. It is so perfect in itself that it is distinct from all human societies and stands far above them (Dulles 2002: 29).

As an institution, the church has an obligation to enforce certain rights, for the Church of Christ is not a community of parallels in which all who belong to it have equal rights.

No matter how unpalatable the truth may be, it stands uncontested that within the Church structures, a society of un-equals exists not only because among the faithful some are clerics and some are laymen, but particularly because in the Church there is the power from God whereby to some it is given to sanctify, teach, and govern and to others not (Dulles 2002: 31). Those entrusted with this responsibility possess the authority to open and/or close the taps of discipline, which may equally be likened to those of grace. In other words, they hold God given, God ordained and God entrusted authority to ensure the ecclesiastical survival of the Church by protecting the doctrinal values, which have been predestined upon them by God. It is in this light that the faithful are to be bound by the powers that their leaders who lead and teach them possess.

The Church therefore assumes a certain form of schooling structure in which the teachers have the power to impose their doctrine with juridical and spiritual sanctions. Thus teaching is juridical and institutionalised (Dulles 2002: 30). This teaching relationship still needs to be clarified, in that this approach does not label the Church as an entity of the state, but conversely, it only points out that the Church has an obligation towards its followers and will thus act in a manner that will enforce peace and conformity towards fulfilling and safeguarding its doctrine of being an ecclesiastically unified and true Church. This is so because the

relation to God's kingdom is established by the task of achieving an order of justice and peace in social life. The kingdom will bring the definitive actualization of an order of justice and peace in the fellowship on humanity. Hence it always stands related to God's kingdom even where the order itself and those in power... are not aware of this or do not want to be aware of it (Pannenberg 2004:49).

This implies that, within the structures of the Church, there persists an undertaking to 'stand where God stands' as it is mentioned in the Belhar Confession. This does not necessarily espouse the political or secular epoch to the righteous will of God, as these two fundamental influences are both based on different foundations, because the "relation to the kingdom lies only in the task, not in the way it is executed" (Pannenberg 2004: 49). Pannenberg simply makes reference to the fact that within the ecclesiastical judiciary, engagements which lead to discipline may not necessarily follow the norms and standards that are incumbent within the secular settings, for these are sanctioned by the proclaimed Word and the

properly administered sacraments and therefore must be aligned with the righteous will of God. This must be so simply because the proclamation of the Word, the administration of the sacraments and discipline, as an entity, are imbued with a major responsibility towards the determination of human destiny in life.

The above excerpts act as evidence that the Church has a role to play in instilling discipline among its members, regardless of their seniority, within its confines, to ensure that it remains a true Church of God. The trueness of the Church is thus determined by its austerity in ensuring that it adheres to its doctrine, and in this regard, the doctrine of enforcing discipline where necessary within its domain. The three marks of the Reformed Church are present within the latter, not as a deterrent to all the transgressors, but as a sinew that binds the Church of God together to preserve ecclesiastical unity as the Body of Christ. Although not all the facets, which relate to the Church of Christ have been explored in this section this does not mean that they are insignificant, but for this undertaking, the focus falls on the ones mentioned which will assist in addressing the issue at hand. Forthwith, we shall ponder upon the confessions and catechisms of the Reformation to investigate their stance on the subject matter.

2.3.2 Definition of the Church in the URCSA

In the previous section, the church was defined in general as the social institution and the community of Christian believers from different traditions and doctrines. In this section the researcher intends to orientate his reader to what is meant by the church within the structures of the URCSA. Article one (1) of the Church Order of the URCSA clearly defines the church as follows:

The Church of Jesus Christ is a community of believers who are called together by the Word of God and by his Holy Spirit. Those who have been called and form the “Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa” are part of this Church of Christ. Together with all the other Churches who confess Christ, this Church has been set apart as a nation as the people of God who belong to Him and who have to proclaim the saving deeds of Him who called them from darkness unto light, a new creation who lives in the light as He is the light (Church Order and Supplementary regulations of the Southern Synod, 2014).

In terms of the URCSA and all other denominations that fall under the Reformed tradition, the church exists where the word of God is proclaimed, the sacraments are administered and discipline is exercised, which means that the church is the local congregation. In order to foster unity and relationships among local congregations, congregations within a larger geographical area, meaning the presbytery or synod, meet in order to share their experience and challenges as the body of Christ. This is stated in the Church Order Article Eight (8) as follows:

As an expression of the unity of the Church, congregations, by means of representatives, come together in Church meetings by virtue of Christ's command to serve one another. The purpose of these meetings is a joint consultation on matters that affect all congregations. These meetings form a visible link between congregations. Two types of such meetings may be distinguished: the Presbytery and the Synod. Depending on circumstances, the Synods may be of a wider or more limited nature. In the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa there will be a General Synod and Regional Synods (Church Order and Supplementary regulations of the Southern Synod, 2014).

A presbytery relates to a structure of Church administration or authority, which comprises elders and ministers alike. This structure exists as the legal person within its meetings in accordance with Article 11.11 of the church order. This means that when representatives attend the meeting of the presbytery there must be an equal representation of governing elders and the teaching elders (ministers of religion). This system accords authority to the latter to enforce discipline and exercise administrative functions within the Church. During the times of Calvin this was termed the consistory and is applicable only to the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. However, the presbytery in the URCSA consists of a number of congregations that fall within a certain geographical area and will thus meet as determined by the Regional Synod. Among others, these presbyteries are entrusted with the following activities or actions in terms of Article 9.1-9.8 of the Church Order:

Representatives of congregations shall meet as presbytery at times and in a manner as decided by the regional synod. This meeting shall:

- deliberate on joint action with regard to the responsibilities of the congregations towards one another and towards the community and society in which they find themselves;

- deliberate on ways in which the congregations may be prepared and equipped spiritually and materially for joint services;
- report on how the congregations have carried out their responsibilities;
- deal with disciplinary matters regarding ministers of the Word and the elected offices;
- the founding and dissolution of congregations and the determination of the boundaries of congregations;
- deal with matters of the calling and retirement of ministers of the Word;
- lay down procedures and rules for the activities entrusted to it.
- Regional synod shall determine the boundaries of the presbytery (Church Order and Supplementary regulations of the Southern Synod, 2014).

It goes without saying that the responsibilities entrusted to the presbytery places the latter in a primary position in relation to enforcing discipline.

It has already been mentioned in this research study that the church in the reformed tradition is the local congregation, while the synod only serves to bring the local congregations together for a common purpose. The regional synod is an expression of the unity of the church; congregations come, by means of representatives, together in church meetings by virtue of Christ's command to serve each other. The purpose of these meetings is joint consultation on matters that affect all congregations. Depending on circumstances, the synods may have a broad or narrow character (Church Order and Supplementary regulations of the Southern Synod, 2014). The delegates of these congregations meet at specific times and in a particular method as prescribed by the Regional Synod. Their sole responsibility is to:

- Deliberate on joint action by the congregations with regard to the activities that cannot be dealt with by the presbytery; decide on disciplinary matters and appeals; (Church Order and Supplementary regulations of the Southern Synod, 2014).

General synod: The General synod is the umbrella body of all the URCSA congregations operating within its boundaries. This body is thus made up of all the [r]epresentatives of regional synods, consisting of the four members of the Moderamen of each regional synod and one minister of the Word and one church council member from every presbytery within the boundaries of each regional synod, shall meet as General synod at times and in a manner decided by the General synod.... [When this gathering meets, it deals with the following issue among others, which need a two-thirds majority in order to be enforced]:

- in the matter of disciplinary action related to doctrinal matters adjudicate on matters brought before it; (Church Order and Supplementary regulations of the Southern Synod, 2014).

Reformed/ Reformation relates to an epoch in Church history, which dates as far back as the 14th and the 17th centuries. It was a series of events that led to the break between the Catholic Church and the Reformers. The theological differences were based on three main principles: the sole authority of Scripture, salvation by grace and through Christ alone, and the priesthood of all believers (Kritzing 2005:148). The people, who align themselves with this doctrine, identify with Protestant Reformation, which was ring-fenced by Martin Luther and John Calvin respectively.

Three marks relate to the said marks, which are viewed as important to the establishment and the maintenance of the true and just Church. Within the Reformed Churches there is however uncertainty regarding the number of these marks, but for the benefit of this exercise the researcher concentrates on these three marks which are incumbent upon the Church: proclamation of the Word, administration of the sacraments, and the correct exercise of discipline.

The Confessions or Creeds as they are commonly known are yardsticks which give the reason for the existence of a certain denomination. They address issues of primary importance to the Christian and their faith.

The confessions... were addressed to the central questions of human existence: Who am I? Who is God? How does God tell humans about himself and about the world in which they live? What institutions has God given to humanity? How are those institutions—churches, government, the family, the economy—supposed to function? (Noll 2004:12).

Creeds must however be separated from the confessions in that a creed contains and “spells out in detail the doctrines or beliefs held by a particular church” (Kritzinger 2005: 50). A Creed is therefore a “brief statement of BELIEF containing the main elements of Christian doctrine.... Their function has been mainly liturgical, since they are recited regularly by members of certain churches in congregational worship” (Kritzinger 2005: 50). Most of these confessions emerged during the 16th century by the then authors, and their ultimate goal was to inherently guide the Christian faith.

Church Order refers to the guiding document that the URCSA subscribes to as a legal document of the said church. This document was initially published in the mid-nineties and later underwent rectification to align itself with the ever-changing milieu. The Church Order holds authority over the General synod and all its subsidiaries. Its sole function is to prescribe how all the meetings are to be held, the conditions of employment of ministers (calling and/or demission), the roles of the office bearers of the church, what procedures should be followed in terms of administration of the church and when to exercise discipline within the church. It also determines the responsibilities of the congregations, presbyteries, regional synods and the General synod to maintain the status of the URCSA as the true Church of Christ.

The above explanations should alleviate any misconception that may arise with regard to the abovementioned terminology. This should assist in proceeding with the topic amicably and without any confusion, as the primary task of systematic theology is not a careful description of what other people have said in the past, but a critical reflection on what *should be accepted and proclaimed* as appropriate expressions of the Christian faith for our situation today (Nürnberger 2011:5). The succeeding account peruses the viewpoints of different scholars on the issue in order to better appreciate their origins with this theory and acquaint ourselves with their perspective in this regard. This will enable the reader to gain an enhanced understanding on the subject matter and its origins so that it can be applied to the current millennia.

2.4 THE SCHOLARS' VIEWS ON THE CONCEPT OF CHURCH

In attempting to explore the stance of the scholars on the subject matter, the researcher opens this discussion by citing the words of one of the church fathers

of the early Church, Clement of Alexandria, who maintained that “if our faith... is such that it is destroyed by force of argument, then let it be destroyed; for it will have been proved that we do not possess the truth” (Gaybba 2005:39). In this discernment, Clement articulated his views in defending the unnecessary integration of faith and other worldly concepts. With this amalgamation of faith and other worldly perceptions, the Church is bound to lose direction and therefore neglect the responsibilities, which have been bestowed upon it by God. Bonhoeffer (2009:357) states that, it is for this reason that the

gospel of God’s love for the world puts the Christian community (church) into a relationship of responsibility and accountability for the world. In both word and deed, the church-community has to witness to the world concerning faith in Christ, to work on removing any offense, and to make room for the gospel in the world. Wherever this responsibility is denied, Christ is denied; for it is the responsibility that corresponds to God’s love of the world (Bonhoeffer 2009:357).

The key words in the latter is making room for the gospel of God to be preached to the world and practised by those who are in leadership positions within the Church without ever looking into their human element which is capable of breaking the link that exists between God and the Church. Bonhoeffer (2009:356) states that:

This means that the proper relationship of the church to the world does not derive from some natural law, or law of reason, or universal human rights, but solely from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This simply means that the Church can never be aloof regarding all the challenges that are not incongruent with it, namely unethical behaviour, sin, moral degeneration and disunity, because these require discipline to be sternly administered and enforced within the confines of the Church. These will incessantly subsist and are forever prevalent within the world that we reside in, but in attempting to solve these challenges, the Church needs to revisit the basics and exercise its marks repeatedly, so as not to lose focus on its mandate as an institution which has been orchestrated by God himself, headed by Jesus Christ and governed by the Holy Spirit. These three marks, with a greater emphasis on discipline, will therefore act as a tendon that will redirect the Church to the trueness that is expected to remain.

2.4.1 The view of Louis Berkhof (1906 – 1945) on the concept church

The marks of the Church are not a new invention as it has been alluded to by one of the prominent writers in the field of Systematic Theology. Berkhof maintains that there really was no need for the instigation of these marks when the Church was still solitary. These three marks came about as a result of the ‘heresies’ that arose in the Church as strata. This occurred in lieu of guarding against the Church sustaining its image and becoming a true Church. Berkhof (2005:576) indicates that:

The consciousness of this need was already present in the early Church, was naturally less apparent in the Middle Ages, but became very strong at the time of Reformation.... As a result it was felt ever increasing that it was necessary to point out some marks by which one true Church could be distinguished from the false. The very fact of the Reformation proves that the Reformers, without denying that God maintains His Church, were yet deeply conscious of the fact that an empirical embodiment of the Church may become subject to error, may depart from the truth, and may totally degenerate.

Berkhof here, intrinsically demonstrates that even though God preserves His Church, it was equally important that the Reformers came up with measures that would ensure that the Church of God remains a true Church for as humans it is not a laborious act to deviate from the principles governing the Church, as the saying goes that *to err is human*. According to Berkhof, it is precisely this human factor that Reformers had in mind when they identified these marks in an attempt to instil homogeneity in the Church and maintain its trueness. However, the adoption of these marks was not universal and not unilateral, as numerous theologians believed that these might not necessarily have to be the same. Differing opinions ranged in terms of how many marks the Church must administer. With these opinions and as conflicting as they presented themselves, the point of departure was obviously one; and that is the creation of a true Church that would never degenerate with the new inventions or belief systems, which may arise as time progresses.

It is in this regard that Berkhof (2005:576) remarks that:

[S]ome spoke of but one, the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel (Beza, Alsted, Amesius, Heidanus, Maresius); others, of two, the pure preaching of the word and the right administration of the sacraments (Calvin, Bullinger, Zanchius, Junius, Gomarus,

Mastricht, à Marck) and still others added to these a third, the faithful exercise of discipline (Hyperius, Martyr, Ursinus, Trelcatius, Heidegger, Wendelinus).

Discipline, according to Berkhof, was at the epicentre of the debate on whether it really is an important aspect of a true Church? He further makes a distinction between two features in relation to the Church and he characterises them as:

(1) those that are responsible for the 'being' of the Church and (2) those which are responsible for the 'wellbeing' of the Church. Hence, some began to feel, that, however necessary discipline might be to the health of the Church, it would be wrong to say that a church without discipline was no Church at all (Berkhof 2005: 576).

The argument advanced here is that, discipline cannot be compared to the other two marks of the Church in that it (discipline) is also practised in the other worldly echelons. Therefore, the Church does not possess sole ownership upon its practice, whereas the proclamation of the Word and the administration of sacraments solely fall under the ownership of the Church and these are rested upon the validity bestowed on them by God. In as much as the researcher is tempted to agree with this argument, he wishes to point out in disagreement that although it may be true of the powers entrusted upon the Church with regard to the other two marks, discipline is still and will forever become an intrinsic part of Church governance and restraint.

The Reformed tradition is focused on the aspect of being 'orderly' in all its operations. In fact, this order is what the URCSA as a Reformed Church of Christ prides itself in, and thus regards the latter as a guiding tool that has continually maintained progress in the Church to become a true Church. As the apostle Paul wrote to the congregation of Corinth that "for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.... Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:33, 40). Now, without discipline and with the presence of the other two marks, it is the opinion of the researcher that the URCSA as a progressively orderly Church is not progressing, because the proclamation of the Word and the administration of sacraments may to a lesser or greater extent attempt to instil order within the community of believers but this does not provide guarantees.

Discipline has to be exercised in all facets within the ambits of the Church, this exercise does not have to take place for the sake of being exercised, but the

members of the Church must exercise it faithfully. This faithful exercise of discipline is essential to maintaining the purity of doctrine and for guarding the holiness of the sacraments. Churches who are lax in discipline are bound to discover sooner or later within their circle an eclipse of the light of the truth and an abuse of that which is holy. Hence, a Church that would remain true to her ideal to the extent to which this is possible on earth must be diligent and conscientious in the exercise of Christian discipline (Berkhof 2005:578). According to Berkhof, this indicates how important discipline is within the Church, not only the existence thereof, but also the faithful exercise of discipline. Loosely translated, it means that all those who are in the opportune echelons of the Church, who have been entrusted with the instillation of discipline, should therefore exercise discipline diligently, without fear or favour and lastly they are to exercise it faithfully.

2.4.2 The view of John Calvin (1509 – 1564) on the concept of the church

John (Jean) Calvin was one of the prominent 16th century theologians. He proved to be monumental in systemising theology and created a system of Church government that influenced the political, social and spiritual setting of the Western world. He was also an ardent believer in the area of ‘congregation-community leadership’, which propelled the upswing of democracy in Europe. He wrote his book called *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, as a tool to disseminate knowledge among the laity who were in dire need of growing spiritually and subsequently aspiring to draw close to Christ, but possessed minimal understanding of the fundamentals concerning the Christian faith.

Calvin is one of the scholars who believed that the Church as an institution requires the marks to control its potential to become a true Church. Calvin agreed with Luther in his approach on the marks of the true Church, namely the proclamation of the Word and the proper administration of the sacraments. However, he emphasised correct faith and an upright Christian life more strictly than Luther did (Kärkkäinen 2002:50). He believed that the Church could survive and become a true Church to be reckoned with by taking into consideration only two of the three marks that the Reformers believed in. He astutely made reference to the proclamation of the Word and the administering of the sacraments as the only marks that can prudently mould the Church to behave and act in accordance with the doctrine of Christ. On the contrary, he also did not rule out discipline as a sinew that binds the Church of God. He did not subscribe to having discipline as

the third mark of the Church, while not undermining its importance within the latter, but emphasising its spiritual practicability as an admonition tool. However, he further dichotomises discipline into two aspects: firstly, discipline that is exercised among the people, and secondly, discipline which takes place among the clergy. This, for Calvin, was the dividing factor, which plays an intricate role in discipline with reference to the powers that may be and spiritual authority. It is in this regard that Calvin speaks to the 'Power of the keys and Spiritual Jurisdiction'. When addressing this aspect of discipline, Calvin (2009:813) refers to the first type of discipline as:

The common discipline to which all ought to be subject, and then proceed to the clergy, who have besides that common discipline one peculiar to themselves.... [He further goes on to state that] [i]f no society, or, no house with even a moderate family can be kept in a right state without discipline, much more necessary is it in the church, whose state ought to be the best ordered possible. Hence as the saving doctrine of Christ is the life of the church, so discipline is, as it were, its sinews; for to it owes that the members of the body adhere together, each in its own place. Wherefore, all who either wish that discipline were abolished, or who impede the restoration of it, whether they do this of design or through thoughtlessness, certainly aim at the complete devastation of the church.

The definitive word in the above statement is that discipline acts as a sinew that is catalytic in nature. Its main responsibility is none other than to act as a binding agent, which brings together members of the Church of God to observe the doctrine of Christ. Calvin further makes a profound utterance that if discipline were to be eradicated either intentionally or as an oversight, it would destroy the Church. This clearly indicates the significant task that discipline simulates within the Church as a doctrine of Christ.

With this in mind, discipline constitutes a remedy that discards ills that manifest themselves within the realms of the Church. This is accentuated by Calvin, when he attests that

discipline, therefore, is a kind of curb to restrain and tame those who war showing intention against the doctrine of Christ, or is it a kind of stimulus by which the indifferent are aroused; sometimes, also, it is a kind of fatherly rod, by which those who have made some grievous lapse are chastised in mercy with the meekness of the spirit of Christ (Calvin 2009:813).

Discipline, according to Calvin, in trying to regulate the transgressors of the law during its administration, consists of numerous degrees that can be attached thereto. These relate to private admonition, rebukes before witnesses and lastly, excommunication. This approach affords the ministers and the presbyters the powers to implement discipline upon the congregants as and when the Church feels that the behaviour of the incumbent is not in unison with its beliefs. If this unpalatable behaviour persists, the principal form of discipline will be that of admonition, followed by censure before observers and finally that of disbarment, where an individual shall be excommunicated from the Church. Calvin holds an undivided opinion regarding how these are to be administered and for him all these are to be exercised in this manner because “Calvin believed that there were specific scriptural directions regarding the right order of ministry in the visible church, so that specific form of ecclesiastical order now became an item of doctrine” (Kärkkäinen 2002: 50).

The second part of discipline, according to Calvin, concerns itself with the clergy or those in the high echelons of the Church. This phase of discipline is contained in the canons, which the ancient bishops framed for themselves and their order. Penalties were also added to sanction the authority of the canons, that none might violate them with impunity (Calvin, 2009: 823). This makes reference to the fact that every bishop had God-assumed powers over his subordinates (the clergy) and that he had the mandate to supervise them in relation to what the canons prescribe, thus ensuring that they adhered to their responsibilities within their respective Churches. This overseeing authority enabled the bishops to exercise discipline upon the non-loyalists and those who transgressed the order of the Church with impunity.

However, the bishops were not the only source of discipline in these manifestations, in that other structures that the URCSA subscribed to were also conceived. Calvin indicates that for this purpose, certain annual visitations and synods were appointed and that if anyone was negligent in his office he might be admonished and if anyone sinned, he might be punished according to his fault (Calvin 2009: 823). These provincial synods were also austere disciplinarian structures upon the behaviour of the bishops to ensure that they rendered their orders in relation to the canons. It is in this regard that these synods were held once a year where the bishops were examined to guarantee observance of their

onus. As long as this strictness was in force, the clergy demanded no more in word from the people than they performed in act and by example; they were stricter against themselves than the vulgar; and, indeed, it is becoming that the people should be ruled by a kindlier and laxer discipline; and that the clergy should be stricter in their censures, and less indulgent to themselves than to others. How this whole procedure became obsolete is needless to relate, since in the present day, nothing can be imagined more lawless and dissolute than this order, whose licentiousness is so extreme that the whole world is crying out (Calvin, 2009: 824). This crying out loudly is not farfetched, even in the current milieu; it is true, in that discipline appears to be obsolete in our Churches. This state of affairs has manifested itself many times within our Churches, where the people and/or congregants view the law of the Church as being selective in that they are disciplined according to their faults, whereas the discipline of the clergy appears not to be subjected to them regardless of their transgressions. The Church needs to administer stricter disciplinary mechanisms to its leaders before it can cascade the latter to its incumbents, for this shall create an atmosphere of acceptance when penalties, punishment, admonition and excommunication are exercised upon its members. This will render the Church a true and active Church in the current era. The Church is therefore urged to rid itself of all inconsistencies which instinctively manifest themselves with regards to discipline and opt to spread the doctrine of impartiality towards all the people and failure to do so will result in facing the judgment of God.

2.4.3 The view of Karl Barth (1886-1968) on the concept church

Karl Barth was one of the iconic theologians of the latter two centuries with his liberal approach towards theology. This kind of exegesis made him a notorious theologian. Brown (1967:9) indicates that to work one's way through Barth's major writing is to be brought into direct confrontation with the great exponents of Christianity such as Luther and Calvin and also with its adversaries from the earliest heretics right down to present day existentialist philosophers (Brown 1967:9). Barth's writing places him at the pinnacle of theological literature, in that he has written beyond any other existing theologian. This accolade is supported by his laborious insights in his book called *Church Dogmatics*. It is thus believed that in his later years a shift in his theology was apparent. What can be learnt from Barth is that his teachings were Christ-centred. However, the theme of his

philosophy “teaches that God does everything in and through Jesus Christ, through whom grace is all triumphant. The essence of Barthianism is to reshape all theology around this idea” (Brown, 1967:12). Barth therefore examines these theological issues extensively with complexity, thus enabling his reader to gain an insightful and pungent comprehension of the Bible. For the benefit of this exercise, the researcher therefore concentrates on Barth’s contribution with regards to the three marks of the Church.

Barth was incongruent with the Reformers in relation to the marks of the Church. It is in this light that when critically looking at the Church, Barth makes a distinction that has always been at the fore of his approach, that is, viewing the Church as the visible and the invisible Church. Bender (2005:73) indicates that:

The church should be the true church, and this should be reflected in the church’s visible life, though the church possesses no means whereby to purge and exclude all hypocrites from its midst. Barth contends that should the church attempt to undertake such a purification, which only God can perform, honesty would necessitate that no one would be allowed to remain in the church and the visible church will be lost.

Here Barth asserts that the church has the potential to become a true church only if it is invisible. However, because the Church is visible and has comprised members who have engaged in sacrilegious behaviour, the church, which in retrospect is made up of the very members who are sacrilegious, has no authority over passing judgment because even they are sinners. As the Apostle John writes in his epistle that “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (Epistle of John 1:8). Therefore, it is only God who can conduct judgement upon such members. When proceeding forward, Barth also makes the attestation that this does not always have to be the case for the church to become a true church, because the church is both justified and sinful. The Church is justified by being God ordained and made up of sinners, just as the spiritual body of Christ was also externally composed of wrongdoers and pretenders. These manifestations of the true church in the visible individual churches by which such churches can be recognised as true churches are the ‘*so-called notae ecclesiae*’, the marks of the church. Here Barth speaks of the distinctive Reformation marks, originating with Melancthon and followed by Calvin, used to identify an individual church, in this regard, the URCSA, as a true and right church (Bender 2005: 73).

He concludes his statement by issuing a stern warning that these marks are not to be disregarded as they play a major role in the identification of the Church and subsequently offer a benchmark through which these Churches will be able to gauge their trueness.

Barth carries on to say that the role of these marks is to test the adherence of the church to the reasons why it exists in the first place, and cites that “the first foundational mark of a true church is “‘the purity of its preaching,’ rooted in Scripture” (Bender 2005: 73). The Church in its duties is therefore called to return the favour and spread this call to others, by proclaiming the Word of God diligently and in an uncompromising manner. By so doing, the church would have fully completed its first responsibility with regard to being the true Church. For Barth, proclamation of the Word of God of this magnitude is undoubtedly expected to be consistent with pure doctrine, because “pure doctrine exists where ‘the external word of the Bible [*biblische verbum externum*] is the measure [*Maß*] and guiding principle [*Richtschnur*] of the external word of the church [*kirchlichen verbum externum*]’....” (Bender 2005:74). After having dealt with the first mark of the Church as explained by Barth, let’s therefore delve into the second mark, which is the administration of sacraments.

According to Bender, Barth recognises the second mark of the true Church as aligned with the first mark, which is the correct administration and usage of the sacraments. He maintains that with a thorough administration of these sacraments the *ecclesia* can be enabled to see itself in another form, that is, being visible in the profane earthly human domain. Through the external words and signs of the church, God must speak his own word, for sacraments are indeed *signa visibilia graetiae invisibilis* (Bender 2005:74). Sacraments play a vital role in the trueness of the Church in that they are representative of the life of Christ whose blood was shed on the cross for the entire humankind and for the reason that people are sinners, whom after having heard and accepted the proclaimed word, consequently must engage in an introspection and mend their ways before they can eat of the body of Christ and drink of the cup of His blood in order to remember Him in that regard. The words of the Church therefore represent those of God, ultimately bearing witness to the latter.

The third and ultimate mark of the Church, Barth surrenders to the Reformed Church and contained within it is the aspect of discipline, which in retrospect he

tallies it with the order that is to be observed during the sacraments. Discipline however is not restricted to the correct administration of the sacraments only, but also extends to the other facets of the Church, namely adherence to the order and laws of the Church, morality, sin, profanity, idolatry and so on. Hence Bender (2005:74) states:

The church when viewed 'from above' [*von oben*] is seen as constituted by its Head, Jesus Christ. In this sense it is the church of Word and Sacrament. The church is also, however, seen 'from below' [*von unten*], and for this reason, the church, its character as a church of Word and sacrament notwithstanding, must be also considered a church of 'discipline and obedience,' reflecting in its earthly life its divine call."

Here Barth spells out his doctrine of the Church in that it can be viewed 'from above' and/or 'from below', and he further makes his point that as the Church is viewed from above, it carries its mandate from Jesus Christ because Christ is the representative of the Church both in heaven and on earth because it is governed by the Word of God and amplified by the administration of the Sacraments. Notwithstanding that, the Church that is viewed 'from below' simply means that the Church can be embroiled with earthly undertakings, and thus be subjected to the ills of the world. It is in this regard that the Church has to sternly exercise discipline and encourage obedience within its parameters. Needless to say that this exercise of discipline includes stringent measures when the transgressor has been found guilty. This discipline will differ from church to church with the outcome being diverse in nature.

With this in mind, Barth maintains that without the proper exercise of discipline, the Church can be equated to no Church at all. He attests that albeit that there is the proclamation of the Word and the correct administration of sacraments, the Church is still duty bound to sternly exercise discipline upon its members, and this must be appropriated genuinely. McGrath amplifies this view when he says that the true church was in heaven, and its institutional parodies were on earth (McGrath, 2011: 384). To simplify this point, it can be said that the idea of the church was conceived in heaven and that is where the real church exists, and its practicability is supposed to be institutionalised on earth; however, this is not always the case as the entities that make up the Church are of a profane stature. Therefore, the members of the Church are to be consistently honed so that the

objective of having a true Church can be achieved. Hence, Barth also makes a point that with their sinful nature, the members of the Church should never be granted the sovereignty that prohibits the Church from fulfilling its obligatory vocation to implement discipline and compliance to the order that is anticipated. This is accentuated by the fact that the Church is not an absolute entity on its own that is continuously surrounded by harmony, because, it will continuously be challenged by the profanity of its members and thus have to incessantly fight these confrontations to bring stability and respect within its ambits. If it does not, it is not a church. The mark of discipline thus supplies a relative and human proof whereby the true church can be recognised in a visible church. While such a standard is relative, Barth insists that “a relative standard is better than having none at all” (Bender, 2005: 74). It thus fulfils its purpose for identifying a concrete church as a true church and for providing a norm for its life and activity.

Based on that which has been alluded to in the reviews of the three reformist scholars above, the researcher can therefore state with authority that the Reformed church accepts discipline as a sinew that binds the Church of God to become a true Church of Christ. This perspective also assists in escalating the discussions and to look into the *ecclesia* as a contrivance that can be utilised to foster this aspect of discipline. Discipline as an element of a collective while not diminishing the impact of the other marks towards orchestrating a true Church, therefore acts as an integral part of the three marks of the Reformed Church. It is in this light that researcher hereafter concentrates on the Church organisation as an instrument that can be utilised to stimulate and/or dampen its ‘trueness’ or its ‘falseness’. This process allowed discipline to be investigated and evaluated as a catalyst within a Church that enables or impedes the latter to become the True Church of God.

2.5 THE MARKS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

It is my undertaking that the myriad churches that exist today are likely to become true churches of Christ. It is important to note that no one carries an absolute right towards owning a church; anyone can and is at liberty to establish or begin a church. The challenge facing the church today is that many churches exist, but are they truly and really the churches of Christ? By this the researcher means that even if these churches do not officially or formally subscribe to the three marks of

the church, for them to stand firm and refer to themselves as the true churches of Christ, they must without a doubt practice these marks. Berkhof (1939:576-578) asserts that the role of these marks is to distinguish the true Christian Church from that which does not subscribe to the values of a true church. He maintains that these marks serve as yardstick through which the church has to engage in introspection in assessing its stance as a true church of Christ. Some changes might occur from time to time in terms of the models of the church, but the marks as provided by Berkhof (1939:576-578) are the permanent foundation of a true Christian Church. The marks of the true Church, according to Berkhof, need to be stated as indicated by the Word as follows below.

2.5.1 True preaching of God's Word

It is important to take note that the church exists in and for the world. Thus, as historical and social situations change, the form of the church also changes. But Christians need to bear in mind that the essence and the form cannot be separated. It is noted that there is a need for a church that is built on a solid foundation, but which is also flexible and open to change. If the above statement is not taken into consideration when people are establishing their own churches, they will face the danger of cultism. Berkhof (1939:576-578) identifies the true Christian Church well by identifying the marks of the church, which should be used as the measuring stick to differentiate the church from a cult. Berkhof was forced to identify the church because of divisions that occurred in the church, not necessarily the division between the Catholics and the protestants, but due to the further divisions that took place among the protestant churches into several denominations and sects. As a result, he felt that it was overly necessary to point out some of the marks by which the true church could be distinguished from the false church (Berkhof, 1939: 576). Marks of the true church are aids to assist human beings to identify certain aspects or dimensions of the church by focusing on those aspects.

It is argued in the reformed circles, moreover within the Presbyterian system and Congregationalists that the true Christian Church is where the word of God is preached. In the reformed tradition, the preaching of the word is central to the church. The preaching of the Word is a truly undisputed mark to determine the true Church from the false ones. In the light of this research, the preaching of the Word of God should be about God and God's concerns for his creation (human

beings and physical-organic environment) run through the grand acts of God, namely creation, reconciliation, renewal and consummation. The true church involves the correct Christian doctrines that are taken from the Word of God to symbolise or identify that particular denomination. Any group which claims to be a church which does not possess this mark is to be declared an untrue church or a cult. There is an expectation from the world that the church should deliver a clear message based upon the Bible, but the more up to date and open-minded a church desires to be, the greater the danger that it will forget the specific message that it owes to a largely atheistic and unstable society. A church that conforms to the trends and current political slogans from the right or left cannot positively influence the world, but will be drawn away by the world. The church decays through secularisation and consequently becomes useless. The only way for the church to restore its position is to repent, to listen anew to the Word of God which is given to the church in the form of the Bible and to declare it to the world through word and deed. Then the decayed church will be renewed to the standard of a true church. The true preaching of God's word is the basis for other marks of the true Christian church, because the administration of the sacraments and the application of discipline is the practical application of the word of God. In this sense, this mark appears to surpass the other two because it serves as the base for the Christian church and those who rely on it entirely. Berkhof (1939:577) adds that the true preaching of the word is the great means for maintaining the church and for enabling the church to be the mother of the faithful. This, he maintains is one of the characteristics of the true Church. The only mark which acted in the favour of these scholars was the proper administration of the Word. Strictly speaking, it may be said that the true preaching of the word and its recognition as a standard doctrine of life, is the only mark of the church. Even though Van Niekerk (2006:373) states that

many churches and their theological advocates: One-sidedly emphasize either a quarter, half, three-quarters or, rarely, a full gospel:

- a quarter-version of the foursome Gospel message amounts to an exclusive emphasising of either Jesus Christ (reconciliation) or the Holy Spirit (renewal) or God the creator (creation) or God the fulfiller of everything (consummation), or

- a half-version of the foursome Gospel message amounts to an exclusive emphasising of either creation (nature) and reconciliation (grace, re-creation), or reconciliation (Word = Jesus Christ) and renewal (Spirit), or renewal (Spirit) and reconciliation (Word = Jesus Christ), or reconciliation (Jesus Christ) and consummation (Apocalyptic/prophetic future events), or renewal (Spirit) and consummation (apocalyptic/prophetic future events), or
- a three-quarters version of the foursome Gospel message amounts to an exclusive emphasising of any three of the foursome grand acts of God, or
- A full gospel message is seldom encountered in church-centred divine or semi-divine churches and the deliberations of their theologicistic spokespersons.

The key problem of this research is the lack of knowledge on how to bring a balance among the functions and the intention of the three marks of the church in such a way that the proclamation of the word and the administration of the sacraments can instil discipline in the members of the church. The Church functions and operates as a highly one-sided experiential awareness in its approach to everyday life, where the preaching of the word is the key element in one church and sacrament is the key element in the other church, and discipline is taken for granted on both accounts. It is accepted as an assumption in this research study that the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments are over-emphasised, while neglecting discipline. The Word and sacraments in the church have the inbuilt tendency to alienate people from their experiential awareness of their very close embeddedness of their humanness as an alienation from God, from themselves as conscious human beings, from their fellow human beings and from the natural cosmic environment which has to be expressed as being closely connected and embodied in the three marks of the Church. In short, Churchism is expressive of the experiences in a church or churches that lack the full experience of the full Gospel of all four presences of God, ourselves as conscious human beings, humanity in general and the natural cosmic environment, while one-sidedly portraying the grand acts of God as portrayed in the Bible or even concentrating in a totally one-sided way on only one of the four grand acts of creation, reconciliation, renewal and fulfilment.

2.5.2 The right administration of the sacraments

It is already mentioned under the mark of preaching of the word that the right administration of the sacraments is the reflection of the proper application of the Word of God or symbolically preaching of the Word. The true church is a community where sacraments are administered in the rightful manner. The administration of the sacraments became the continuation of the preaching of the Word of God; hence, the reformers believe that the preaching of the Word of God is central to the Church of God. While this mark of the true church was rejected by certain scholars in various ways throughout the ages, it remains an essential mark of the true church. The sacraments are based on the Word of God. Therefore, administration of the sacraments complements the preaching of the Word of God. Berkhof (1939:577-578) indicates that sacraments are in fact the invisible preaching of the Word of God. A denial of the central truths of the Word of God will naturally affect the correct administration of the sacraments. It is therefore worth noting that proper administration of the sacraments is truly the second mark of a true Christian church. The word of God and the administration of sacraments are not to be separated from each other due to their efficacy, they are also not to be separated from their influence on social, economic, political and psychological factors. It will be proper for the researcher to proceed to baptism as the mark of the Christian church that is utilised to induct an old person into a new person in the communion of believers (Church).

2.5.2.1 Baptism as the sacramental rite in the church

Gaillardetz (2008:19-20) indicates that, baptism introduces a person to a communal life in Christ, pointing out to the following:

It is from the writings of Paul that we get the mostly fully developed reflection on the theological significance of Christian communal life. Paul's theology of the church was grounded in two insights: first, that salvation came through contact with the saving power of the death and resurrection of Christ, and, second, that this saving contact came through baptism into Christ's "body" the church. Indeed, the early church's theology of baptism might be thought of as the first Christian ecclesiology. To be baptized a Christian meant being baptized into mystical participation in Christ's death and resurrection as one was simultaneously initiated into Christ's body the church. Paul's theological reflections on the Christian community centered on the metaphor of the body. By speaking of the church as a body, Paul privileged the communal nature of

Christian life, spiritual coexistence, and the interdependence of all the members.

According to Gaillardetz (2008:19-20), baptism is the initial stage that leads to an interdependent coexistence of members of the church, members by baptism need to be purified from their sins of separation, in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, class and colour. However, the same church or body of Christ that Gaillardetz refers to as the body of Christ exists in parallel to the baptismal rites and promises; hence the researcher speaks of the falsity of the church in terms of its overemphasis of one or two elements over and above the other one. Gaillardetz (2008) has tried to move the line by stating that baptism brings the re-creation of a new person through redemption in Jesus' death and resurrection, while the Holy spirit renews the work of Christ of reconciliation through the preaching of the word.

Furthermore, if for Paul baptism initiated the believer into the life of the community, the bonds of the community with one another and with God were further enriched through the celebration of the Holy Communion or Eucharist. The Eucharist was a holy meal that celebrated the two communions, or *koinonia*, that Christians had with God in Christ and with one another. The water, bread and wine are the organic natural elements that bring about intra-relationships (inner person's connectedness), interrelationships (the connectedness among other human beings), and connectedness to God. Michel (2012: 103) indicates that when human beings enter the church through the orderly initiation of baptism, human beings become intimately united with Christ as members of the mystical Body (Church) of which Christ is the Head. Thus, Christ is most truly and supernaturally our Brother, all human beings are children of God in a very special and sublime manner, and we are all brethren together who are intimately united in the one Christ. In this holy fellowship we find a harmonious combination of the complementary factors of humankind, that is, organic fellowship coupled with full respect for human personality and individual responsibility. Through baptism, believers are purified from their sins and initiated into the new fellowship in the same manner as the Jew was received into the new people of God through circumcision as an initiation rite. However, circumcision emphasised dying of the old life and birth into a new life in Christ and because of this; it distinguished the Christians from Jews. Baptism as a sacrament is preceded by the Word of God (Keane, 2005:9).

Pickstock (2012:150) indicates that the catholic rite is free from any exclusion. Simply by virtue of their common humanity, all are admitted to the body of Christ, without obliterating their differences. The qualification to enter the body of Christ is through baptism, which is accessible to all and leaves no trace of specific anatomical differences such as circumcision. After baptism, the water washes away, leaving an invisible transfiguration. The person is irrevocably changed, but only to what one already was (Image of God). It makes the individual person more human, rather than setting a barrier between the previously impure self and the new initiated self. The word of God, the sacrament of baptism and the Eucharist all constitute the revelation of the mighty deeds of God that emphasise the relationship between God and His creation, as well as the relationship among human beings and the physical organic environment. In the next section, the Eucharist as the mark of the church which emphasises the unity of believers in the Christian church is discussed.

2.5.2.2 Eucharist as the sacramental rite of the church

The Eucharist is the wholeness of the “one whole Word of God” – Jesus Christ, risen and glorified and abiding in our midst keeps together the depth and meaning of the sacramental encounter (Janowiak, 2011:167). The Eucharist and the kerygma cannot be heard and celebrated without taking action. Is the problem of churchism celebrating the Eucharist and hearing the word without any change of mind or heart? Avila (2012:123) puts it in this way: to a certain degree that celebration of the Eucharist is the authentic prophecy of the new world, to the degree that all those who celebrate it are sufficiently removed from their habitual situation, to the degree that the Eucharist is celebrated as true fiesta, the church injects in all its member’s seeds of protest. If they believe that they are hopelessly bound to certain servitudes, it is at this moment that they glimpse that this order of things is not inevitable. If they accept with resignation society as it is or as it has been forced upon the people of God, the creative imagination, awakened by the celebration of the utopia, reveals to them that there are other possible schemes and designs for society. The celebration of the Holy Communion as the mark of the Christian Church brings the sense of awareness or a reflexive moment in the church of Christ, which raises many critical questions of race, unity, gender and class within the church and society. Furthermore, Avila (2012:123) indicates that the Holy Communion can be an anaesthetic or evasion. But it can also be the

seed of revolution that awakens the mind to what is possible, to what is not yet achieved, and to what has not yet even been contemplated by the creative imagination. It is no accident that many times the celebration of the Passover was preceded in Israel by political rebellions against foreign occupation. The celebration of the Eucharist is not innocent, but it is the gesture that necessarily takes place in a political context and cannot avoid a confrontation with faith. In the light of this research, the right administration of the sacraments as the mark of the true church indicates the need for interconnectedness of God, human beings and the physical-organic environment as God is worshipped by human beings through symbols (organic materials) to show the presence of the one whole word of God, Jesus Christ. Hence the administration of the sacraments is one of the marks of a true church, but the truth is also tied to the prophetic voice and action.

De Gruchy (2011:378) indicates that the current practice as the reformed church expanded was later reinforced by practical considerations, as in Scotland and South Africa. Yet, even when these attenuating circumstances did not apply, a quarterly or at best a monthly service of Holy communion became normative. And while frequency does not necessarily determine significance, infrequency changes the character of Sunday worship and can have serious negative consequences on the life of the Church. Among these is the separation of the Word from the sacraments.

Calvin was of the strong opinion that the proclamation of the word of God and the celebration of the sacraments belonged together. However, infrequency of the Holy Communion inevitably meant that a separation occurred to the detriment of both the Word and Sacrament. For just as there should be no Holy Communion without first listening to the preaching of the Word, by the same token, there should be no Proclamation of the Word without the Holy Communion (De Gruchy, 2011:378). Karl Barth (1939:211) observed that “a service without sacraments is one which is outwardly incomplete”. When the Reformers refer to the Eucharist they are not speaking to that part of the liturgy when there is distribution of the elements of the Eucharist are distributed, but the service as a whole, including the reading and preaching of the Word. The act of separating the Word from the Holy Communion otherwise undermines the incarnational core of the Christian faith: “The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us” (John 1:14). In fact, to separate the Word from the Eucharist suggests a *docetic* Christology, namely that Christ is

not understood as truly present in the time and space as flesh and blood, but only as divine Word – a danger to which Calvin himself was not immune. From a Reformed perspective, this omission reduces the Eucharist to a fellowship meal or *agape*. The prayer of thanksgiving is incomplete without invoking the Spirit to bless the elements that are being set aside “for this holy use and mystery” (De Gruchy, 2011:378).

Furthermore, De Gruchy (2011:379) postulates that the bad practice also derives from relating church discipline to “taking communion”. He emphasised that there is a scriptural warrant for ecclesial discipline related to the Eucharist (I Cor. 11:28), but this has too often been misunderstood and abused. If the Eucharist is a means of grace, it has to do with changing lives and strengthening discipleship, not with punishing sinners by excluding them from the table. A related and seriously misguided practice is making attendance at the Eucharist a way of checking up on whether members of the congregation have made their contribution to its financial obligations. All of this turns the sacrament into an instrument of law, shifting the focus away from the presence of Christ, who graciously embraces us at his table, to an instrument for the exclusion of deemed unworthy despite any words of invitation to the contrary.

The Word of God and the celebration of the Eucharist possesses the potential to discipline the members of the church. Moreover, the office bearer who is supposed to study the prevailing milieu, therefore proclaims the word and distributes the elements of holy communion to the congregation, these actions of partaking in the service of God has a bearing on the whole life of the congregation and subsequently includes service to one another and the world. The essence of this service of God is found where the congregation meets around the Word of God and the sacraments. There God is worshipped and praised, his Word is listened to, the sacraments are received, and all the needs of the people are brought before Him in order to strengthen the believers in their faith and to prepare them for their service to one another and the world. Such actions are prone to bring discipline closer to the whole life of the church. As one cannot separate the Word of God from the Eucharist, the same is not possible with the receivers of the Word and the Eucharist, meaning that the discipline of the receivers is very important to the service of God. The next section will discuss the faithful exercise of discipline as the third and final mark of the Christian church.

2.5.3 The faithful exercise of discipline

When listening to the Word of God that has been preached and actively participating in the sacramental celebration of the true church, there needs to be an element of purity. However, to maintain purity in the church, faithful exercise of discipline is an essential element to that process. Therefore, the third mark of the true church is also very important because it ensures that there is purity in the church and that the purity of the doctrine is also maintained. It also guards and protects the holiness of the sacraments. In fact, it is now very clear that all three marks of a true church are needed to create a balance for the welfare of the Christian Church. Berkhof indicates that churches that are lax in discipline are bound to discover sooner or later within their circles an eclipse of the light of the truth and an abuse of that which is holy. Hence a church that would remain true to her ideal, in which this is possible on earth, must be diligent and conscientious in the exercise of Christian discipline (Berkhof, 1939: 578). Donald Bridge in his book, "Spare the Rod and Spoil the Church" to quote John Calvin, says that "the powerful figure of John Calvin opposed them at first but finally came to the same conclusion that the church without discipline is like the body without sinews" (1985: 3). In terms of the faithful exercise of discipline within the anthropocosmic sense making, the true church needs to exercise discipline with love so that the interconnectedness of God, human beings and the physical organic environment cannot be disintegrated. Discipline is there for maintenance and sustenance of this interconnectedness. The three marks of the true church, preaching the word, administering of the sacraments and discipline, have endured criticism and rejection, but have eventually emerged triumphant. There are other scholars who were of the opinion that there is also a fourth mark of the true church, that is, "*agape*" love.

The Church finds itself in a dilemma or caught in an irresolvable tension today. Insofar as we are able to maintain any presence in modern society we do so by being communities of care. The church learns from God that God disciplines his children because of the love and care God has for his children, therefore the church as the loving and caring community has to do likewise with its members. In such a context, any attempt for the church to be a disciplined and disciplining community seems anti-ethical to being a community of care. As a result, the care that the church gives, while often quite impressive and compassionate, lacks the

rationale to build the church as a community capable of standing against the powers confronted. The church sometimes experiences difficulty with being a disciplined community, or it even cannot conceive what it would mean to be a disciplined community. This is therefore not surprising given the church's social position in developed economies because of this juxtaposition that the church finds itself in. The church exists in a buyer's and consumer's market, so any suggestion that preempts the notion that in order to be a member of a church one must be transformed by opening one's life to certain kinds of discipline is almost impossible to maintain (Hauerwas, 2012:657). The situation which the church finds itself in seems to render the activities and responsibilities of care and discipline incompatible. Care is identified with compassionate care of the individual and is now thought to be the most important priority of the church. Care requires an understanding of the particularities of the situations of individual members so that the very idea of disciplining someone in a personal crisis is simply unthinkable. The church seeks to be understood and to understand – not to be judged.

In brief, the problem of the modernity for the church is how to survive as disciplined communities in the democratic societies. For the fundamental presumption behind democratic societies is that the consciousness of something called the common citizen is privileged, no matter what kind of formation it may or may not have had. It is that presumption that gives rise to the very idea of ethics as an identifiable discipline within the modern university curriculum. Both Kant and utilitarians assumed that the task of the ethicist was to explicate the presuppositions shared by anyone. Ethics is the attempt at the systemisation of what human beings, all perhaps only inchoately, know or which they have perhaps failed to make sufficiently explicit (Hauerwas, 2012:660). Discipline as the mark of the Christian church is not standing alone, but is a demonstration of obedience to the word of God, and the sign of being partaker in the celebration of the Holy Communion. That which is in the word of God and what Christians believe about the Eucharist and how Christians need to live their lives is summarised in symbols called confessions. These confessions describe in short are that which different denominations believe according to the text and the context. The confessions of faith in the Reformed church are discussed in the next section.

2.6 CONFESSIONS OF THE REFORMED CHURCH

The confessions or creeds as we commonly know them are yardsticks which give the reason for existence within a certain denomination. They address issues of primary importance to Christians and their faith.

The confessions... were addressed to the central questions of human existence: Who am I? Who is God? How does God tell humans about himself and about the world in which they live? What institutions has God given to humanity? How are those institutions—churches, government, the family, the economy—supposed to function?” (Noll 2004:12). Creeds must however be separated from the confessions, in that these contain and “spells out in detail the doctrines or beliefs held by a particular church (Kritzinger 2004: 50).

A Creed is therefore a “brief statement of BELIEF containing the main elements of Christian doctrine.... [T]heir function has been mainly liturgical, since they are recited regularly by members of certain churches in congregational worship (Ibid)

Most of these confessions emerged during the 16th century by the then authors, and their ultimate goal was to inherently guide the Christian faith and thus address the latter concerning the socio-political and cultural influences which could prevail or derail them from the Christian beliefs and traditions.

In his book, *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation*, Noll asserts that:

the meaning of ‘confession’ is stretched slightly to incorporate personal or group statements of faith that never became official doctrinal standards for churches or denominations. The more normal meaning refers to the formally statements of a particular group’s Christian convictions (Noll 2004:14).

It is therefore this very conviction that sets out the parameters of Christian faith living as being outlined within these confessions. These confessions, in retrospect offer ‘coordinates’ for a true Christian living; hence their reliance on the commandments as a true relationship that supposedly exists concerning God, His Word, our faith and what we profess to believe in.

If Luther and Calvin called upon Rome to rethink its interpretation of Scripture, so too did leaders of the Renaissance challenge other intellectual traditions in art, political theory, literature and history. If Protestants raised troubling questions in theology, so too had several generations of academicians raised troubling issues in philosophy. In short, the world of the sixteenth century needed new

statements not just to reorient Christian belief, but to reposition Christianity itself within the forces of early modern Europe (Noll 2004:15).

The confessions play a role in the life of a Christian in that they act as a dome that protects what the Christian doctrine professes. These confessions are confessed by an individual and/or congregation with an open heart to the outside world to attest, amplify and declare their faith. This is done to entrench and deepen the incumbent's Christian beliefs and thus declaring what they stand for to the congregants, the community and the world at large.

2.6.1 The four claims of confession, according to Karl Barth

It is important for the researcher to journey through Karl Barth's claims of the confession in order to give a clear understanding what a confession is and why it is the identity of the church. A confession as the identity of the church or denomination relies on what it subscribes to, that is, its content and its major function of disciplining the members of that particular church because they have internalised the content of that confession. Karl Barth, as one of the drafters of the Barmen Declaration, states in his *Church Dogmatics*¹ that confession has four claims that must be met:

Firstly, the witness and confession claimed by a human being must always bear the character of an action without an ulterior goal, which takes place only to honour God. A confession is not made with an aim in view and is not focused on results but made because God is God who does all things well, and therefore, knowing this the person cannot remain silent (Barth, 1969:77). As confessors we are not concerned with any end, but only with the honour of God. Without this conviction and without the risk of being ludicrous, there is no confession of faith (Barth, 1969:78).

Secondly, the required confession may, must and will occur when a human being realises that his or her faith, or rather the faith of the Christian community is confronted and questioned either from within or without by the phenomena of unbelief, superstition and heresy (Barth, 1969:78-79). In the situation in which the call to confess arises, there is an awareness of it, and therefore of the incursion of the acute confronting and questioning of faith by one of its opponents.

¹ Barth Karl, 1969. *Church Dogmatics* Vol III Part 4 The Doctrine of Creation TT Clark Edinburgh.

A man does not sleep through it, nor does he neglect it, nor reinterpret it, nor minimize it as a situation in which confession is possible not commanded he does not, then, deny the status confessionis which has actually arisen, nor put off its consequences to tomorrow or the next day, to a more serious situation in which he will undoubtedly have to confess and will actually do so, though the time is not yet ripe for confession (Barth, 1969:79).

To possess the necessary summons to confess is an indication that one also belongs and believes that in a given situation it should actually be necessary to protest and oppose responsibly and authoritatively to unbelief, superstition and heresy of the word of faith. A mere human statement is wholly inadequate as a protest of faith. If only opinions and convictions existed, then whether they are expressed or not, the person would actually not be ready to confess (Barth, 1969:80). It constitutes a protest against the various judgments, superstitions or heresies. It must have the character of a protest (Barth, Church Dogmatics III, Part 4 p 80). Confession has nothing to do with lyricism or meditation. The confession that has commanded us will necessitate the nature of a risk or defiance (Barth, 1969:81). A confession is a decisive action and not an incidental reaction. It is definitive. The confession that is commanded of one will always be distinguished from an arbitrary outbursts of human resentment (Barth, 1969:81).

Thirdly, confessions are distinguished from lyrical effusion, because it occurs as a definite opposition and therefore as an act of defiance and conflict. Barth indicates two infallible tests that can be utilised to test whether a confession is genuine or not. Firstly, whether and to what extent it is concerned with what scripture sets out as being an all-controlling point of departure (proclamation of the Word), and therefore with Jesus Christ, with the covenant fulfilled in Him, with the reconciliation accomplished in Him, with His lordship as exclusive lordship, with His unity with God and therefore with the source of all good. The next test is whether and to what extent the word of the confessor commits him to a specific public action or open attitude (disciplined behaviour of confessors). A declaration may be bold and clear and centrally Christian in the above-mentioned sense, but as long as it remains theoretical, entailing no obligation or venture on the part of him or her who creates it, it is not a confession and must not be mistaken for it. It becomes a confession when the word as such implies an action, making an obvious decision in which its subject is revealed and exposed as a member of the

Christian community in larger or smaller publicity of his surroundings (Barth, 1969:82-85).

Fourthly, confession is a free action. It is a response to a summons, resting on free choice. It proceeds from the Holy Spirit who breathes where He wills. It is related to God's free grace.

Confession is bound to neither calendar nor clock. When its hour comes it may and must occur; none can demand confession from another, nor can one commission another to confess. He who goes into the open with his confession dies for it of his own impulse, on his own account and on his own responsibility. He cannot denigrate the confession of another. Nor can he be persuaded or forced by any to confess this or that. In a confession a man stands on God's side, this has the sober and liberating implications, in respect of all that may be entailed, that God stands on his or her side. He or she who confesses no longer has to fear. Confessing, he puts everything he or she might fear behind him. In the act of confession, he or she steps out into the freedom of God in which he or she too, may be free (Barth, 1969:85-86).

2.6.1.1 Heidelberg Catechism

The *Heidelberg Catechism* is a case in point as it was commissioned by Elector Frederick III, who was the ruler of one of the most persuasive provinces in Germany, the Palatinate, during the years 1559 – 1576. Frederick III requested the professors and scholars at the University of Heidelberg to formulate this document as a means to give the youth instructions on life and be used as a guide for the teachers and preachers of the Word alike. This was adopted by the synod of the then times in the sixteenth century and has thus been adopted by other synods with corrections since then. This has been taught in the catechism classes, which aim at preparing the youth of the respective Churches to become pious, responsible and unfading Christians by affording them faith tools to be able to tackle challenges which they may encounter during their Christian lives.

Contained in the Heidelberg catechism are questions such as: 1. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort? Three important things: that we are sinners, how will we be set free from our sins and misery and lastly be in a position to thank God for our deliverance, 2. What does God's law require of us? This is encapsulated in the gospel of Matthew 22: 34-39, that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength as this is the first

commandment and the second one is exactly the same as the first but is dedicated to our fellow brethren or neighbours, 3. Did God create man so perverse and wicked? God never created man to be perverse and wicked, but only created man in his own image to be truthful and holy, so that man may recognize God as his only God and creator and forever give Him the praise and glory that God deserves, 4. But doesn't God do man an injustice by requiring in his law what man is unable to do? God does not do anyone an injustice by requiring that man keep his laws, because he gave man the capability and ability to uphold His law, and man decides to deviate from the law due to his unruliness and therefore succumb to what the devil prescribes to him, 5. Will God permit such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished? No, God will never allow such acts to go unpunished for he forewarned mankind not to transgress His commandments and should transgression be the option then punishment shall therefore be the remedy, 6. According to God's righteous judgement we deserve punishment both in this world and forever after: How can we escape this punishment and return to God's favor? God just and ever loves, therefore if we repent and confess our sins He is good to acknowledge our repentance and forgive us our sins, but His justice when He judges and punishes will be deeply felt by those who are in transgression of His laws. (As taken from the URCSA's Confessional Source Book 2011: 8 –12)

All of the above questions are asked to instil in the minds of the Christians what God is all about and what it is that He will and will not find acceptable in the behaviour of the people. The answers to these questions are all in the affirmative that God will not under any circumstances allow humankind to be derailed from the law because God has granted us the ability to choose between right and wrong, and knowing that we are capable of doing what is right in his eyes. For the Lord says "Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty" (Exodus 23:7). Failure to comply with God's instruction and guidance will therefore lead us to be punished here on earth and in the everlasting life.

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (Romans 8: 3-4).

God therefore leaves no room for sin to occur and become a vile serpent that devours His nation unto condemnation. Thus, the Word is stringent on the transgression of man by committing sin and thereby sin cannot go unpunished. In other words, sin and the law work in unison in that one cannot exist without the other. This is also accentuated by the fact that for humankind to be aware of their transgression they need to be informed by a series of restrictive measures, which take the form of the law in this regard. The law therefore works as a sinew that binds humankind to what God expects of them, and failure to adhere to this catalyst that is adhesive in nature will therefore lead to punishment for the Word also spells out the outcome of such a behavioural stance. This in itself leaves a mark on all our lives that we must always strive to become righteous Christians and live as such.

The Heidelberg Catechism works as an overall working document as it does not only address the discipline and conduct aspects of life, but also covers an array of issues with which every Christian has to abide, namely Man's Misery, Man's deliverance, The Lord's day, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, The Sacraments, Baptism, The Lord's Supper, Man's Gratitude, The Commandments and The Prayer. A harmonious relationship exists among the three confessions being the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic confession (one of the three confessions which is accepted within the Reformed tradition, and was written in 1561. Its origins stem from Belgium to make it clear to the Spanish leaders that the Reformed faith had no intention to rebel against the Spanish powers) and the Canons of Dort (which is also a Reformed confession which was instituted in the 17th century, containing five canons. It came about as a tool which stood against the ideas of Professor Jacob Arminius, a leader of the Remonstrant Fraternity. Its canons include "[T]otal depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace and the Perseverance of the saints" (Kritzinger 2004: 33) and at times it is termed TULIP.

2.6.1.2 Confession of Faith

In the Reformed Churches, there is also the *Confession of Faith*, which is ranked among the greatest and one of the oldest doctrines that still exists within the strata of the Church. It is also termed the Belgic confession based on its origins as it was conceptualised in Belgium, which formed the northern part of the Netherlands in those times. This was the brainchild of *Guido de Brès*, who drafted this confession

as a response to the persecution that occurred to the faithful reformists against the Roman Catholic government. The Belgic confession was a tool that perpetuated the standing point of no return against King Phillip II and therefore amplified the voice of the Reformed church against the inequities that transpired in their lives as the king and his allies orchestrated these inhumane acts disproportionately. Hence, the church took a stance that they would rather “offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire” than deny that which this confession represented (URCSA’s Confessional Source Book 2011: 69). This confession was thus adopted by the churches in the Netherlands and ratified by the synods, which sat in the said location during the sixteenth century. The Confession of faith was also well accepted by the office-bearers of the church and therefore embraced by the whole community of faith. This confession was a symbolic doctrine within the Reformed church in that it emphasised the stance of the reformists and was recognised and understood across the political, social and spiritual spectrum.

Encompassed in the abovementioned confession are articles, which make up the whole document. However, for the benefit of this exercise we concentrate only on those articles that bear reference to our subject matter. These include, inter-alia, *Article XIII* (The providence of God and His government of all things), *Article XVII* (The recovery of the fallen man), *Article XXIV* (Man’s sanctification and good works), *Article XXX* (The government of the church and its offices) and *Article XXXVI* (The Magistracy ‘Civil government’).

2.6.1.2.1 The providence of God and His government of all things (Article XIII)

This article and its successors clearly spell out the love that God has for His beings and that He has not in any way created them to perish in sin, for He has created all things not to

forsake them or give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment; nevertheless, God neither is the Author of nor can be charged with the sins which are committed (URCSA’s Confessional Source Book 2011: 75).

In this citation, the justness of God is evident, which is beyond human understanding, even though humankind tends to disobey God’s law; He will pass

judgement on us in ways that are mysterious to us. The lesson that we learn from the above is that nothing can steer us into darkness by chance, for God has always sought to protect us from sin, because His law is the guiding tool that shows us the way and cannot derail us from His holy way if we abide by it. The one simple reason for this is that God still exercises His paternalistic protection upon humankind so that they do not deviate from His teachings and thus governs them in a more holistic manner.

2.6.1.2.2 . The recovery of the fallen human being (Article XVII)

In this article, God reveals His providence as the father of all believers and non-believers alike. In the same manner as the father protects his children, God also has protected humankind from sin and thus sent Jesus Christ, who was born of a woman, to come into this world and save humankind from oblivion because they threw themselves into physical and spiritual death by neglecting the Law of God and abandoning His ways. Christ's sole purpose in this world was to rebuild the self-imposed fallen image of humankind and rekindle the dead physical and spiritual stature of humankind in forging the union that pre-existed between him and his creator.

2.6.1.2.3 Human being's sanctification and good works (Article XXIV)

This article amplifies and exposes the faith of humankind in its belief that if a person truly has an exclusive and true faith, which has been moulded by hearing, learning and internalising the Word of God and subsequently allowing the Holy Spirit to perform its duties in him, it "regenerates him and makes him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin" (URCSA's Confessional Source Book 2011:80). Therefore, it is this faith that assumes the role of a true guide in the life of a Christian, this faith is of utmost importance in the said life because it is virtually unbearable to assume that this faith can prove to be unrewarding towards mankind, "for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture a *faith working through love*, which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word" (URCSA's Confessional Source Book 2011: 80). This argument leads us to the sole focus that it is only by our steadfast faith in Christ our Saviour that we are justified for all that we embark upon, as works can never be deemed good works if they do not

have Christ's influence. The analogy that can be drawn from the above argument is that, whatever our actions, we cannot begin by saying that we are Christians who are redeemed by Christ our Saviour and extract our strength from the Holy Spirit, but still possess the potential to commit sin and not expect to suffer the consequences thereof. Having said that, God owes us nothing, but in retrospect we are the ones who are forever indebted to Him. Hence we are to continuously strive to do what is good and follow in the path of Christ because

though we do good works, we do not found our salvation upon them; for we can do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable; and although we could perform such works, still the remembrance of one sin is sufficient to make God reject them (URCSA's Confessional Source Book 2011: 81).

There is therefore no guarantee that even when we do well and what is characterised as a virtuous act is overawed by our sinful behaviour, God will still punish us for that transgression for He did not create us to dishonour His law as Christians.

2.6.1.2.4 The government of the church and its offices (Article XXX)

The government of the Church and its offices relate to Church polity and administration to ensure the ever existence of the true Church. However, these two are to adopt a secular approach when governing the Church in its entirety. This article also refers to the appointments of Church leaders who are pious in nature. This relates or makes specific reference to the ministers and pastors alike, who are God's appointees entrusted to spread and preach the Word of God and to further oversee and perform the administration of the sacraments whilst being led by the Holy Spirit to carry out this mandate.

These ministers and pastors are not the only leaders within the Church; they are assisted by the deacons and the elders to govern the Church of Christ by forming the Church Councils "that by these means the true religion may be preserved, and the true doctrine everywhere propagated, likewise transgressors punished and restrained by spiritual means...." (URCSA's Confessional Source Book 2011: 84). It is only when this administrative approach has been internalised and implemented without fear or favour that the Church can enjoy order and a decent

stance within its community and thus encourage its leadership to be of faithful character as prescribed by St. Paul in his epistle to Timothy.

2.6.1.2.5 *The Magistracy 'Civil government' (Article XXXVI)*

The magistracy and governance of the church is emphasised in this part of the Confession in that it states that humankind has been deprived and therefore God has by His own hand elected

kings, princes and magistrates; willing that the world should be governed by certain laws and policies; to the end that the dissoluteness of human being might be restrained and all things carried on among them with good order and decency. For this purpose, He has invested the magistracy with *the sword for the punishment of evil-doers and for the protection of them that do well* (URCSA's Confessional Source Book 2011: 88).

This clearly reveals the order that God has instilled in the world, not excluding the Church being part thereof and that it must also be governed under the same law and order that governs the world. The ministers, pastors and the clergy are also God's appointees and they must also govern and administer the Church with good leadership skills and not deviate from that which the Church represents.

In doing so, their office will not only keep a watchful eye on the wellbeing of the state, but also protect the sacred ministry so as to promote the kingdom of Christ, to worship and honour God as He commands His Word. This, however, does not exclude the selectees from the rule of law as they also form part of the system that preaches discipline among the society and the members of the Church at large. With this in mind, they (clergy) are then subjected to respecting and showing honour to whatever decision has been taken against them when they engage in immoral acts (actions which are not congruent with morality) and thus transgress the Law of God, for they are to lead by example and never for a moment think that they are exonerated from discipline and the Law of God is only applicable to the subordinates or the less fortunate. More importantly, the clergy hold the highest office in the magistracy of the Church in that they are not only the punishers, but have also been given the task to supplicate, intercede and pray for them who have been found to be in transgression of the rule of the law.

2.6.2 Belhar Confession

The Belhar confession was conceived long before its adoption in 1982; however, it was formally accepted as a confession within the Reformed fraternity in 1986. It was the first of its own kind to be generated within the family of the Reformed Churches in three centuries and the first confession to be the brainchild of a Church in Africa. The Belhar confession derives its name from the small town called Belhar in the Western Cape, a town that was created to house the coloured people in that region. In this small town, the entire Reformed Church family the *Dutch Reformed Mission Church - DRMC*, *Dutch Reformed Church - DRC*, *Dutch Reformed Church in Africa - DRCA* congregated to discuss this document that was formulated to be a tool to address the *status confessionis* that the Reformed Church found themselves to be under. The *status confessionis* that needed be to addressed meant

that a Christian, a group of Christians, a church, or a group of churches are of the opinion that a situation has developed, a moment of truth has dawned, in which nothing less than the gospel itself, their most fundamental confession concerning the Christian gospel, is at stake, so that they feel compelled to witness and act over against this threat (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2013: 330).

This confession has since become the bedrock of theological reference and reflection as well as a salient point of theological identity within the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (Boesak, 2011:1).

This confession emerged from the hearts of the faithful in order to address the sin that was orchestrated with impunity among the children of God. This bore reference to the apartheid theology and policies which were prevalent in South Africa at the time. The Belhar confession had only one purpose within its drafting, and that was to address the separate development policy within South Africa which constituted sin and that its moral and theological justification by the white minority government was a mockery of the gospel and thus resulted in a consistent disobedience of the Word of God, all of which equated to a theological heresy. In brief, the Belhar Confession addresses all the actions that are not in unison with that which the Word of God promulgates; this is where discipline is important. Its primary role is to ensure adherence to what the Lord our God wants us to become while we live in the world that He has given us, so that we become agents of change by abiding in what the Word predetermines as it distinctly

propagates issues such as unity, reconciliation and justice. Finally, it aligns its authority with the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. This confession played a significant role not only in its country of origin, but also the world over and it became a gift to the world. Kritzinger, in the chapter entitled *Living Belhar Loving Belhar* states that all five articles of the Belhar confession are equally important for living and loving the Belhar confession. This equal treatment of the five articles of the Belhar confession is the most important for this research study in the sense that the person who confesses this confession needs to live according to its principles.

It has become customary to say that the message of the Confession of Belhar has to do with Unity (Art. 2), Reconciliation (Art. 3) and Justice (Art. 4). By doing so the importance of Article 1 (Hope) and Art.5 (Obedience) are downplayed or ignored. These then become mere “book stops” around the “real confession”. The integrity of the Confession is damaged by doing that. The Confession of Belhar does not incite us to “man-made” activism; it invites us to become part of God’s nurturing, uniting, reconciling, transforming and sanctifying mission in society. Our work for unity, reconciliation and justice must be embedded in the faithfulness of the triune God (Art. 1) and in our obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord (Art. 5). It is also important to remember that none of the middle three articles are of higher importance than the others. Even if one believes that one is personally called to work for the unity of the church, the Confession of Belhar reminds one that one cannot separate this from reconciliation in society and standing against injustice. In this manner one is drawn beyond personal interests and into an integrated participation in God’s transformation of the world. It is hoped that this booklet will draw participants into a Belhar spirituality of hopeful trust in God’s faithfulness (Art. 1) and resolute commitment to serve nobody and nothing else (Art. 5).

2.6.2.1 Hope in God’s faithfulness

When we confess in the Confession of Belhar, we confess that we believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who through Word and Spirit gathers, protects and cares for the church from the beginning of the world and will do to the end (as taken from Article One of Belhar Confession).

There are certain options available for characterising the main thrust of Article One of the Belhar confession. Its emphasis is placed on the gracious initiative of the

triune God to call the church into being and to preserve it throughout history calls forth a response of grateful wonder. It also elicits an openness to be further gathered, fed and protected by God's Word and Spirit. The more the researcher meditated on this rich sentence, the more the researcher became convinced that the "sting" of Article 1 is in its "tail" – that the last six words ("and will do to the end") presents the punch line. The punch line brought me to the theme of *hope*: God's faithful gathering and feeding of the church calls forth gratitude and obedience but above all its calls forth *hope* in God's on-going faithfulness – "to the end". This led me to make "Hope in God's faithfulness" the catchphrase for Article 1.² The same article is the hope for the unity of the church since this unity is anchored in the unity of God. Gaillardetz (2008:85) postulates that this unity is based on the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity describes how God is one and illustrates to us that God's unity is a relational, differentiated and fecund unity (it is able to support the growth of other healthy forms of unity); by analogy it is the same regarding the Church (body of Christ). If the oneness of the Church emphasises the Church's deep spiritual unity as the one people of God and the body of Christ, the unity of the Church highlights the relational, differentiated, and fecund character of the unity of the Church. The catholicity of the Church reminds Christians that, following the analogy of the triune life of God, the unity of the Church is a differentiated and relational unity (Gaillardetz, 2008:85). Hence, the Belhar Confession begins with the triune life of God, which is able to support the growth of a healthy Church unity.³

2.6.2.2 Unity

Unity in this instance refers to unity that exists in the triune God, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, who regroups, safeguards and maintains His Church globally from the beginning to the end and it further accentuates the belief in one universal Holy Christian Church and a unity of saints from the whole human family. This means that for unity of believers to prevail among the congregations, common goals and common behaviours have to exist. Church unity can therefore not suffer due to the unruly or unbecoming behaviour of one or two of its members; such an

² While writing this paper the researcher discovered that the RCA study guide also identifies hope as the key emphasis of Article 1 (See Session 8: The Belhar as an affirmation of hope; RCA 2006:47-50).

³ Belhar Confession (1986) article 1 & 2: "We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end. We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family."

act would thus place the unity of the Church at stake. Unity, therefore, acts as a sinew that keeps the Church together. This unity refers to and relates to a harmonious reaction to that which the Church condones and for this unity to manifest, it must be visible so as to enable the world to believe that estrangement, hostility and animosity all result in sin and therefore does not build the Church of Christ.

This view is aptly explained by Modise (2013) when he looks into the road leading to the unification process of the Reformed Churches to the establishment of the URCSA that different synods of the Reformed family “viewed church unity as a gift, obligation and scriptural imperative [in that,] the church is the Body of Jesus Christ on earth – not many bodies, but one minded body; this truth is vividly described in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians 1:12-31, where he compares the church to the human body, explaining that this body is a single, integrated, living organism whose every part supports, strengthens and intimately cooperates with every other part. There is no division or conflict in such a body; there is always the spontaneous mutual support which different organs give one another. It is true that the limbs fulfil different offices and responsibilities, but all are servants of one another and cooperate closely in order to promote proper and successful functioning” (Plaatjies-Van Huffel: 2013: 121-122).

The key phrase here is that they “are all servants of one another and cooperate closely to promote proper and successful functioning” of the church, the congregation and/or the community of believers, which means that all the believers must adhere to the laws prescribed to them, even though they all have different offices which they occupy and no one is above the law. However, the confession clearly states that it rejects any doctrine, which promulgates spiritual unity in the name of peace but at the expense of those who by deed or word go against these laws working against the unity that God wants to manifest within His Church (Belhar Confession 2011:3).

2.6.2.3 Reconciliation

Reconciliation is, however, a very complicated and complex concept to deal with; hence, it is very important to provide a context. When dealing with reconciliation the researcher needs to be very careful because reconciliation needs to be genuine

and not cheap. One cannot walk away from the table of reconciliation too soon while it took centuries to be internalised in the hearts of people.

Van der Walter and Human (2005:55) concur with Vorster (1986) by arguing that the concept of reconciliation has meaning in many contexts, and applies to everyday human relations and situations. It is a concept, however, which in particular has religious overtones. Reconciliation has to do with relationships, which for some or other reason were damaged or scarred. The need normally exists to mend these damaged relations and to restore it to its former ideal state. The process to restore this relationship is converged in the concept of reconciliation. When a relationship between two parties has been damaged or harmed, it needs to be reconciled.

Breytenbach (1986:1) argues that if the word reconciliation is used in a theological sense, there are two events which have to be taken into consideration: traditionally, 'reconciliation' has been utilised to refer to the redemptive event in which a human being is freed from the deadly effects of their sins, where human beings that have broken the relationship with God, other human beings and the creation are brought into a relationship again. In this sense, reconciliation is associated with the soteriological doctrines of redemption and atonement (at-one-ment - unity with God, one another and the entire creation). However, there is also a second, more recent use of the word reconciliation in theology. Reconciliation is used to refer to the process by which alienated people are brought together in concord. In this sense, reconciliation is associated with the liberation of human beings from the conflicting political and social forces that determine his or her life.

Thus Barth (1961:3) argued that:

Reconciliation in the sense of the Christian confession and the message of the Christian community is God's active and superior Yes to man. It is God's active Yes to man as it is the fulfilment of the eternal election in which God has determined, determines and will again determine Himself for man to be his God, and man for Himself to be his man. It is God's superior Yes to man as it is the overcoming, in God's omnipotent mercy, of the No, the contraction, the opposition, the disruption in which man, if he were left, he was left to achieve it, would necessarily destroy his relationship to God and his fellows, and therefore himself. God does not permit him to execute this No of his, this contraction and opposition. God does not abandon him to the mortal peril to which he thereby exposes

himself. He takes the lists against man and therefore for him, for his salvation and for His own glory. He stands by His Yes. He accomplishes its actualization. This is the work of God the Reconciler.

Reconciliation, as stated by Barth above, has to deal with mending the broken relationships between human beings and or between God and human beings. In such a relationship there is a lack of connection with the physical organic environment.

The Belhar confession preaches the entrustment of reconciliation by God within the ambits of the church through the renowned name of Jesus Christ. Reconciliation relates and refers to “God’s action of healing what has gone wrong between individuals and groups; and of bringing creation to perfection” (Kritzinger 2004: 147). This healing that Kritzinger refers to is not only limited to people residing on earth, but also includes healing of the strained relationship that exists between God and His people. So, in other words, this healing process cannot take place without the relationship having suffered a tremendous trauma with relation to the Law of God. This also relates to a restorative process of bringing all those who have by words or deeds retaliated against what they are expected to become as a community of saints. We must; however, be true to ourselves that this healing process of reconciliation cannot be stimulated without justice ever taking place.

The problem needs to first be identified and after going through the identification process, there has to be a remedial exercise in terms of addressing the problem. These remedial exercises depend on the vast array of restorative justice processes, but do not in any way rule out punishment (in broad terms), ostracism and relinquishment of the power of office if the transgressor is the elected member of office. Therefore, the Church is to lead by example, starting from within and therefore extending to the outside world. It is in this regard that the Church is called upon to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, to safeguard its blessings as a peacemaker as directed by the Word and Scriptures, saved by Christ and led by the Holy Spirit. This will also allow the latter to become the true witness of the law, in spoken language and actions portrayed in the true expectation of the new heaven and the new earth in which all the righteous people reside.

2.6.2.4 Justice

It is important to remember that in this part of the Belhar Confession assertions have been made that reconciliation cannot be obtained if justice is not practised to the letter. Therefore, this leads us to one conclusion that all these primary issues that the Belhar Confession addresses are intertwined, in that there cannot be one without the other.

Justice in its entirety demands love. Justice contains an egalitarian core: equal claims to mutual freedom and fidelity to contracts in the case of commutative justice, equal rights to mutual participation for the public good in the case of distributive justice, and obligation to aid in the creation of social and political structures for participation and mutuality in the case of social justice. However, the creation of a safe space is important for a “loving community.” Viewed in the framework of this analysis, it becomes clear that the theory of justice presented in the tradition is a Christian theory of justice of love. The theory advocates emerge from the fundamental norm of Christian love. Commitment to the hierarchical model of social order as a demand of reason surely prevented the standard of love from having its full impact in earlier years and now. Justice explicates the response that love calls for in the differentiated but related relationships of social and interpersonal interdependence. Discernment and judgment concerning the concrete actions called for in particular situations therefore depend on the mutuality and concern for individual persons, which is love. The God in whom Christians believe is a God of love. Out of love God established his covenant with humanity and promised to be the saviour of the down-trodden and the protector of the underprivileged forever.

Thus the call to respond to this God of the covenant is a permanent call “to turn away from self-sufficiency to confidence in God and from concern for self to a sincere love of neighbor. Because God has identified with all persons through the covenant, especially with the least persons and because every person is a true image of God, response to God in faith and respond to the neighbour in love and solidarity are inseparable God’s absolute demand for justice and love (Hollenbach 1988:30-31).

Similarly, Van Niekerk (2008:38f) inclusively extended the biblical commandment “to love God above and beyond anything else, and to love your neighbour as yourself” as follows:

- Love God above, and beyond anything else –
- love your human neighbours,
- love your animal, plant and neighbours' thing,
- love yourself as a human being.

The influence of the norm of agape has caused the traditional to place special emphasis on interpersonal and social mutuality in discussions of justice. Justice demands social relationships, and a kind of social organisation that opens the way to the fulfilment of the person, which can occur only in unity and solidarity with others.

Therefore, there is a need for reconciliation for the broken image of God and the broken relationship between human beings and God as well as broken relationship among human beings.

The confession of Belhar states clearly that God has manifested self as the primary object that aspires to bring forth justice and true peace among His people. This approach is amplified by the fact that God regards Himself in a distinct way as the God of those who have been afflicted, namely the deprived, the impoverished and the wounded and He therefore charges the Church to follow in these steps. The character of God influences the side that God takes, this character is love as (God is love).

Furthermore, that God is the absolute supplier of righteousness in that He brings forth justice to all those who have been afflicted and oppressed, provides food to the starving, liberates those who are imprisoned, heals those who are sick, looks after the orphans, strangers and widows alike. Finally, God's ultimate wish is to teach the people of this world to be morally correct as His chosen disciples by doing what is right and never deviating from doing good. This brings forth the notion that there will always be those who either consciously or unconsciously commit acts that are not in line with what God desires of us and such entities defame the true identity of being Christian. Such people also bring about misery upon the church of God, and God will never stand afar when these inconsistencies prevail because He is a just God.

The nature of God, therefore, is one that stands with the downtrodden; those who have been unjustly treated. This ill-treatment occurs as a result of fellow Christians, who when performing these injustices, are a malady of a society that has no respect for the law and more importantly the Law of God. The church is henceforth called upon to stand by its incumbents against any form of

suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like the living waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (URCSA's Confessional Source Book 2011: 3).

The Belhar confession is direct in its approach that as the appointees of God and Christians it is necessary to emulate what God stands for. It is in this light that this confession always makes reference to the need to "stand where God stands". In other words, it is necessary to tackle all the injustices which transpire in our midst and challenge them with vigour and retrospectively reward all that is morally right and that which is done with good intentions. Standing where God stands means that it is essential to act against the injustices and be aligned with all those who have been wronged, and finally one must guard against those who use the Church as a tool to progress their selfish and unjust interests.

With this in mind, it is evident that the confessions and the catechism with which the URCSA succinctly aligns itself stands against all the wrongdoers in the Church and society at large, regardless of the office that is held. The repercussions thereof are also to be aligned with that which God would have effected should He be the disciplinarian in the matter. The researcher merely mentions this as we serve a just God, a God of the afflicted and the downtrodden and therefore punishes all those who incite all these transgressions and engage in immoral activities. However, this does not mean that the transgressors are being banished; not at all; they will be reprimanded as a means to help them remember their mistakes and become better Christian citizens again. For

If the confession of the church as the 'communion of saints' is not to be misunderstood, it must be clear that the 'saints' are forgiven sinners. Until the consummation of God's redemptive activity, there is a daily need of repentance and prayer for forgiveness within the communion of saints. A church that considers itself identical with God's reign, or that no longer passionately hopes for

the fulfilment of God's work of reconciliation and communion, denies the reality of the church as the provisional representation of God's coming reign (Migliore 2004: 264).

2.6.2.5 Obedience

The Confession of Belhar instructs us to be obedient to Christ, the head of the church, nobody or any authority but Christ alone.

2.7 THE CHURCH DISCIPLINE IN THE URCSA

Du Plessis and Lock (2007:2) indicate that discipline means a code of conduct prescribed for the highest welfare of the individual, church and society in which the individual lives and it is a personal system of organised behaviour designed to promote self-interest while contributing to the welfare of others. Discipline is necessary for the effective functioning of the Church, so that everything should be carried out in order. Undisciplined behaviour not only disrupts proclamation, teaching and learning of the Word of God, but can also endanger congregants and faith leaders. The term discipline refers to Ministers of the Word and congregants complying with a code of behaviour as stated in the Word of God (Bible), Book of Confessions and the Church Order and Supplementary regulations. Among other things, these may determine the expected standards of clothing, time-keeping, social behaviour and work ethics. The term may also be applied to the punishment, which is the consequence of the transgression of the code of behaviour stipulated in the Word of God (Bible), Book of Confessions and the Church Order and supplementary regulations. For this reason, the usage of church discipline sometimes means admonishment and punishment for breaking church rules rather than behaving within the church rules. In Du Plessis and Lock's (2007:2) definition the main focus falls on the code of conduct that needs to be obeyed and respected rather than on the person's wellness and well-being. Discipline in this context is obedience, application and behaviour which demands respect from all stakeholders who belong to the Christian community and the entire society.

Discipline as a theme in general is characterised by sets of rules and norms, which guide, control and govern a set behaviour by the incumbents who are subjected to it. To accentuate this notion, Allen explains discipline as "a control or

order exercised over people or animals, esp. children, prisoners, military personnel, church members etc.” (Allen 1994:332). In other words, discipline is a mechanism, which has been sought by an institution to bring about consistency and stability within a certain framework, which can also be carried out within a realm of “do’s and don’ts” which carry punitive measures when not followed. Albeit discipline may be a universal governing element within the society generally, it is, however, not the case in relation to the Churches in general. This is so because the Reformed Church in particular has taken discipline and accorded it its highest regard as an element that has a bearing on the sustainability of it as an institution.

Discipline may therefore be used to train and empower ministers of the Word and congregants to adhere to a code of conduct of the church, which demonstrates values like respect for God, human dignity and equality, and to punish those who do not adhere to such a code enshrined in the Word of God, Confessions and the Church Order. Discipline implies a code of conduct that prescribes the highest welfare of an individual and the community in which an individual lives and it is a personal system of organised behaviour designed to promote organisational culture, self-interest and self-esteem while contributing to the welfare of others through respect of others. In this sense, discipline should be a two-way interaction between people to create a well-balanced Christian community living and working together towards serving God, one another, and the world. Discipline is necessary for the effective functioning of a church as an organisation.

The Reformed Church has always regarded *discipline* as one of its intrinsic factors which forms its lifeline and fortifies and prolongs its existence as the true Church of Christ. This existence is not single-handedly reliant on the latter, but has also been coupled with *the sharing of the Word* and *the right administration of Sacraments*, which assist in propelling the Church in the right ecclesiastical direction. It is in this regard that order can be obtained only through the right administration and pragmatic implementation of these three marks. This peculiarity is the one that marks the Reformed Church is different from the rest of its counterparts in its regimented practice of Christian endorsement.

The Reformed Church as such “understands itself [to be] responsible both to God and to its members. Indeed, Reformed Churches have historically been characterized by the practice of discipline. One can read through the minutes of almost any Reformed assembly and discover a number of cases of ecclesiastical

discipline” (Janssen, 2000:261). Although it has to be conceded that with this act of practicing discipline, it appears that the Church is meddling in the private affairs of its members. This legalism often contradicts the gospel of grace. One of the key responsibilities of the Church as a shepherd is to herd its flock in deed and actions; to take a stance upon the transgressions of its herd and act thereon. However, the Church has a responsibility when exercising discipline, in that it has to be carried out as cautiously and benevolently as possible. The church must therefore approach the mission of exercising discipline with great caution so as not to become labelled as an ecclesiastical policing agent. Conversely, discipline must become a pastoral exercise that aims at protecting the transgressor with the ultimate goal of absolute repentance.

2.7.1 The ecclesiastical gathering and how discipline takes place

The URCSA as

an ecclesiastical body bears in mind that control as such has to do with misbehaviour punishable by secular authorities but also on variety of misbehaviour. Everything that go against the form for celebration of Holy Communion against the Baptismal promises and against the promises at the induction of members or marriage and all that can disturb good order should be bore in mind. The transgression of overseers of the congregation in their official ministry, the negligence in their official duties and the misuse of power will in particular be punishable (URCSA Church Order 1999:86).

These transgressions, as explained above, are those that ridicule and stand in contrast to what the Word of God, the Confessions and the Sacraments are professing. This relates to any act that repudiates the Holy Communion and renounces the promises which the member committed to during their baptism and their induction. Some of these transgressions include, inter-alia: misrepresentation of power of office, negligence of official duties, misappropriation of funds, immorality, drunkenness, infidelity, and unbecoming behaviour which are all punishable offences by the secular authorities. However, for all these transgressions, although punishable, a certain legal process must be followed before punishment can be carried out.

Discipline has therefore to be carried out under certain ecclesiastical orders, which do not infringe on the incumbent’s rights and character, but has to follow the

regulations of the Church Order of the URCSA. It is in this light that when disciplining the transgressors, the Church has to discipline these confessing members in the most humane way as possible. This brings us to the other factor of discipline that has been covered in the Regulations 81-93 of the Church Order, which involves the steps to proper disciplinary procedure, which unfolds as follows:

- Transgression – This relates to the fact that, for any disciplinary process or act to be initiated against a confessing member, there has to be some sort of a transgression of the law. In this case it is the aforementioned act, which is not in coherence with the Word of God, Sacraments viz; Holy Communion and Baptismal promises.
- Matthew 18: 15-16 “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou has gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Holy Bible 2006:420). This deed may be enacted by anyone who notices the transgression. This is the starting point of discipline, which is more inclined towards brotherly and/or sisterly love. If the transgressor does not heed the advice, then the next process must unfold.
- Written complaint – There has to be a written complaint about the said confessing member of the Church, by a member of the congregation who is deemed to be confessing and has a good stature in the church. This deed will in essence rid the church of rumours without substance, which may surface in the church, even among confessing members.
- Composition of Church Council – Once the rumour or a punishable act has been reported to the church council, the chairman of the council will then convene a meeting, where the case will be discussed. But even before the discussions continue, the chairman will purify the gathering by relieving all those who are directly or indirectly linked to the accused. Thereafter a quorum will be obtained, and if not, the gathering will be put down for another date, with the hope of obtaining a quorum.
- Investigation – The council shall look into the matter at hand and decide on merit if the accusation to continue with the case stands or dismiss it. If it is dismissed, there will not be

any case to be investigated, but if not, the council will appoint a commission to investigate the matter and report to the following gathering of the church council. Should the member confess in writing to the offence then the council shall act accordingly and discipline the perpetrator. Sometimes the council will need to investigate further by calling witnesses and complainants to verify and support their views in order to uncover the truth.

- Judgement and Notice – Once all the necessary steps of investigations have been exhausted, the facts given in the investigative process are weighed and the decision is made in terms of finding the accused guilty or not. This will also be put in writing, minuted and the people concerned will be notified of the findings. The onus then rests upon the council to reprimand the accused if they are found to be guilty. This admonition will in most cases be in a form of a suspension from the sacraments and partaking in other activities within the church, which are in leadership positions. If the perpetrator continues to commit the punishable offence and does not repent from their actions, further sanctions may be instituted against them, which may finally lead to banishment from the body.
- Appeal against the outcome – This only comes into effect once the accused is not entirely pleased with the outcome of the commission and the council ruling is not in their favour. The confessing member in this regard has four weeks to lodge their appeal with the higher body within the ecclesiastical circles. This can only be done by submitting a written document to that effect.

The “Presbytery will make use of the following disciplinary measures, with the understanding that suspension includes discipline and that presbytery also gives judgement in connection with subsistence: The following is enclosed in regulation 89 of the Church Order and Supplementary regulations of the URCSA Southern Synod:

- Church council members
- Admonition in or outside of the meeting of presbytery;
- Suspension in service until proper remorse is shown with or without the sacraments;
- Dismissal from service by presbytery, with or without the use of the sacraments;

- Ministers of the Word (Church Order and Supplementary regulations, 2014:89).
- The following are steps that can be followed were the meeting has satisfied itself with the fact and the merits of the case:
- Admonition in or outside of the meeting of presbytery by presbytery;
- Suspension from service by presbytery until proof of proper remorse is shown;
- Dismissal from service by regional synod on recommendation by presbytery, which also in the case of candidate ministers involves the nullification of the act of licensing and in the case of evangelists the nullification of the evangelists certificate (URCSA Church Order 2014:86).

This process can be explained only in the words of Janssen that “when behaviour threatened to become scandalous for the church, and thus to negate the very gospel that constitutes the church, the order required that a number of steps be taken” (Janssen 2000:262). This process has been established in the light that the Reformers regard discipline as a sinew that binds the church together and thus makes it the true church of Jesus Christ. Discipline for the reformer, though difficult, forms the basis of what the confessing members believe in, which is why

the reformed understanding of the church is communal at its heart. The member, recall, becomes organically connected to the body of Christ in baptism, a member of Christ around the Table. Discipline, then, happens around the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures (Janssen 2000:262).

2.7.2 The ecclesiastical gathering and the method of conducting the gathering

In the reformed church, the disciplinary and judicial procedures took place in the ecclesiastical gathering, as stated in the Belgic Confession Article XXX, that ministers and pastors are not the only leaders in the church, but also elders and deacons who form a church council (URCSA’s Confessional Source Book 2011: 84). These meetings or gatherings are in most cases conducted in a political manner and the members make decisions through debates or dialogues with very limited discernment, as the researcher has already alluded to in the research. There was a shift from a monarchist to a democratic way of doing things. It will be

proper to clarify these three meeting strategies and determine which one is the best to be used in the reformed church polity, taking the three marks of the church into consideration. It was stated in the General Synod of 2012 that:

Meeting of the church is a meeting in the presence of God, where we through prayer, reflection on Scripture and sharing our understanding of God seek to discern God's way for us. It is a meeting where we listen: we listen to God as He speaks to us through his Spirit, through his Word, through the history of the Church, through the confessions, through fellow believers and through the world and creation. As church we are aware that many church meetings in the past have been held in God's name and yet it took decisions not honouring God. This needs to make us very aware that we always seriously need to discern God's will for us during the meeting (URCSA Agenda, 2012:13).

The church meetings were held in the name of God, but strong men and women in positions were swinging the meeting towards their own directions and intentions; hence discipline in the church has degenerated when considering the proclamation of the Word and administration of sacraments. Thus, at this point, the researcher wants to highlight the importance of discernment as the meeting strategy to resolve disciplinary issues, the Word of God, confessions, and the history of the Church and fellow believers need to be listened to in order to reach the decision that will bring glory to the name of God. The researcher distinguishes between the three strategies as defined in the agenda of the URCSA general synod of Okahanja in Namibia 2012 (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: The three strategies as defined in the agenda of the URCSA general synod of Okahanja in Namibia 2012

DEBATE (POLITICAL)	DIALOGUE (SOCIAL)	DISCERNMENT THEOLOGICAL
One side knows “the truth” and seeks to persuade others to join its way of thinking.	Understanding or direction emerges through listening to many or all the voices in the group.	Community of believers seeks guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer, reflection on Scripture, tradition, values, and current realities; dialogue and finding places of agreement.
Defends a viewpoint	Suspends judgment	Offers “holy indifference” to all but God’s will.
Uses advocacy, persuasion	Balances advocacy with inquiry, explores underlying assumptions, causes, rules	Takes a “long loving look at the real” - contemplation
Uses hard data to get to answers to problems; reasoning is made explicit	Seeks to get to deeper questions and possibly new framing of issues	Uses intellect/reason and affect/intuition and spirit experience
Resolves by defeating or persuading opposing side; or may find synthesis of opposites	Invents unprecedented possibilities and new insights; produces a collective flow	Uncovers a decision rather than makes it: discovers what is most life-giving and loving by listening to wisdom of the Holy Spirit and all voices
Distinguishes and polarises differences	Looks for coherence first	Builds on belief that all are part of one body of Christ
Persons identify with positions or stay in fixed roles	Conversation uncovers concerns, needs, fears, hope and interest	Options are weighed apart from being identified with particular persons
Each side names strengths of its own position and weaknesses of the other	Group members work together to name strengths and weakness of options	Each person reflects on the weaknesses and strengths of each option and then shares with the whole group
Either/or choices: binary options	Multiple options	May generate multiple options, discover a “third way” or discern yes or no
Knower’s mind	Learner’s mind	Seeker’s mind

When one studies this table deeply, it leaves the researcher with no option but to recommend the discernment as the strategy to be utilised in the church meeting in order to integrate the three marks of the church. When discernment is used during a meeting that needs to discipline a member then the Word of God will be considered more than the words of the members of the meeting, for example, a

debate-like meeting (political), traditions, confessions, sacraments and values of the church will be taken into consideration.

As Gaillardetz (2010:99) states, the medieval political theorists such as John of Paris and Marsilius of Padua challenged the view that monarchy was the highest form of government. Their call for the rights of all the people to participate in government would inevitably be applied to the church as a social body. This political situation during the medieval era has influenced the church to adopt the same governance structure as the political government. The papacy was the church monarchy where the pope had the right and authority to discipline all members and office bearers in the church without any question. While there has been a shift from monarchy to democracy, this shift has also impacted on the church governance, where the church was governed by God through delegated powers where God anoints His people to govern the church under His guidance through the Word and the sacraments. The church meetings take the place of the pope who used to discipline the church members, through consensus or votes (the political way) in the meeting as the highest decision-making body. The central problem here was over-emphasis of democracy, while theocracy was underplayed. This is an infirmity that has crafted a new setting that has moulded Christians and their beliefs to consider themselves superior to the Word of God. This indisposition is a result of the misuse of the Bill of Human Rights, which in return, resulted in a far-reaching aftermath regarding the Word of God, the sacraments and discipline in the Church of God. The Church has reached the point where she should revisit the basics where God is the central focus and head of the Church. Discernment in governance is the other shift from the democratic way of governance or decision-making to the theocratic way of governance or decision-making.

Discernment is one strand in the fabric of discipleship; it is the church building strategy. It cannot be picked out and practised without the surrounding support of personal and corporate spiritual practice or relationships and communication within the faith community. As we begin to explore discernment in the community of Christ, it is important to remember how it is connected to the larger context of spiritual formation and discipleship development. The following are the key principles of discernment as stated in the agenda of General Synod of the URCSA (2012:14):

- Discernment is an on-going attitude and practice of Christian Spirituality.
- Specific, structured discernment processes are used to discern God's will at particular points of need in which we desire to align our lives and ministry more fully with God's purposes.
- Discerning what it is we need to discern is a critical part of the discernment process. Getting clear about the question is an important first step.
- Discernment does not take place in a neat, orderly, linear fashion. We may find ourselves being drawn back to scripture or pulled once more into silent prayer as we stay open to God during the discernment process.
- Discernment includes head, heart, spirit, and body work. We think and speak, we listen and wait, we feel and are moved, we have physical sensations and responses. It is a whole person process.
- Discernment is based on the trust that God is the Source of all we are and are trying to do. God is the One who already knows what we are seeking and wants to communicate with us. Letting God be larger, wiser, and greater than us is a key shift in our awareness. We think we know this and then find ourselves still trying to figure it out in our own minds or worrying about finding the one true solution.

Through observation in the ecclesiastical gatherings, the researcher has come to the realisation that the church meetings were more often conducted in terms of the debate and dialogue method, with very limited discernment. The handling of the disciplinary action within the meeting is discussed in Chapter four, where the data from the documents of the Southern Synod are analysed.

2.8 SUMMARY

The researcher in this chapter has journeyed through relevant literature to determine how other researchers have handled the identity of the church in relation to the three marks of the church. The researcher has consulted much literature on the under-emphasis of discipline in the URCSA within the Southern Synod. The history of the URCSA was discussed, covering its origin in the Dutch Reformed Church up to the establishment of the Uniting Reformed Church in

Southern Africa on 14 April 1994. The statistics regarding membership as well as the ecclesiastical structure were furnished.

The researcher has clarified words and concepts, beliefs and notions that are the backbone of this research study, which was intended to assist the reader of this research study to gain a better understanding on the topic of the study. The church was defined as the community of Christian believers throughout the world; the church as the servant, the power of the Church and the institutionalization of the Church. The researcher further gave the definition of the church within the URCSA context in terms of the Church Order of the URCSA. Different views on the concept of the church from different scholars were critically discussed, analysed and placed in the context of the URCSA.

The researcher also discussed the marks of the Christian church using different perspectives. Proclamation of the Word and how the preacher of the Word could be selective or over-emphasise certain doctrines as their strong point, as against the full gospel were thoroughly discussed. The right administration of the sacraments, as the other form of the proclamation of the Word of God was also discussed in this chapter. The administration of the sacraments complements the preaching of the Word. The researcher identifies the following sacraments, namely baptism and the Eucharist as the sacramental rites of the church. Finally, discipline was also discussed in this chapter as the mark of the Christian church, and as one of the under-emphasised marks within the URCSA.

The symbols of the reformed church representing the confessions or creeds of the church were discussed. The researcher has initiated the discussion, starting with the four claims of confessions by Karl Barth. The following confessions were mentioned and discussed as the identification of the Reformed Church, moreover the URCSA: Heidelberg Catechism; Belgic Confession and Belhar confession. These confessions were discussed in relation to the identification of the church and discipline in the church.

Finally, the ecclesiastical assembly which handles discipline or serious church matters, as well as the method to conduct such a gathering was discussed. The researcher also discussed the three methods of conducting a meeting, as presented in Table 2.1, which indicates that the debate and dialogue methods

were over-emphasised while discernment was under-emphasised. The following chapter deals with the research method followed in this research study.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter has portrayed a theoretical and yet a systematic context as a foundation for this research, which attempts to outline the relationship that exists between God and the world regarding how the world and all its inhabitants, more especially the “chosen ones”, view the three marks of the Church within the URCSA’s Southern Synod, with greater emphasis being placed on the mark of discipline. An attempt was made to examine the biblical foundations of discipline as a third mark of the Reformed Church, as a sinew that acts as a motivation for the establishment of the true church of Christ. A contextual approach to church discipline was developed, placing the Southern Synod of the URCSA at the centre of this mission.

The role of this chapter is to focus on the research methodology that was utilised in collecting, collating and analysing relevant data. To achieve this objective, qualitative research methodology was at the fore of the process. “An approach to research was adopted in which the procedures are not aimed at obtaining statistical data or discovering ‘laws of nature’, but instead the focus falls on interviews and/or participant observation so as to ascertain how people experience or understand their situation. This kind of research does not claim to produce ‘objectively true’ results, but it is the only way to research people’s cultural, religious or personal convictions” (Kritzinger 2000:146).

Qualitative research is not easily defined and yet it does have certain characteristics that tend to distinguish it from quantitative research methods. Qualitative research concerns itself partly [with different] approaches... and employs research methods such as participant observation, archival source analysis, interviews, focus groups, and content analysis (Struwig & Stead 2001:11).

In doing so, a hermeneutic approach was enlisted as the absolute tool that assisted in driving the excursion into the topic of the importance of discipline as a sinew that is responsible for binding the Church of Christ together. This researcher

looked into the documentation of relationships where the aspects of cause and effect came to the fore between certain constructs. Content analysis is of prime importance in this type of research for it exposes the reason for things happening the way that they did, further outlining the reasons and/or causes thereof. Through this research methodology, the documents containing relevant data were collected, analysed and used to develop an appropriate approach to fulfil the aim of this study.

3.2 CONDUCTING A SYSTEMATIC RESEARCH

For this undertaking to meet the highest expectations in fulfilling the research objective, a thorough research plan was embarked upon. This plan allowed the researcher to “gain access to the subjects of research. Whether they [were] survey participants, archival records, workplaces or interviewees, it [was] essential to acquire access in order to obtain credible data” (Maree 2012:88). The researcher’s goal in this escapade was “to specify and combine the key elements and methods in such a way as to maximise validity of [his] findings” (Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter 2012:161). In trying to achieve the above, when conducting this research, hermeneutics case studies and life histories were employed as a premise for obtaining optimum interpretation of the available data. The researcher also explored a method that mainly concentrated itself on that which has not yet been thoroughly exposed or researched.

Exploratory research can be defined as “research into an area that has not been studied and in which a researcher wants to develop initial ideas and a more focused research question...During the exploratory research stage the researcher investigates a problem about which little is known. The major purpose of exploratory research is the development and clarification of ideas and the formulation of questions and hypotheses for more precise investigation. Typically, this type of research involves gathering of a great deal of information from a small sample” (Struwig & Stead, 2001:7). This means that a great deal of care had to be undertaken when choosing information sources, extraction of data, analysis of data, coding of data, interpreting and presenting the acquired data.

The researcher therefore recognised that the phases of the exploratory theological cycle were very useful in this systematic research. It is in this regard that exploratory research was carried out in the following manner, which can be

divided into three methods, inter-alia, “the study of... sources of information, an analysis of selected cases [and finally] a survey of individuals who were likely to have opinions on the subject [matter] under investigation” (Struwig & Stead 2001:7).

The study of secondary sources of information allowed the researcher to scan and fully understand the existing material on the subject of research. This also enabled the use of literature that had not yet been tapped into so as to provide new insights on the subject matter. This also enabled the researcher to accumulate appropriate and useful information so that informed decisions could be made and to correct the course of the actions of the Southern Synod. There was also an even greater need for uninterrupted assessment of the activities and programmes in the light of concrete research in order to correct some of the mutual myths and fallacies within the Southern Synod.

Secondly, the researcher looked into the analysis of selected cases. These cases were handpicked so as not to cloud the researcher with unnecessary information, which was not pertinent to the study. Only a few case studies were assessed in terms of addressing the aspect of discipline within the Church circles. The researcher also concentrated on the cases that dealt with disciplinary measures in the Southern Synod as and when such cases arose. The desired outcome in such cases placed its “emphasis on arriving at a complete description and understanding of the constructs being studied, despite the small numbers of persons involved” (Struwig & Stead 2001:8).

Case studies afforded the researcher an opportunity to gain the upper hand in isolating three factors from the given cases. They:

- Showed “features that are common to all cases in the general group;
- [Showed] features that are not common to all cases, but are common to certain sub-groups;
- [Exposed] features that are unique to specific cases” (Struwig & Stead 2001:8).

This exercise enabled the isolation of discrepancies, which were prevalent in these case studies and are also pertinent to this research process. Constant research strategies in this field further assisted the researcher to see if there was a gap which needed urgent intervention with regards to discipline within the

Church and the work that lies ahead, which in turn made us aware of the needs and possibilities of our concerted efforts to keep our Churches as the true Church of Christ.

Thirdly, the researcher believes that this research systematically assisted in empowering the church he serves, not forgetting its main objective, which is to be the true Church of Christ, to study its own situation and to take appropriate action when the need arises. As an aspiring systematic theologian, the researcher believes that there is no matter and/or subject that is too small to have a systemic intervention. There needs to be increasing awareness of the fact that not only should the congregants become bystanders in ecclesiological matters; contrarily, they should become insiders helping the church to engage in introspection and use this research as a *litmus test* to take stock of the church's standing in terms of what it is assigned to become by the persuasion of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the Church needed this research for self-examination as members of the body of Christ and subjects who are entrusted to carry out the three marks of the Church so as to ensure its survival as a true Church of Christ. This is sometimes perpetuated by the fact that Christians are blind to their own biases and limitations when dealing with discipline as a Church of Christ.

3.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is a method that is utilised to draw information from manageable samples as opposed to the quantitative methods. This kind of research method "is interested in the depth of the problem and a smaller sample size is often used. The qualitative research approach presents facts in a narration." (Maree 2012:82). The qualitative method looks at the world as a socially constructed reality, but to achieve this there are numerous research designs which are pertinent to the sustainability of qualitative research methods. These are ethnography, phenomenology, case study, grounded theory and action research. For the purpose of this project the case study research design was considered as this was the operating tool for the completion of this task.

The term case study carries with it numerous meanings and understandings. For the benefit of this undertaking, an attempt to explain what is meant by the term case study could be useful. A case study could also be

commonly referred to in the literature as a method, methodology, research design and paradigm, these are inappropriate terms.... Case study is understood to be a decision regarding what is to be studied, not a methodological decision, although it also guides how an enquiry is to be conducted from any theoretical approaches. [It is also] an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives for the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in real life context (Maree 2012:83).

Conducting a research using a case study method can yield its own advantages because it is evidence led.

3.3.1 Qualitative Methodology in Systematic Research

The major objective of the qualitative research method is an exploration or the discovery of the notion that there is an over-emphasis of preaching and administration of sacraments and the under-emphasis on discipline in the URCSA in general and the Southern Synod in particular. The qualitative paradigm in its broadest sense refers to research that elicits participants' accounts of meanings, experience and perceptions and also produces descriptive ways in the participant's own written and spoken words (Ary, et al: 2006:450). Qualitative methodology proceeds with the "collection and analysis of primarily non-numerical data (words, pictures and actions) [the researcher still needs to] apply a structured approach" (Bryman, Bell and Teevan 2014:41) in their research efforts. It relies on the inductive mode of data presentation, analysis and synthesis. Qualitative research methodology also employs four different traditions when data is collected and analysed under the latter. These are known as naturalism, ethnomethodology, emotionalism and postmodernism. To ensure that justice is served in this research, the researcher takes the opportunity to look into the last two approaches in greater depth, that is, by adopting the emotionalism and postmodernism approaches, as these may be the approaches that assisted the researcher succeeding in completing this assignment. "Emotionalism: is concerned with subjectivity and gaining access to 'inside' experience; is also concerned with the inner reality of humans it has not become the focus of a significant stream of research" (Bryman, et-al 2014:41). Postmodernism in this regard, relates to that

approach which “has an emphasis on ‘method talk’; is sensitive to the different ways social reality can be constructed” (Bryman, et-al 2014:41). However, it is necessary to bear in mind that these approaches could possess the ability to overlap one another when research is being conducted, because they both deal with humans as social beings and are affected by these approaches in their daily lives.

3.3.2 Research Setting

Research setting refers to the place where data will be collected. For this research, there is no specific setting where data was collected for the completion of this research, because content analysis that extends “to the collection and qualitative analysis of texts and document[s]” forms the basis of this task (Bryman, et al. 2014:42). However, various influences from a variety of settings were taken into account when conducting this research, for example, meetings, informal discussions and ecclesiastical gatherings.

3.3.3 Population

Pilot and Hungler (1999:155) define the population in research as the totality of subjects that conform to a set of specifications, comprising the entire group of persons that is of interest to the researcher and to whom the research results can be generalised. A research population consists of all the subjects that form part of the study. The research population for my study comprises all the ministers who form part of the Southern Synod of the URCSA. This does not only relate to those who have faced the might of the church law but also those who were on the other end of the law. In other words, there shall never be an exclusion of any member from the entire population of ministers who fall under the ambit of the Southern Synod, for in one way or the other every respective member of the Church has an input in how, why and to what extent discipline is sanctioned within the parameters of the stipulations of the Church as being recorded therein.

3.3.4 Sampling

The qualitative study, according to Cohen et al. (2007:146), stands or falls not only on the appropriateness of the methodology and instruments used in the study but

also on the suitability of the sampling strategy that has been adopted. In qualitative research, only a sample of a population is selected for any given study.

The study's research objectives and the characteristics of the population (such as size and diversity) determine which and how many interviewees are selected. A sample is selected from a larger group of persons, identified as the population from whom data will be collected.

Purposeful sampling, as a dominant strategy in the qualitative approach, has been adopted for this particular study. Purposeful sampling, according to Ary et al. (2006:472), in contrast to probabilistic sampling, seeks to select information-rich cases, which can be studied in depth. The researcher selects particular subjects from the population that will be representative and provide maximum insight and understanding about the research questions. Information-rich cases are those from which the researcher can learn a great deal about the issues under investigation. The sample was drawn from the Southern Synod, whose decisions were based on the two noteworthy cases that are presented in Chapter four, namely one on moral issues and the other one on maladministration.

3.3.5 Documents

"Documents, both historical and contemporary, provide a rich source of information" (Maree 2012:91). These can be used in conducting both quantitative and qualitative studies; however, there are different types of documents that can serve as credible sources when engaging in research. The above can include personal, public and archival documents. Personal documents relate to documents such as "diaries, confessions, autobiographies and life histories" while public documents refer to "documents such as the mass media, statistical year books and Church records", and archival records refer to documents "such as service records of organisations, hospitals, and social workers" (Maree 2012:91).

Maree maintains that research designs such as case studies, ethnographies, qualitative surveys and action research are at liberty to use these documents for collecting data, although these have to a greater or lesser extent both strong and weak points. "The advantages of using documentary methods are that they are economical; enable the investigators to study past events and issues retrospectively; and are relatively quickly and easily accessible, especially since

the introduction of electronic media” (Maree 2012:92). In this study the documents that were important for this study were the agenda of the URCSA Southern Synod, minutes and “Acta” (decisions of the synod) of the said synod, where the researcher studied, analysed and presented the data from these documents.

3.3.6 Qualitative research data collection techniques

Qualitative research depends on multi-method strategies to collect and collaborate data. Hence, interviews and observations are primary data collection techniques in qualitative research. Qualitative research is an interactive face-to-face research, which requires relatively extensive time to systematically observe, interview and record processes as they occur naturally (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:428; Ary et al., 2006:474).

Qualitative researchers study the perspectives of the participants through interactive strategies. Each qualitative strategy is particularly suited for obtaining a specific type of data (Ary et al., 2006:474):

- Observation is appropriate for collecting data on naturally occurring behaviours in their usual contexts;
- Interviewing is optimal for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences; and
- Document analysis is performed to gain understanding of the phenomenon under study.

For this particular study, literature was utilised as the primary data collection strategy and the researcher used observation and document analysis to verify and corroborate the collected data.

For the researcher to be in a position to provide an epistemological position on the findings, one needs to adopt an ontological perspective on the topic at hand without fail. This will also facilitate the collection of data by using the correct research tool, for the researcher will be seeking to uproot the social realities, which surround the population being researched. When data is being collected, there are other “properties listed [which], may appear more well matched to qualitative research methodology than others, for example, social processes, interpretations, social relations, social practices, experiences, understandings...” (Mason 2007:14).

3.3.7 Qualitative data analysis techniques

Data analysis, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2007:159), means a process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that the researcher accumulated to present findings. Data analysis involves working with data, organising data, breaking data into manageable units, coding data and searching for patterns. In short, it is making sense of data in terms of the participants' definition of the situation, by noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities.

Qualitative researchers alternate between data collection (e.g., interviews, observations and documents) and data analysis (creating meaning from raw data). It means data analysis in qualitative research is performed concurrently or simultaneously with data collection through interpretative, recursive, and dynamic processes (Ary et al., 2006:490).

This enables the researcher to focus and shape the research study as it proceeds. It also enables the researcher to develop a successively deeper understanding of the research topic and to guide each round of data collection.

In this study, analysing data was managed by segmenting data into three key stages, namely (1) familiarisation and organisation, (2) coding, and (3) summarising the data (Ary et al., 2006:490).

3.4 VALIDITY OF THE STUDY

Validity of a measurement is the extent to which the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. A test is valid if it measures what it purports to measure. Validity is a degree to which a test is capable of achieving certain aims. The instrument will be valid if it is capable of achieving the aims of this research study. Validity in research is concerned with soundness and the effectiveness of the measuring instrument (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001:31).

Earlier versions of validity, according to Cohen et al. (2007:132) and Ary et al. (2006:243), were based on the view that it was a demonstration that a particular data-gathering instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. The focus of recent views of validity falls not on the instrument itself but on the interpretation and the meaning of the scores derived from the instrument.

The term validity according to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:407) means the degree to which scientific explanations of the phenomenon match the realities of the world. The explanations about observed phenomena approximate what is reality and truth and the degree to which the explanations are accurate. These comprise the validity of the study. In other words, the validity of qualitative designs is the degree to which the interpretations and concepts have mutual meanings between the participants and the researcher. The researcher and the participants agree on the description or the composition of the events, especially the meanings of these events. If a piece of research is invalid, then it is worthless.

In qualitative research, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:407), validity rests primarily within the honesty, depth, richness, scope of data collection and data analysis techniques. It means that if the above processes are adhered to from the beginning of the study, validity will be enhanced.

The strategies advocated by Johnson and Christensen (2004:249-256) and McMillan and Schumacher (2001:407-410) to enhance validity in qualitative research are participant review, mechanically recorded data, persistent fieldwork, participant verbatim language, multiple researchers, member checking, low-inference descriptors and triangulation.

For this study, the researcher employed the following strategies to enhance validity.

3.4.1 Mechanically recorded data

A digital and video camera were used to record some observations and all the interviews that were conducted to enhance the validity by providing accurate and relatively complete records. The main interviews and several scenes were also recorded in the field notebook. While some of the data were professionally transcribed, due to cost considerations, the researcher transcribed some of the data.

3.4.2 Low-inference descriptors

Concrete, precise descriptions from field notes and interview elaborations, which enabled the researcher to identify patterns in data, were the hallmark of this study. It means that during the interviews, descriptions were literal and were understood

by the participants. This ensured that interviewees accurately understood the perceptions of meanings explained by the researcher.

3.4.3 Participant review

The researcher asked the participants to review and verify the transcripts of what was heard and seen during the interviews as well as their observations and analysis of documents. The participants were further asked to modify some of the information or interpretations of the transcript. The data obtained from each synod was subsequently analysed in order to obtain a comprehensive integration of the findings.

3.4.4 Triangulation strategies

Triangulation allows for cross-validation among data sources and data collection strategies, time periods, and theoretical schemes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:478). To find regularities, the researcher compared different sources, situations and methods to see whether the same pattern recurred.

For this study, verbal clarification was triangulated by written references and three data collection methods, namely observation, interviewing and analysis of documents. This reliance on corroboration among different methods served to enhance the validity of this investigation.

3.5 RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY

The reliability of the measurement instrument is the extent to which it yields consistent results when the characteristics being measured remains are unchanged throughout (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:99). Reliability is the ability of a test to achieve similar results under similar conditions. Reliability of a measuring instrument is the degree of consistency with which it measures and deals with matters of accuracy. It refers to the consistency with which an instrument produces equivalent scores.

According to Cohen et al. (2007:146), the meaning of reliability differs in qualitative and quantitative research. Reliability in quantitative research is essentially a synonym for dependability, consistency and replicability over time. On the contrary, reliability in qualitative research is regarded as a fit between what the

researcher records as data and what actually occurred in the natural setting that is being researched, that is, a degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of the coverage of the investigation process. Reliability in qualitative research requires and embraces the truth and neutrality of the setting being observed.

These elements of reliability were taken into consideration during this investigation. The methods employed for multiple data collection and data analysis enabled the researcher to record the actual, natural and comprehensive meaning of settings and eliminated any researcher bias. Thereby, it rendered the findings more accurate and reliable.

3.6 RESEARCH ETHICS

Whenever human beings are the focus of investigation, researchers must look closely at the ethical implications of the proposed study. Most ethical issues in research fall into one of the four categories, namely protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy and honesty with professional colleagues (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001:107). Research ethics, according to Johnson and Christensen (2004:94), are principles and guidelines that help researchers to uphold data that researchers regard as valuable. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:420) state that the qualitative researcher needs to be sensitive to ethical principles relating to their research topic, face-to-face interactive data collection processes, an emergent design and reciprocity with participants. Emergent designs require that ethical principles be considered throughout all phases of planning and data collection. Most ethical situations require the researcher to determine situational priorities, which involve discussions with participants. Ethical guidelines include, but are not limited to, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and privacy.

3.6.1 Informed consent and permission

Qualitative research necessitates obtaining the consent, the co-operation and the permission of the subjects who are to assist in the investigation in the institutions providing research facilities (Cohen et al. (2007:52). Informed consent, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:421), is regarded as a dialogue and procedure in which individuals choose whether to participate after being informed of the purpose of the study and facts that would influence their decisions. Informed

consent encourages free choice of participation. Before a participant can participate in a research study, the researcher must give the prospective participant a description of all the features of the study that might reasonably influence his or her willingness to participate.

The principle of informed consent, according to Johnson and Christensen (2004:105), refers to the fact that a participant, once given the pertinent information, is competent and legally free of the desire of others to make a decision as to whether to participate in a given research study.

For this study, the researcher consulted each of the southern Synod documents and engaged in informal consultation with the leaders of the synod.

3.6.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

In general, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2001:108), McMillan and Schumacher (2001:421) and Cohen et al. (2007:64), any research study should respect the right of the participant to privacy and confidentiality. Under no circumstances should a research report be presented in such a manner that others become aware of how a particular participant has responded or behaved. There is a strong opinion among researchers that settings and participants should not be identifiable in print. A researcher must keep the nature and quality of the performance of participants strictly confidential. If the behaviour of any particular person is described in depth in the report, he or she should be given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. The essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity. The principal means of ensuring anonymity is by not using the names of the participants or any other personal means of identification. Johnson and Christensen (2004:112) state that anonymity and confidentiality are important to avoid connecting the participant with any information that would be embarrassing or harmful.

Ministers and Church council members who participated in this study were given full assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. Other than identifying factors such as gender, race and general location of the participants, no personally identifiable information was divulged. Each participant was assigned a code letter.

3.6.3 Voluntary participation

Voluntarism entails applying the principle of informed consent and thus ensuring that participants freely choose to take part or not in the investigation and guarantees that exposure to risk is undertaken knowingly and voluntarily (Cohen et al., 2007:52). In this study, each participating individual was requested to be interviewed and each confirmed willingness to be interviewed. All participating individuals were fully informed of the purpose of the study in advance and afforded the option to discontinue their participation for any reason whatsoever, at any time during the process.

3.6.4 Competency and relationship with participants

According to Cohen et al. (2007:52), competence implies responsible, mature individuals and skilled individual participation in the interviews. The researcher had to ensure that he did not engage individuals incapable of making decisions because of immaturity. The researcher has completed and successfully passed research modules, with the University of South Africa. He has conducted and passed a mini-dissertation for Bachelor of Theology with the University of South Africa. Therefore, the researcher possesses a high level of competency and skill in undertaking this research study. On the basis of the above, the researcher endeavoured to maintain a healthy relationship with each participant and shared a high degree of trust and respect throughout the investigation.

3.7 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the empirical research. The chapter included and stated the context of the research problem, design, and methods. Qualitative research was explicitly stated, described, and discussed. This chapter also indicated the research design employed to collect and analyse data. As indicated in the design, this study was interpretive, measured to account and ensured reliability and validity of data. The next chapter focuses on the presentation of the data, analysis and interpretation of the results as well as discussions of the empirical investigation.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DISCIPLINARY ISSUES IN THE SOUTHERN SYNOD

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Contrary to the previous chapter, which concentrated on the methodological approach to this undertaking, the current chapter consequently redirects its focus on a scientific presentation of data collected from the research exercise, the analysis thereof, and the interpretation of the results as a process that led to the investigative discussions, which were empirical in nature. This chapter also presents, analyses and investigates the case studies as presented in this study.

4.2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT RESEARCH POPULATION

This study was conducted within the Southern Synod of the URCSA which is situated within the three provinces in South Africa, namely: part of Mpumalanga, part of Gauteng and a part of North-West Province. The unit of analysis can be described as the Ministers of the Word in the Southern Synod, there was no formal interview of the participants in the meetings that were responsible for the data presented, and the researcher used the documents as the sole sources of information to present, analyse and interpret the data. The data are presented according to the case studies taken from the minutes, agenda and Acta (decision of the Synod) as discussed in Chapter 3. The case studies fall within the following categories of misconduct within the church: maladministration of funds in the synodical office by Ministers of the Word, and ill-discipline in terms of lifestyle as a minister of the Word. The method of research employed in this data collection was mainly document analysis. The above mentioned documents were analysed and the researcher compiled these case studies that needed to be analysed in relation to the three marks of the church.

4.3 INFORMATION ON MALADMINISTRATION OF FUNDS IN THE SYNODICAL OFFICE BY MINISTERS OF THE WORD

According to the Church Order of the URCSA (2014), there must be a support ministry that takes charge of the running of finance and administration affairs of the Church. This ministry supports the core business of the church. As stated in Chapter 2, the Christian church needs to proclaim the Word of God, administer the sacraments and exercise the discipline of its members and ministers. This ministry is supposed to support these financial and administrative activities and needs to appoint an administrator who is responsible for day to day running of the church office. This case of maladministration took place during the transition from the white administrator to the black administrators who were subsequently entrusted with the administration of the Church funds and properties. The Synodical commission of the Southern Synod appointed two ministers of the Word to handle the aspect of church administration; this appointment was made based on distance and/or proximity from home to the church office in Kagiso, near Krugersdorp. During their tenure, there was financial misappropriation of the church funds and when the church discovered this discrepancy the necessary steps were taken. The following case concerns one of the administrators at the Presbyterian level, which was appealed at the regional level.

4.3.1 Case Studies 1A and 1B on maladministration of church funds

The two respected and good ministers of the Word were both employed by the regional synod as employees to run its financial and administrative functions. Case 1A had a congregation to run and Case 1B was a retired minister who held his status as a minister of the Word. The church entrusted all the monies and properties to them for the smooth running of the Synod. They were employees of the synod in terms of the Labour Relations Act of South Africa, but at the same time they were under the discipline of their respective presbyteries as Article 9 of the Church Order stated. They were to operate in terms of Regulation 75 of the Church Order of Southern Synod (2014). The following were their responsibilities according to the regulation:

- Activities and powers. The administrator is responsible for the following activities:

- He/she is ex-officio secretary and member of the SMFA in an advisory capacity.
- He/she is responsible for the church office as prescribed in regulation 57.3.2.2
- He/she is responsible for the proper bookkeeping of all monies received by the church office or paid out.
- He/she keeps in safety all correspondence and documents, accounts or any proof which deal with the spending or receipt of money.
- He/she keeps minutes of all decisions taken by the SMFA and executes these decisions as well as all synodical and synodical commission decisions, which have bearing on the properties and funds or related matters.
- He/she deals with all correspondence on behalf of the SMFA.
- He/she deposits all monies received in a solid bank, approved by the SMFA and keeps an adequate amount available for running expenses. All available funds are invested on [sic] fixed property against bond [sic] or as loans to church institutions with prove [sic] of debt from ecclesiastical management or solid institutes with the approval of the SMFA.
- He/she deposits all monies received in a solid bank, approved by the SMFA and keeps an adequate amount available for running bond or as loans to church institutions with proof of debt from the ecclesiastical management or solid institutes with proof of debt from ecclesiastical management or solid [sic] institutes with the approval of the SMFA.
- He /she deals with the administration of finances and funds of the support ministry service and witnesses as well as the synodical institutions and instances as entrusted to him by the SMFA from time to time. The SMFA will ascertain that any institution applying for its transfer of its financial bookkeeping system has required infrastructure to carry out this work effectively. The auditing of the books of the institutions which do this work themselves is done by the official auditors of the regional synod.
- He/she makes payments from the funds of commissions and ministries of synod which have their own funds as approved by the relevant commission.

- He/she deals with the payment of approved emoluments and travel allowance to synodical officials and office personnel.
- He/she pays the travel expenses and day fees of members of commissions and ministries who have to undertake work under instruction of synod or presbyteries and other inevitable expenses which have to be met by the synodical funds, after he/she has ascertained the legitimacy of the claim. In case of a difference between him/her and the claimant with regard to accounts, these accounts are being submitted to the SMFA for a decision.
- He/she collects the annual levies as determined by synod.
- He/she has the books of the church office audited every year in April/May and submits the report to the commission for administration. He compiles a balance sheet of all available funds of synod.
- He/she compiles a joint financial report forms for all presbyteries for every third Year of the synodical recess and make this available to the clerk of synod to be taken up in the agenda or scheme of activities for the next synodical session.
- He/she watches over the church buildings and reports to the SMFA on conditions of the church building and other matters that affect building.
- He/she takes care that when a report is received of the ordination of a candidate minister that the ordinary minister is appointed by the relevant state department as marriage officer. He also informs the particular state department when a minister stops being a minister of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa.

The above-mentioned employees of the Synod did not comply with regulations 72 and regulation 75 of the Church Order in terms of their terms of references as administrators.

4.3.1.1 Matter at the Synodical commission level

It was found that, there was misappropriation of funds from the church office during April-May 1999 that amounted to R55 000. It was discovered that the amount was withdrawn from the church account in the form of a loan without the approval of the Synodical commission. The said ministers acted beyond their legal powers as per article 11.11 of the Church Order and the Public Funds

Management Act. Instead, the said ministers carried out an unauthorised withdrawal from the institutional funds without following the proper procedures as stated in the regulation 75 of the Church Order. There was a serious deviation in terms of the budget and the instructions given to them by the regulations of the Church Order and the Public Funds Management Act.

The following are the facts that led to the decision of the Synodical commission as per the document analysis:

- The two ministers agreed that they had made an unauthorised transaction from the church account in the form of a 'loan'.
- They both acknowledged in a written letter to the Support Ministry of Finance and Administration, that they had taken R55 000 as a loan.
- Stating that upon taking that money, they had hoped to pay it back before the ministry found out about the unauthorised transaction.
- Case 1A later admitted to have taken a further R15 000. 00 of which
- R13 000.00 was later paid back.
- It was agreed that on the 30th November 1999, Case 1B repay R20 000.00 and Case 1A also repay R22 000.00 from the R55 000.00.

Based on the points given above, the Synodical commission took a decision to dismiss the case with admonition to the two ministers, because they had shown remorse and they were prepared to pay the money back. In performing this act, the Synodical commission of 2000 was trapped between the two poles of the church, that is, both a caring and disciplining community. Hauerwas (2012:657) states that the situation in which the church finds itself appears to make the activities of care and discipline incompatible. Care is identified with compassionate care of the individual and is now thought to be the first business of the church. Care requires understanding the particularities of the individual members' situation so that the very idea of disciplining someone in a personal crisis is simply unthinkable. The church seeks to be understood and to understand – not to be judged. The synodical commission dismissed the case on the basis that the two ministers had shown remorse by acknowledging that they had misappropriated the church funds and that they would repay the money. In that sense, the Synodical

commission acted beyond its legal powers, as per regulation 16.1.4 of the Church Order that states: “Regarding doctrinal and ethical life of these officials they will fall under the supervision and discipline of the Church Council and Presbytery where they reside and attend public worship services”.

The Synodical Commission ruled as follows on the matter, which was beyond their legal powers:

- That the Scriba Sinodi is to write a letter to all congregations informing them about the misappropriation of funds and the actions taken by the Synod;
- Misappropriation of Synodical funds had occurred during the months of April & May 1999;
- That there was a show of repentance from the transgressors and the transgressors also showed remorse.
- Furthermore, a substantial amount of money was retrieved from the accused; and
- Preventative measures had been put in place to curb further transgressions of such a nature.

4.3.1.2 Matter at the Presbytery level

It was also found that the matter was handled at the presbytery level of Case 1A, was suspended by the presbytery based on the allegations, which were not formally forwarded to the presbytery by the regional synod that had appointed him. The matter was brought before the Presbyterial from the report of the delegates from the Synodical commission. The presbytery took this matter up as the official disciplining body according to article 9 and regulation 16.1.4 in terms of the employment of officials in the regional synod. The following is the argument from the presbytery:

- Case 1A had committed a wrongful deed by performing an unauthorized transaction from the synod funds.
- The Synodical commission does not possess the right to deal with disciplinary issues of members of the presbytery as per Article 9 and Regulation 16.1.4.

- Case 1A had to be disciplined in terms of the Church Order regulations and the Biblical ten commandments of Moses (Decalogue) as well as the confessions of faith of the church.

The respondent advances the following argument to the presbytery:

- The notion of intent was brought to the fore, as it is believed that this (intent) had more to do with the alleged transgression, which was the misappropriation of funds.
- The intention of the brothers was to multiply the finances of the church by investing the money without the permission of the Synod.
- However, they did not make a proper investigation into the financial institution they are investing in. The person responsible for the contracts of the investment and to whom the money had been given is believed to have been a con-man who took off with the monies, which was withdrawn from the church account.
- Finally, that all the monies taken would be repaid into the account of the church.

The presbytery ruled as follows on the matter which was not reported formally to the presbytery for handling, but to implement the decision of the Synodical commission on pastoral care to the minister in their jurisdiction.

It is in this light that when the administration commission completed its investigation and dealt with the matter at hand to its own satisfaction, the findings hereof were therefore cascaded to the relevant structure within the church to be further addressed and/or for information sharing. However, when the presbytery of Case 1A heard of these transgressions, they decided to act upon the findings and carry out discipline as it was their prerogative. This led to the presbytery sending out a memo to the accused informing him of the decision that the presbytery had taken to acting further on the information received from the Administration Commission. The letter further stated that the accused was to make himself available on the day in order to give an account of the series of events. Based on the contents of the said letter the meeting sat as stipulated with representatives from the presbytery.

The sitting was therefore opened and clarity was given as to the purpose of the meeting and the matters to be decided upon. In that meeting the chairperson,

extended an olive branch to the accused, but not as the chairperson of the meeting, but as an individual, that the transgressor be pardoned, be allowed to continue working as a minister and be forgiven for his acts as he had shown remorse and returned some of the money. There was disagreement with the chairperson's statement as it was felt that he was trying to persuade the meeting to move in a certain direction. Deliberations concerning the matter also unfolded, where others opted for suspension until investigations were concluded, but the final and ultimate decision was unanimous that the minister be 'skorsed' (punished by having to leave working/serving his congregation) as per the church order. The decision to suspend the minister until such time that he displayed proper remorse for his actions (Regulation 89.4.2.2 as in Church Order of 1999), was agreed upon unanimously. The minister was subsequently punished by means of suspension as an example to further deter other ministers from making the same mistake. The regulations, which were exercised, to carry out this decision were regulation 87 (87.1, 87.2, 87.3, 87.4), regulation 88 (88.1, 88.2, 88.3, 88.4, 88.5), and finally, regulation 89 (89.1, 89.2, 89.3, 89.4).

The above-mentioned decision was taken by the presbytery based on the following points, which were stressed in that meeting:

- (1) The presbytery made the decision to suspend the minister, whom the church had trusted, due to the mistrust and unfaithful nature, which the minister portrayed;
- (2) The lack of cross checking the validity and reliability of the person to whom the money was given, with reference to the amount of the money involved in the transaction. It was agreed that the credentials of the person whom the money was given to should have been double checked before the money was released into his care;
- (3) That a subsequent meeting be held three days later, where the minutes of the current meeting were perused, corrected and signed;
- (4) After the minutes had been signed, a letter stating the facts as discussed in the meeting were delivered to the minister, informing him of his suspension and a copy sent to the church council of his respective church;
- (5) Finally, the presbytery had to look into the matter of consulates "konsulentskappe" because this system was also affected by the suspension of the said minister.

In the meantime, the presbytery had already written a response letter to the congregation, which fell under the consular services of the accused, explaining that the accused was no longer their consular official as a result of the suspension. Needless to say that the respective church council members from this church had previously written a letter to ask for the removal of the accused as their consular official based on the facts at hand whether they were deemed to be true or untrue. The accused was suspended from his official duties and the interim minister's duties in the presbytery.

4.3.1.3 Matter at the Synodical commission level as an appeal

In line with the appeal process, the appellant wrote a letter of appeal to the scribe of the S.Tvl Synod, where he contested the decision leading to his suspension, which was taken at presbytery level, according to procedure. In that letter, the appellant gave a reflection of what transpired in the meeting that resulted in his suspension, and gave the reason for the presbytery's latter decision as Regulation 89.4.2.2 "Suspension from service by presbytery until proof of proper remorse is shown".

The appellant therefore raised his reasons for the appeal as follows:

- In his own understanding the matter that lay before the presbytery for the "misappropriation of funds" was dealt with at the Synodical Commission at the meeting which, was held on the 2 December 1999 and that the circular of 08 December 1999 was circulated to all congregations from the Scribe of the Synod and it stated the three points upon which the appeal was based.
- In that the presbytery of his locality in tackling this matter were not the '*aanklaers*' (accusers) and didn't have the '*klaagstaat*' (charge-sheet/formal complaint), and that if this was so, therefore the '*aanklaers*' could not be the judge and the accusers at the same time.
- Finally, in the decision making process of the presbytery, they did not take into cognisance of the requirement that when investigating the case, the church council of the respective minister should be informed of such action stemming from Regulation 88.1, that the presbytery was not completely purified as there were those who were part of the proceedings at the Synodical Commission proceedings (drawn from Regulation 89.1), and that the accused showed remorse and repentance at the Synodical Commission and

the presbytery did not accept that action as stipulated in Matthew which reads “if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your own brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses’” (Holy Bible 2006: 1069).

The appellant’s facts portrayed a clear understanding of the law, or rather, the church order, which was quoted in this instance in lieu of his appeal being granted. The Synod thoroughly discussed the contents of the appeal letter and drew their own conclusions

The Special Synodical Commission met on the 16 November 2000 to discuss the appeal statement from the accused and took every detail to heart in preparation for giving direction to the process. They perused all the information given by the accused and thereafter verified it against the actual proceedings and procedures followed. Their findings were the following:

- The main appeal in terms of Regulation 88.1 was that the Presbytery Commission did/did not inform the church council of the accused regarding their investigation and charge.
- That when investigating the accused, no ‘charge-sheet’ was drawn up that outlined the nature of the transgression and the extent of it. When perusing the minutes of the two presbyterial meetings, it was noted that no formal charge-sheet was drawn up and therefore the appellant himself was unsure of whether he was being a victim of rumours or formal complaints.
- Both issues of the appeal were pondered and deliberated upon at great length and were thus voted upon by the special Synodical Commission, of which the findings were as follows.

The findings of the deliberations and voting were that the meeting decided by way of the majority vote that the appellant’s appeal succeeded for these three reasons in that:

- The Presbytery and its commission investigated the matter/case without the knowledge of the church council.

- The accused was never informed that the investigation was taking place as there was no charge sheet brought to the presbytery commission or through a rumour.
- This led to the conclusion that there was no charge sheet available to propel the investigation, which the Presbyterian Commission sanctioned.

As a way forward, the Synodical Commission called the presbytery and the appellant to their chambers to inform both parties of the outcome of the appeal. In this meeting, both affected parties were informed of the Synodical Commission's decision to uphold the appellant's appeal and further requested these parties to cooperate in lieu of the decision taken.

This created further discontent for certain members of the presbytery as they believed that the role of the Synodical Commission was to peruse the procedural flaws and not to judge the merits of the case. These presbytery members were also unhappy about the presence of the appellant's church members as if their presence somewhat influenced the decision of the Synodical Commission. Furthermore, the scribe of the presbytery made his agitation known about the scripture, which was read as the opening devotion. He highlighted that the opening word gave the impression that the acting chairperson of the day (who was the assessor of the synod) was not impartial.

In line with the decisions, which were taken, the commission felt the need not to invite the church council of the appellant's congregation, as this would be seen as taking sides and influencing the meeting to favour of the appellant. In conclusion the Synodical commission concluded that everything that had to be resolved was to be done between the appellant, the church council and the presbytery and its commission.

The cited case represents a disciplinary process that is aligned with an administrative malpractice. Later on in our discussions we therefore look into the case above and try and analyse its merits as to whether the law of the church was correctly applied in reaching the outcome. Some of the issues that were pondered on were whether the processes followed were neutral or biased.

In the concluding note on the first case, it is clear that the synod had used the political way of running the meeting, where the debate and a majority rule system

of vote was used draw a conclusion on the matter. It is clear from the facts and procedure given that discernment was not employed as the way of running the meeting, the community of believers did not seek guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer, reflection on Scripture, tradition, values, and current realities; dialogue and finding places of agreement. There was persuasion from the strong party within the meeting, hence the matter was concluded by a vote.

4.4 INFORMATION ON THE DOCTRINAL AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR OF THE MINISTER OF THE WORD (EVANGELIST)

It was noteworthy to learn from the synod documents that, ministers of the Word are sometimes ill-disciplined when one evaluates them in terms of the Word of God they proclaim, and the sacraments that they administer to the congregation. Müller (2011:339) states that:

In the preaching event both the preacher and the listener are captives of the Word. It puts both the lives of the preacher and the listener at stake...Sermons are never 'nice'; sermons speak with passion, liberating people from their captivity from sin and evil. This passion is elemental and instrumental in presenting the good news.

Proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments should be supported by the good life of the minister of the Word and sacraments. There is a saying in English that says: "Action speaks louder than words" and "practice what you preach or preach what you practice." What Müller (2011) said is that the Word of God should work within the preacher and the listeners. It is unfortunate that the case study that is presented is the opposite of what was postulated by Müller (2011). The life of the minister of the Word presented in this case does not support the teaching and authentic way of preaching. The actions of the minister of the Word that does not support his or her teaching leaves us with no option but to say the words of Müller (2011:4) that "too many sermons are full of human words, without containing the Word of God". The act of carrying out discipline is the result of good practice of the proclamation of the word and administration of the sacraments. When one examines the facts in this case in terms of the ethical life of a minister of the Word, it is important to consider what Calvin said in the Institutes. Calvin astutely made reference to the proclamation of the Word and the administering of the sacraments as the only marks that can prudently mould the Church to behave and act in accordance with the doctrine of Christ. On the

contrary, he did not rule out discipline as a sinew that binds the Church of God together. He did not subscribe to having discipline as the third mark of the Church, while at the same time not undermining its importance within the latter, but emphasising its spiritual practicability as an admonition tool. However, he further dichotomises discipline into two: firstly, discipline that is exercised among the people, and secondly, discipline that is applied to the minister of the Word. This, for Calvin, is the dividing factor that plays an intricate role in discipline with reference to the power that may be and spiritual authority. It is in this regard that Calvin speaks to the “Power of the keys and Spiritual Jurisdiction (Calvin, 2009:813), when addressing this aspect of discipline. Thus, since there are the regulations that regulate the life and teaching of the ministers of the word, it is unfortunate that in this case the minister of the word is implicated.

There are regulations from the Church Order of the URCSA that regulate the ill-disciplined ministers. The following regulations are of importance when a minister of the word is alleged to be misbehaving in the church: when the minister does not comply in terms of ethical and doctrinal issues then the following regulation is to be applied: Regulation 24 and Regulation 89.4.1.2. The following information stems from the official documents of the church, which is archived in the church office, and deals with the case of the minister of the Word (Evangelist) who was suspended based on his lifestyle that did not support his teaching. After reading and analysing this document these are the facts as they unfolded:

4.4.1 The applicant in Case 2

The church council appeared to be the applicant, in this case, applying to the Presbytery X, so that the presbytery could discipline the minister, as it is the prerogative of the presbytery to discipline an office-bearer of the church. The church council followed articles 7 and 9, which states that the church council cannot discipline an office-bearer of the church, and that only the presbytery can discipline the office-bearer. Article 7.2 states that the church council disciplines members of the congregation with the exception of elected office bearers; and Article 9.4 indicates that, the presbytery deals with disciplinary matters regarding ministers of the Word and the elected offices. In this case, the church council had acted within their legal powers and referred the case to the relevant body for adjudication.

4.4.2 The respondent in Case 2

According to the informant, the respondent was the assistant minister in the congregation with limited functions as the evangelist under the supervision of the local minister and the church council. He was responsible for a certain portion of the Congregation H, which was located in the mining community. According to the informant, this minister had to proclaim the Word of God, instruct the catechumen on the doctrine of the church and the Word of God, conduct house visitation and lead the people in an exemplary lifestyle.

4.4.3 The Outline the Facts of the Case

According to the documents, the following were the outlining facts of the case:

- The life and witness of the respondent namely Case 2 in the light of the evidence before the Church Council and Presbytery is an embarrassment to the whole congregation and the church as a whole.
- That the life and witness of the respondent is questioned, he was misusing alcohol in public and this spoiled his preaching of the Word.
- There was perpetual continuance of such behaviour.
- The respondent does not see any wrong doing in his behaviour as a minister of the Word.
- Therefore, he does not show remorse for all his actions, which are not in congruence with what the church preaches.
- The Church Council has in turn showed the utmost tolerance for this behaviour, not only as individuals, but also by implementing the Scriptures from Matthew 5:41 (Minutes of the Synod).

4.4.4 Articles and regulations transgressed by the respondent

Which law did the respondent allegedly transgress? According to the documents before the presbytery there was evidence that the respondent had transgressed the church law. When looking at the case in point it was evident that the law that the respondent had transgressed is not explained in detail, as it is said only that “the life and witness of the respondent is questioned.” This, according to the

researcher, should result in the transgression of Regulation 24.3.1, which reads thus:

When a particular charge against the doctrine and life of a minister of the Word dissatisfaction prevails in the congregation, it is the duty of the church council to do everything in its power to restore peace. If the church council regards it as necessary the assistance of one or two ministers of the Word, with the agreement of the parties involved are being called upon for assistance (Church Order, 1999:26).

According to the informant, the respondent had transgressed the promises he made in the licensing Oath of ministers of the Word, confessions of faith, Biblical instructions and the formula of sacraments. This information is based on the semi-structured question to the interviewee.

4.4.5 The arguments of the applicant for the case

According the document and the researcher's analysis the following were the arguments of the church council, which in this case, was the applicant:

- The case in question could not be dealt with in isolation, but had to be aligned to the decisions taken by the Presbytery and the outcome of the Church Council. All these factors were to be taken into cognisance when looking into this matter against the respondent.
- Wherein the Church council took the decision on the 05/02/2004, that the said evangelist was suspended for three (3) months, with pay but without travelling allowance.
- Following the suspension, (Reg. 89.4.1.2, "suspension in service until proof of proper remorse is shown with or without the sacraments") the Church Council was to keep watch on the behaviour of the respondent, to see if there was progress in the life and witness of the Evangelist as a Christian leader.
- Furthermore, the church council also saw it fit to instruct the evangelist who was the accused in this matter to evacuate the church mission house as his behaviour was still unacceptable

- Remorse and contrite was never displayed by the evangelist while being suspension.
- All the above were put to the Presbytery as a recommendation concerning their Church leader who was the accused at this point.

The abovementioned argument does not show how the behaviour of the minister in question affected the proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments as discipline in the church is inter-related to the other two marks of the Church.

4.4.6 The arguments of the respondent in this case

According to the documents and the researcher's analysis the following were the arguments of the respondent for the case, which was the minister of the word:

- The documentation does not have much to say on the response of the respondent.
- The respondent did not in any way see himself as being on the wrong side of the law of the church.
- It also highlighted his dissatisfaction in how his matter had been handled as it also went to the extent of seeking outside help for the evacuation from the church house.
- He consulted with a law firm, which in turn wrote a letter to the church council informing them of how unprocedural this evacuation had been executed.

It seems from the argument of the respondent that the respondent did not receive a fair chance to present his case before the presbytery. In this sense it appears that the natural justice was not applied in this case and if so, the church had failed to act according to its confession of faith namely confession of Belhar, which states that justice should flow like waters. In light of the meeting procedures and the method of decision-making within the church the meeting followed the debate and parliamentary system of handling the matter, where voting determines the verdict of the meeting, instead of following discernment where values, traditions,

confessions, Scripture and prayer are considered while seeking the mind of the seeker.

4.4.7 The ruling of the Presbytery in this case

According to the documents, the Presbytery, who acted as the 'judge' in this case, ruled that; the Presbytery align itself with the decision of the Church Council in that it agreed that the accused be suspended for a period of three (3) months, with pay but without the travelling allowance. This was the initial finding of the Presbytery but subsequent to that, when the council reported that there was no progress in behaviour, a more stringent decision was implemented. This was to sever the tie between the congregation and the evangelist as recommended by the Church Council. These ties were severed with the evangelist still retaining his status as the evangelist of the church and he would still be eligible to be called to another congregation. Subsequent to this on the 10th November 2004, the Presbyterial Commission sent the evangelist a letter stating that he would be given a letter of demission that released him from duty at his current congregation and therefore would no longer serve that congregation but he would be able to serve at another congregation should he be called to the latter.

The big question here is whether the ruling of the presbytery is in line with the articles and regulations of the church in the Church order or not? The outcome of the case as spelled out by the Presbytery is not totally in congruent with the article and regulation of the church or the church order. The applicant was the church council who took their dissatisfaction to the presbytery for investigation and decision-making, as the church council did not want the evangelist anymore. Their grievance against the perpetrator was not explained in detail, but questioned the 'life and witness' of the evangelist. This questioning is unclear and therefore becomes dubious. The Presbytery however took the liberty of investigating the matter concluding that, the ties between the congregation and the evangelist be severed. This according to the Presbytery was a heavy decision to carry out but had to be effected in order to avoid a calamity and eradicate the rift that existed between the two parties.

According to the law, the church meetings should not be judges on cases that affect their own colleagues, as, feelings emotions and biasness easily overcome justice and the principle of fairness.

4.4.8 The appeal before the Synod by the respondent

The respondent was not satisfied with the ruling of the Presbytery, since the nature of the charge was not clearly stated in the verdict. According to the informant most of the cases that were appealed to the synod were ruled in favour of the accused, due to carelessness of the Presbytery in terms of the procedure and misrepresentative of facts by the church council or the Presbytery. In this case the following was the point for appeal.

As stipulated by the procedure to be followed in such cases, when the respondent or the accused is unsatisfied regarding outcome of the investigation, they are then required to lodge an appeal within a certain stipulated timeframe. The church Order states that the appeal should be lodged within the four weeks after the Presbytery has taken a decision, and within those four weeks the appellant should provide the synod with the necessary documents. The respondent did this and the letter of appeal was submitted to the scribe of the Southern Transvaal synod, as is stated in the Church order regulations, which acknowledged the letter from the sender and promised to look into the matter as soon as all the facts have been made available to them. The efforts of the Moderamen to mediate on the matter were further frustrated by the failure of the respective congregation and the Presbytery to submit and/or furnish the Moderamen with the certified copies of the minutes of all the meetings, which were held. Instead what the Presbytery chose to do was to submit the reports as the matter was under the auspices of the CCMA and respective lawyers. This is as far as the appeal went, as the Moderamen could not conduct the appeal process without the necessary information on the case and processes, which were followed.

According to the informant, a senior minister in the URCSA Southern Synod, the CCMA ruled in favour of the accused. The accused served his suspension. However, the presbytery ignored the decision of the CCMA and did not reinstate him. During the interview with the informant, it was found that the appeal case was handled in another Synodical commission under the leadership of the moderator. This Synodical commission ruled that the accused be reinstated in his service in the congregation with immediate effect.

4.5 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATION ON THESE CASES

In this case study, one can see that discipline was exercised. However, the extent of the discipline may still be questionable, and would need investigation. With this in mind, the researcher determined that discipline is practised in the URCSA, but at what cost? It may very well be that those who administer discipline as an important mark of the church do so in utter ignorance or are being drawn by their own ulterior motives. This stance will therefore lead to maladministration of discipline as a corrective measure, which may lead the Church into disrepute and thereby lose its primary purpose of being a true Church.

When members who form part of the disciplinary meeting handle church matters with ulterior motives this indicates that both the accused and the accusers lack discipline and therefore, if the one who is entrusted with the responsibility to carry out the disciplinary hearing is biased, he or she should be deemed to be equally guilty and declared unfit to fulfil the disciplinary function. It is evident from the above cases that the regional synod made a ruling on the maladministration of church funds, without referring the matter to the respective presbyteries to handle the discipline of both members who were involved in the maladministration of church finances. Only one member was disciplined and appealed his case. The same happened in the second case when the presbytery handled the case without stating the clear charge of the accused, for example, by stating that the life and the witness of the minister of the Word is questionable, but failing to state the reasons supporting their position. Lack of proper handling of matters in church meetings indicate the lack of discipline of the members of the meeting to investigate thoroughly with a proper reporting channel to the relevant body/bodies. This is justified by the list of offences that are punishable in the church that are stated in Chapter 8 on Church Control and discipline in Regulation 77, which states: "The transgression of overseers of the congregation in their official ministry, the negligence in their official duties and abuse of power, will in particular be punishable" (Church Order, 2014:138). The members of the presbytery who handled the second case did not provide the synod with the necessary documents for the synod to continue with the appeal of Case 2. This therefore is the other sign of the lack of discipline of the members of the presbytery. Furthermore, the synod did not take further steps against the members of the presbytery as those

members are the ones who were supposed to handle disciplinary action against members of the presbytery.

4.5.1 Processes and Procedures

Let us take a step back and remember that earlier on we made reference to the fact that a presbytery relates to a structure of Church administration or authority, which consists of elders and ministers alike. This system accords authority to the latter to enforce discipline and exercise administrative influences within the Church. During the times of Calvin this was termed the consistory and is only applicable to the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. The presbytery, in the URCSA, however, comprises numerous congregations, which falls within a certain locality and will thus meet as determined by the Regional Synod. Among others, these presbyteries are entrusted with dealing with:

9.4 disciplinary matters regarding the Ministers of the Word and the elected offices; (and to)

9.7 Lay down procedures and rules for activities entrusted to it (Church Order 1999:5).

It can never be contested that the responsibilities entrusted to the presbytery placed the latter in a primary position of enforcing discipline on the ministers of the Word. However, it is important to note that even though it seems as if the full might of the law has taken charge, discrepancies will always manifest in other matters that support and enable or detract and hinder the enforcement of the law. When discrepancies or unprocedural tendencies exhibit themselves within the Presbyterian disciplinary system and hinders or thwarts the actual procedural process of disciplining the transgressor, it is in this regard that the appellant can utilise the services of a higher body.

As evident in the first case, the appellant was in disagreement with the decision that was taken by the presbytery, that of suspending him under Regulation 89.4.2.2 without following the procedures of the Church Order. The presbytery in this regard was at fault to suspend the minister when the congregation where the minister is employed did not sanction such an action on their minister. The Presbyterian Commission presented themselves as a commission that failed to exercise the law in depth and acted emotionally in attempting to solve the issue amicably. It is important to note that a moral infringement such as

‘misappropriation of funds’ is an offence that is sin, as it is written in Deuteronomy 5:19 “though shall not steal”.

The presbytery therefore failed to exercise the following: (a) Accept the ruling of the Synodical Commission (because the accused showed remorse and was willing to return the funds, that part of these had already been paid back); (b) That the presbytery had proved to be the accuser and the judge on the matter, because there was no charge sheet from the congregation, therefore they prosecuted without the formal complaint and lastly (c) failed to notify the respective congregation of this case as the presbytery acted alone in handling this case. This is also the equivalent of a reaction based on emotions rather than acting logically.

This higher body’s expertise is not to look into the merits of the case, but to revisit the procedures followed in terms of disciplining the incumbent. This relates to the Regional Synod and its commissions acting on its behalf, which acts:

As an expression of the unity of the church, [where] congregations come, by means of representatives, together in church meetings by virtue of Christ’s command to serve each other. The purpose of these meetings is a joint consultation on matters that affect all congregations... Depending on circumstances; the Synods may have a broad or narrow character (Church Order 1999:5).

The delegates of these congregations meet at a specific time and in a particular method as prescribed by the Regional Synod. Their sole responsibility is to:

10.1 deliberate in joint action by the congregations with regard to the activities that cannot be dealt with by the presbytery; decide on disciplinary matter and appeals (Church Order 1999:6).

4.5.2 Coercive Leadership

It is necessary to remember that the Church can never be aloof with regards to all the challenges that are not congruent with it as a system that one utterly believes in. This includes, inter alia, unethical behaviour, sin, moral degeneration and disunity, because these ailments require discipline to be sternly administered and enforced within the confines of the Church. These will persist and are prevalent within the world in which we reside, but in attempting to solve these challenges, the Church needs to go back to basics and exercise its marks continuously, so as

not to lose focus on its mandate as an institution which has been orchestrated by God himself, headed by Jesus Christ and governed by the Holy Spirit. These three marks, which require more emphasis on discipline, will therefore act as a tendon that will redirect the Church to the trueness that is expected to remain. However, one major challenge that is slowly crawling into the life of Church discipline is coercive leadership. By coercive leadership, the researcher refers to the process where those who are in leadership and who are expected to instil discipline use coercion to influence the outcome of the meeting or cunningly sway the decisions of the disciplinary committee to suit their interests.

This may very well be the case in point in this study. Those who were in power may have deliberately influenced the decision making in this case. This abuse of power was achieved by treating with contempt every aspect of the case. Thus ultimately dividing the house by subjecting them to a vote, knowing very well that the outcome would be the one, which is in their favour. The major cause of such decision making was the voting procedure, which was not a secret ballot but a public vote, allowing other people to feel bound to take decisions which they did not entirely agree with, as the of the presbytery was composed of church council members and ministers alike. In one way or the other (whilst trying very hard not to demean the intelligence and character of the council members), when the house was subjected to voting, they (council members) were almost keen to side with their ministers and not to vote against them. This could be propelled by numerous facts such as homogeneity, avoiding conflict, and displaying trust and respect for their ministers. With these reasons, some leaders may utilise this honest trust and belief in them as leaders by the council members to their benefit and therefore serve their own interest by swaying the meeting to their desired outcome. It is in this light that the responsibility of the church, in having the three marks, is an attempt to instil homogeneity in the Church as a primary source and maintain its trueness. Therefore, in order to ensure that this homogeneity is prevalent in the church, these marks are to be practised without apprehension or sympathy. For the trueness of the church does not rest on the aspirations of an individual or a group of people, but relies on the law of the Church and the guarantee that these will be exercised accordingly.

The other challenge that faces the Church is that when all these disciplinary proceedings are to take place, the golden rule is to begin with a prayer for the

Lord's guidance. This prayer does not take place in isolation, but is therefore based on, and draws its power from, the proclaimed Word of God. If the prayer is to be genuine in character, then the subject performing the prayer has to be in good standing with the Eucharist, as this resembles the body of Christ in order to allow discipline to be correctly administered. This is actually the right time for discernment to override everything and take over the proceedings, in that discernment is based on the trust that God is the Source of all we are and are trying to do. God is the One who already knows what we are seeking and wants to communicate with us. Letting God be larger, wiser, and greater than us is a key shift in our awareness. We think we know this and then find ourselves still trying to figure it out in our own minds or worrying about finding the one true solution.

The researcher, through observation in the ecclesiastical gatherings, has come to the realisation that church meetings were conducted in the form of debate and dialogue with very limited discernment (letting God be and take over the meeting through His power). This took place when the meeting conducted the disciplinary action as witnessed in the first case. Secondly, these church meetings were held in the name of God, but were they held, under the auspices of the church from above or below? For Barth, the Church, which is viewed from above, carries its mandate from Jesus Christ because Christ is the representative of the Church both in heaven and on earth as it is governed by the Word of God and amplified by the administration of the sacraments. Notwithstanding that if the Church is going to allow both strong and influential men and women in high positions to swing and steer the meetings towards their own directions and intention, discipline in the church will have degenerated when compared with the proclamation of the Word and administration of sacraments. When that happens the Church of Jesus Christ would have been run '*from below*', which simply amplifies what Barth meant by the Church '*from below*', meaning that the Church can be embroiled in earthly undertakings, and thus be subjected to the ills of the world. It is in this regard that the Church has to sternly exercise discipline without human influence and encourage obedience within its parameters.

This coercion can also appear in myriad ways. In the abovementioned, coercive leadership is evident, meaning that coercion that comes '*from above*', but can still be experienced '*from below*', where the people on the ground make it impossible for the leadership to make progress with their functions and therefore render their

efforts and themselves useless. This position is reflected by the actions of the church council and the presbytery in the latter case. In the second case, one can detect that there is a resolute effort to hide the truth, thereby avoiding conflict, or at the worst, being afraid that their decisions may be rescinded by the Synodical Commission. This notion is perpetuated by the church council and the presbytery alike by failing and/or refusing to provide all the minutes of the meetings held (which in this case represents the truth) to the Moderamen, which in the researchers opinion, was a ploy to have their decisions carried out without any hindrance. This represents an influence from below, which in turn acts as interference against the proper exercise of discipline by the Moderamen to service the affected party.

4.5.3 Size of Disciplinary Committee

The size of the disciplinary committee plays a pivotal role in addressing these disciplinary issues. The researcher attests to this as people in general, regardless of their infringements, do not want to be tried in front of others or strangers as this would expose their action. The Synodical Commission did not direct this case to the smaller ministries, which deal with judicial matters, but rather, handled the matter themselves. This in turn creates a conflict of responsibilities in that it investigates the allegations and decides thereon. In this regard, their wish was to invite all the members of the synod to inform them of the outcome of their investigation and the verdict, when in actual fact they had the judicial ministry called the Support Ministry for Judicial Matters (SMJM), which could have dealt with the disciplining and submitted its findings to the Synodical Commission for review and implementation.

These cases offer a window into how discipline as the third mark of the true church is addressed within the URCSA, Southern Tvl Synod. Understandably, these do not begin to represent the entire processes relating to discipline. However, it can be contested that these cases give us a sneak preview into the administrative and moralistic disciplinary proceedings in the said church (while not all cases are handled in this manner). The first case deals with misappropriation of funds of the church, which relates to the maladministration of the organisation's finances, whereas the second case clearly highlights an ethical and moral misdemeanour that had offended the congregation.

The two cases, although separate and unique in nature and share a common ground in the processes involved, can be questioned and were not qualified to require enforced discipline. Once more, the researcher wants to contest that

if our faith... is such that it is destroyed by force of argument, then let it be destroyed; for it will have been proved that we do not possess the truth (Gaybba, 2005:39).

People who carry out discipline sometimes misconstrue its essence by letting their actions favour their aspirations. This kind of action leads the disciplinarians to be kings unto themselves and to only look after themselves and their ego, thereby neglecting the process of discipline.

4.6 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the researcher presented the information that he collected from informal discussions, observations and document analysis. The information was analysed and interpreted in terms of the three marks of the church as was discussed in Chapter 2. The researcher demonstrated in this chapter that there are imbalances in the functionality of the three marks of the church where the content of the Word received almost one quarter; sacraments a quarter in the URCSA and discipline maybe one over eight. The cases presented in this chapter illustrate that there is a lack of discipline in terms of the life, teaching, administration and governance of the church meeting. This is illustrated in the manner in which the church meetings erred in terms of handling the cases and applying the church articles and regulations. In the next chapter, the researcher presents the findings, recommendations and conclusion to the research study.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher brings the reader close to the realities surrounding this undertaking. The key aim of this research was to evaluate the URCSA in relation to the three marks of the church with specific reference to discipline. In so doing, the author perused a substantial amount of literature and engaged himself in it in order to address the topic at hand. Discipline as an intrinsic mark of the three found in the reformed tradition, formed the epicentre of this research, not implying the neglect of the other two marks of this church. In addition, while attempting to do justice to this process, a number of facets within the realm of the church itself had to be examined.

Arguably, these factors had a significant bearing on the discussions. They relate to the historical background of the URCSA, the confessions, definition of the church in the URCSA, the powers and responsibilities given to the church, the servanthship of the church and the powers bestowed upon the church, the scholastic views on the concept of the church, the marks of the church (which encapsulated the proclamation of the word, the correct administration of sacraments, that is, baptism and the Eucharist, and the faithful exercise of discipline. Coupled with this was the methodology that was utilised to obtain the desired information as highlighted in Chapter three. Subsequently, Chapter 4 discussed and analysed the case studies covered in this research. All of this information was spread across the preceding chapters. At this juncture it is necessary to concentrate on the outcome of this exercise and draw conclusions regarding this task.

5.2 BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this part of the work is to reflect on the preceding chapters and strategically determine the findings in order to draw possible recommendations and conclusions.

In the opening chapter, the intentions in embarking upon this exercise and the introductory elements of the thesis were clarified. This chapter formed the

navigation phase through which we steered the deliberations. Coupled with that the problem statement, research aims, research method, population and sample of the study served as pointers to the discussions.

The succeeding chapter interrogated literature that relevant to the subject matter, covering different areas of interest that were researched, engaged in and the relevancy thereof was indicated. As the purpose of this literature review was to make sense of the goal of the study, clarification of any uncertainties regarding the topic was exhausted. Hence, the scope of this recorded matter extended from the historical background of the URCSA, the origins of the three marks of the church and their influences, to how they influenced the church to be the true church of Christ. In addition, how the society together with its secular standards exerted an influential bearing on the church was considered.

In the applied approach, I took the liberty to explore the understanding of the church in the context of these three marks and how they serve as a support structure in the maintenance of the doctrine of the church. It is thus important to note that the proclamation of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments and the proper exercise of discipline are without question the propagators of a healthy church life. In this light, observance of the three marks is of utmost importance to ensure the survival of the church and maintain its trueness. There needs to be a distinguishing factor between the being and the wellbeing of the church. I want to believe that discipline as the third mark of the Reformed church can contribute greatly towards the well-being of the church of Christ.

In order to attain the intended goal, the third chapter furnished strict parameters relating to the methodology. The research design and the methodology in use was key to uncovering the challenges, which manifested in trying to address this field of study. The literature review coupled with the research methodology created an array of primary information for this research. Upon presentation, the data and/or information collected appeared to be valid and reliable and thus addressed the issues of concern regarding the topic. This was achieved by adhering to the principles of qualitative methodology, which also concentrated on the research settings, the population to be interviewed either formally or informally, the sampling, the documents, which were the source of the information, the research ethics that one had to adhere to, such as anonymity and confidentiality of the subjects and/or informants, all of whom were subject to voluntary participation in

this research. These methodological strategies were employed to maximise the outcome of the research conducted.

In Chapter Four, the heart of this research contains the evidence to qualify the hypothesis presented in this study. This evidence was presented in the form of case studies cited from the minutes and the 'Acta' of the URCSA Southern Synod. The data were obtained through informal interviews, document analysis and observation. Only two case studies were cited where one is an administrative case and the other one is an ethical or moral case. These two cases are used as yardsticks to accentuate the challenge that is facing the Church of God. The disciplinary undertone that formed part of the investigative challenge at the beginning of this task became exposed and further explained in ecclesiological tones in lieu of understanding the reasons towards such behaviour, thereby harmonising the stance of the true church of Christ in the public domain.

The analysis of such information also took place in the same chapter. This analysis was interpreted in relation to the three marks of the church that were highlighted and explained in the previous chapters. In this interpretation, it was discovered that imbalances exist with regard to these marks of the church and that their applications within the realm of the church are not the same. The other two marks, that is, the proclamation of the Word and the correct administration of the sacraments, enjoy more publicity whereas discipline is slowly being downplayed within the high rankings of the church. The other striking factor that was discovered was that the attitude coupled with the mindset that is prevalent within the people at these institutions is subjected to politics and social influences have greater significance than discernment. Within this chapter, there were findings that contributed greatly to the dissipation of discipline in the church, which is exacerbated by how discipline is exercised. During this process, the disciplinarians sometimes become arrogant and therefore fail to maintain equal treatment of all three marks of the church, thereby tend to render the church ungovernable and sometimes acting against its principles.

With that in mind, the findings as tested against the aims or objectives of this research are considered to determine whether the mandate of this undertaking was fulfilled.

5.2 FINDINGS BASED ON THE RESEARCH AIMS

The findings of this research study are based on the aims thereof as outlined earlier in the preceding chapters. It is important to note that these findings are based on the information collected in this study and were therefore pertinent to this research study. The primary of this research was to conduct a literature investigation in order to define and clarify the concept of the church in the Reformed tradition within the perimeters of this study. The second aim of this research was to determine which types of governance and management style are used in the URCSA and how they impact on the discipline. The third aim was to simply investigate how the three marks of the church influence each other to instil discipline in its members and office bearers. The last aim was to investigate how the URCSA controls, reinstates and renews the ethical conduct of its members and office bearers in relation to the Word, the sacraments and the discipline of its members.

5.3.1. Conducting a literature investigation to define and clarify the concept of the 'church' in the Reformed tradition

In relation to the first aim, the process and the attempt to conduct a scholarly investigation with the hope of defining and clarifying the concept 'church' within the ambits of the Reformed tradition has been completed. This undertaking was carefully presented by citing all the necessary sources. To carry out this responsibility, a thorough engagement with the theological scholars, Louis Berkhof, John Calvin and Karl Barth, was conducted. The insights and the inputs that were deliberated upon allowed a remarkable account on the concept of church in the theological and secular realms.

The words of Moberg are noteworthy when he attested that the church represents religion that is organised in totality. This community of believers draws its guidelines from what God proclaims to it through His word. As a community of believers the Church also has a responsibility towards the community that she represents, therefore the church is a social institution. Hence, the church as a social institution is more open to social influence and as a living organism, she can easily adapt to the environment in which she finds herself like any living organism.

The Christian Church has thus experienced a significant number of Church models, which have developed over the years having drawn their inspiration from the early Church. The greatest premonition of the Church in the eye of an ordinary individual is rooted in the aspect of *service*, which is the service of God, service to one another and the world. However, being in a public fraternity, the Church has and will always be viewed as an institution that brings light to the world we live in. With this in mind, Luther's dictum '*Ecclesia semper reformanda*' draws closer to reality, that is, the church of Christ can never be stagnant; it has to reform its strategies to ensure its survival. However, in that reformation, the church of Christ cannot forget its accountability unto God and one another. So, in other words, the responsibility of the church cannot change towards its subjects, as it is a 'servant church'.

5.2.1 Types of governance and management style used in the URCSA and how these impact on the discipline

The URCSA as a reformed church of Christ subscribes to the presbyterial type of governance system. This is so because the URCSA believes strongly in the priesthood of all believers as it is recorded in the gospel of Matthew, in that the Church does not believe in or rely on the hierarchical type of governance where cardinals, bishops and popes govern the church. Within the URCSA, certain powers of the Church are clearly ascribed to its leaders, and therefore grant them the latitude to exercise austerly with regard to entrenching the three marks of the Church, that is, proclamation of the Word, offering sacraments and exercising discipline. All this is carried out in order to accomplish ecclesiastical unity as this represents a true Church. Unfortunately, URCSA, as a Reformed church that utilises the presbyterial governance system, its officers do not possess absolute power, but only delegated power to implement the decision of the meeting. In other instances, this power may or may not be abused in directing and leading the Church of God.

When reference is made to the government of the Church and her offices, this quickly draws an inference to Church polity and church administration. These two factors are key to the sustenance of the church in that their role is to ensure the continued existence of the true Church of Christ. However, these two are to adopt a secular approach when governing the Church in its entirety. There exist also in the church the appointments of Church leaders are by virtue of their appointment

deemed to be pious in nature. This statement makes specific reference to the men and women of the cloth, who are God's appointees and who are entrusted to spread and preach the Word of God and to further oversee and perform the administration of the sacraments whilst being led by the Holy Spirit to carry out this mandate.

These ministers and pastors are not the only leaders within the Church but they are assisted by the deacons and the elders to govern the Church of Christ by forming the Church Councils. These structures do not extend to the church councils only but also to the presbyterial level, the regional synod and finally the general synod. It is strikingly important that through all these strata the same membership of the churches make up these structures. It is only through such structures that true religion may be well preserved, as this will enable the propagation of real doctrine of the church to persist and the admonition of the offenders to be exercised within the parameters of the doctrine of the church. It is only when this administrative approach has been internalised and implemented without fear or favour can the Church have order and a decent stance within its community and thus encourage its leadership to be of faithful character.

5.2.2 How can the three marks of the church influence each other to instil discipline in members and office bearers?

I wish to agree with the aim as cited above in terms of taking the three marks of the church as a unit, because it will be cumbersome to view them as separate entities when their ultimate goal is to collectively ensure the survival and maintaining the trueness of the church of Christ. When all these marks are put in place and are working towards the collective they transform the church from just being a church into a Church of Christ with wellbeing. As pointed out earlier, these three marks are interdependent and have a responsibility towards each other, in that one mark cannot be effective without the influence and the proper representation of the other two marks. In his approach when relating to these marks, Berkhof asserts that the main reason for having these marks is to create a divide between the true church of Christ and a cult. He maintains that these marks, when not practised accordingly as a collective and the other one lags behind, they may cause a church to become a cult.

The first of these marks is the proclamation of the Word of God. Hence the true

church is characterised by the correct Christian doctrines that are entrenched in the Word of God to symbolise or identify a particular denomination. That is why, in the reformed tradition, the preaching of the word is central to the church. Therefore, the true church of God is manifest firstly by the evidence that the Word of God is preached. The preaching of the Word therefore becomes a truly uncontested trait to determine the true Church from the false ones. This preaching of the Word of God is also centered on God and His concerns for His nation. Subsequently, this nation has to spread love and respect for God, one another and the world at large. Any group which claims to be a church which does not possess this mark it is to be declared an untrue church or a cult.

The second mark refers to the correct administration of the sacraments within a church of Christ. This clearly indicates that for a church to be termed a true church of Christ, the first mark must undoubtedly be a prevalent occurrence in that institution. In other words, in order to administer the sacraments correctly the Word of God needs to be preached and the Word of God needs the sacraments to be a living Word. Thus this relationship that exists between the two is mutual. These sacraments in the reformed tradition, unlike in Catholicism, refer to baptism and the Eucharist respectively.

Baptism marks the initial stage of Christendom that leads the baptised to an interdependent and coexistence of members of the church. This process of baptism is characterised by members who are purified from their sins of separation in terms of gender, race, class and colour. Baptism initiated the believer into the life of the community of believers, and the relationship of the community with one another and with God were greatly influenced through the celebration of the Holy Communion or Eucharist. The Eucharist is a holy meal that celebrates the two communions, or *koinonia*, that is, the fellowship that Christians have with God in Christ and with one another. The water, bread and wine that are the organic natural elements brings intra-relationship (inner person's connectedness), interrelationship (the connectedness amongst other human beings), as well as connectedness to God. Therefore, the Eucharist and the Kerygma cannot just be heard and celebrated without action being taken; it is the problem of churchism to celebrate the Eucharist and hear the word without any change of mind or heart. Karl Barth (ibid.) observed that "a service without sacraments is one which is outwardly incomplete". When the Reformers refer to the Eucharist they are not speaking of that part of the liturgy when there is

distribution of the elements of the Eucharist, but the service as a whole, including the reading and preaching of the Word.

When the other two marks are strongly adhered to, then the third one can be easily exercised, because the Kerygma and the Eucharist are reliant on righteousness, morality, honesty, love and faith. As a result, a church that is based on these traits will never struggle to become disciplinarians, and thus by so doing they will be practising the third mark of the church. This co-existence of the marks will ensure the existence of a pure church and that the purity of the doctrine is also maintained. Faithful exercise of discipline in the church also acts as a guardian that protects the image of the church and holiness of the sacraments. In fact, it is now very clear that all the three marks of a true church correlate with each other to attain proper balance and for the welfare of the Christian Church. Churches that are lax in discipline expose themselves to the misuse of the truth and abuse of that which is Holy. Hence a church that would remain true to her ideal, should proclaim the Word of God diligently, administer the sacraments rightfully, and finally must be diligent in the exercise of Christian discipline.

5.2.3 How does the URCSA control, reinstate and renew the ethical conduct in its members and office bearers in relation to the Word, sacraments and discipline of its members?

The fundamental challenge that this research has identified is the lack of knowledge on the part of the church regarding how to create a balance between the functions and the intentions of the three marks of the church in such a manner that the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments can instill discipline in the members of the church. This lack of knowledge is sometimes caused by ignorance and/or arrogance. The said cause exacerbates this lack of knowledge which is therefore not genuine but artificial. This artificial influence, which has a tremendous bearing on the operations of the church, leaves little or no room for discernment to exist. When the Church of God is challenged by little or no exercise of discipline of its leadership, it renders the Church of God untrustworthy.

To reinstate or renew the ethical conduct of this community of believers, the community of believers has to fully and sternly adopt the premise that its faith should never be based on the fact that it wins an argument or not and if such

happens then they cannot begin to claim that they possess the truth. Though hard to contend with, discipline for the reformer is part of what the confessing member of the church believes in; hence the members of the reformed tradition are well aware that for every transgression of the law there will be dire consequences. This was sufficiently pre-emptive for the church to let its subjects know the consequences of non-protection of the church doctrine and the rebellion against the latter.

To revitalise the ethical conduct of the members and the office bearers alike, the confessing members of the church profess the abiding Word of God. They must also become connected to the body of Christ in baptism, be transformed into the body of Christ through the Eucharist and be capable of discerning discipline. The result thereof will be the true Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in the Church of Christ, if discipline dissipates then Christ leaves with it. Hence churches, which lack this third mark, do not represent the true Church of Christ, but resemble a church without Christ as their foundation.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The book of Donald Bridge (1985), "Spare the Rod and Spoil the Church" is a case in point when attempting to make recommendations for this research, in that the church of God has for a long time spared the rod and spoiled the wrongdoers. This resonates well with the words of Clement of Alexandria that "if our faith... is such that it is destroyed by force of argument, then let it be destroyed; for it will have been proved that we do not possess the truth" (Gaybba 2005:39). When transgressions occur in the Church, and the Church Order becomes overly silent, then that silence is purposeful, which is proof of the influence and the role that human element plays within church administration. Our faith, our belief, our spirituality, our doctrine has been distorted by the unnecessary integration of worldly concepts such that discernment has been slowly eroded in the churches.

This incorporation of Christian faith and other worldly perceptions has led the Church of Christ to lose direction and subsequently overlook its primary responsibility (the three marks of the Church), which have been bestowed upon her by God. It is important to note that of the three marks of the church, the primary task of this research was to investigate the prevalence and the application of the third and final mark, which is discipline, within the URCSA Southern synod.

The reason for this task is that it is evident that the two marks of the church, namely the proclamation of the Word and the correct administration of the sacraments, are diligently performed in the said church, whereas discipline is underplayed. The responsibility of the church is to ensure the coordinated exercise of all these marks as they represent the true church of Christ. Wherever this responsibility is denied, then Christ is denied for this responsibility resembles God's love to the world. To remedy this polarisation of its primary duties, the Church of Christ has to be accountable to God, to its community of believers, and to the world for this shortcoming. The starting point for the church of Christ is that; in both word and deed, the church-community has to become witness to the world concerning faith in Christ, to work on removing any offense, and to make room for the gospel in the world.

The two case studies, which were deliberated upon, afforded the reader a glimpse of how discipline is handled in the URCSA pertaining to the ministers of the cloth. The truth of the matter is that, although there are disciplinary hearings orchestrated in the URCSA, there is no guarantee that their outcome will be aligned with the procedures and the law of the church. In other words, when disciplinary measures are instigated against a man/woman of the cloth, there has to be stringent adherence to what the law stipulates with regard to the infringement. This will also allow for discernment to take place and influence the proceedings, because although it is customary for the meeting to begin with the Word of God, it is very seldom that it exerts an impact upon the meeting. In the opinion of the author, the reason for the aforesaid is that an overwhelming influence from the secular world has entered the Church of Christ through the integration of concepts and therefore tends to render the church ungovernable.

This is evident in disciplinary matters when there are instances where democracy outweighs theocracy. The irony of the matter here is that there are church policies, laws, beliefs, ideas, influences, polity, values, ethics, word and spirit to guide the disciplinary hearings. Therefore, the church has the upper hand in dealing with these issues, but surprisingly, all these appear to fall by the wayside and the human element seems to take over the decision making processes. This can be highlighted in the two case studies, which were cited in this research: (a) in the case study relating to maladministration of church funds, there was a deliberate foiling of the case by the presbytery in that they knew that they could not play the

role of both the accuser and the judge in a single case; (b) in the second case, both the church council and the presbytery refused to make available the minutes of all the meetings held to the Moderamen regarding the same case. Both these instances are evidence of the contrivances, which the human element can exploit to steer the direction of the outcome to their desired result. Conversely, although I wish to tread carefully, such behaviour can result in ignorance of the law and/or lack of knowledge. If the latter is the reason for such malpractices then the entire church leadership needs to attend workshops where they will be taught the legal processes as stipulated in the church's legal document, that is, the Church Order. Strangely, it is the ministers of the Word who are responsible for all these malpractices, and the belief is that as ministers of the Word, they are learned in terms of church administration and practices.

While the approach towards these cases may pose a problem in terms of processes, it appears that the disciplinary system does not take place in camera. Apparently this occurs so that cases can be debated in the presence of observers and ordinary members of the church. When they want to purify the house (*as it is said in Afrikaans: om die huis suiwer te maak*) at such disciplinary instances, it is done to those who are directly or indirectly involved to the case. The challenge with such a stance is that sometimes larger settings for the disciplinary processes of a leader presents obstacles. Therefore, the size of the hearing may pose a challenge. In this light the URCSA should move towards a judicial process is carried out by smaller numbers of people who are adequately capable to administer these processes. This simply means that these high profile cases in the church must be directed to the Support Ministry for Judicial Matters (SMJM). This ministry must therefore deal with all the matters relating to the disciplining of the leadership of the church. Such people must be trained in dealing with these cases and be equipped with the necessary tools to work under the direct authorship of God and therefore allow discernment to follow when handling these processes. This process may unfold in the following manner: once the charge has been laid with the presbytery by the church council, the presbytery must investigate and take the necessary steps, but if unhappiness still prevails, the SMJM must take over the case (including all the necessary, documents, statements, witness reports, minutes of the previous meetings, etc.) and start investigating. When the SMJM has reached a decision, they may make it available to the Moderamen for endorsement and upon the findings, the Moderamen will rule on the matter.

If the church does not follow proper procedures when preparing for all these disciplinary cases, then it exposes itself to abuse of the system. At times, as noted in the first case, it is easy for the disciplinarians to use coercion to influence the outcome of the disciplinary process. I state this because the ministers who formed part of the processes knew that the presbytery had no right to overrule the decision of the Synodical Commission on the matter, but they still continued with their aspirations. The decision that stands here is that this was an act of 'looking out for a brother'; hence the chairperson stated that 'in his personal capacity, he requests the house to forgive the transgressor', forgetting that the transgressor, no matter their friendship, was employed by the church and is therefore accountable to the church. The relations play a minimal role in terms of the processes to be followed. So it is my belief that there is an obscurity of the rule of law regarding disciplining the leaders within the URCSA, as favouritism by those who are entrusted with discipline can derail them from performing their God-given duties of enforcing the latter. What ministers of the Word forget is that "your ordination does not set you above others in your church. You are ordained in order to carry out an assigned role or function in the church" (Beattie 1999:7). The author postulates that the Church of God is being ruled by the knower's mind, when there is really little learning taking place in people's minds, because a few seek the intervention of the Lord in such matters. In other words, the Word of God has been politicised and socialised and the result thereof is the absence of discernment.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The task of this exercise was to evaluate the southern synod of the URCSA in accordance with the third mark of the reformed church, which is discipline. Reference has been made to the fact that the Church of Christ has not revealed any challenges or difficulties in the unhindered application of proclaiming the living Word of God and the administration of the sacraments. Both these marks appear to be performed accordingly. However, although the Church of Christ has served these two marks with diligence, there appears to be a restraint on the exercise of discipline as a sinew that binds the marks of the church. Discipline in the URCSA has been commissioned within the three marks of the reformed church and thus, together with the other two marks, they have to be implemented in unison. No mark has to enjoy the benefit of interrogation and optimum usage more than the

other.

Calvin equates the church with a powerful and well-recognised organisation within the realm of humanity. Conversely, a church that lacks discipline is like a body that is well built but lacks the ligaments to make her perform at her optimum. This comparison resonates with the scripture in James 2:17 that says, “faith without works is dead”. Consequently, the church of Christ as a community of believers should justify its existence by aligning the beliefs with what the law professes. The law in this matter refers to Mathew 18, that if a person sins, they are to be addressed individually, and if they persist, another person must be called on to admonish them, and if they refrain from their actions they do not have to be reported to the church council, but if they do not refrain from their actions and keep transgressing the church law publicly, then they must be reported to the church council and the disciplinary process should ensue. When handling such matters, the church should be wary of ‘cheap reconciliation’, because it is this kind of reconciliation that would have a snowball effect, thereby making a mockery of the church of Christ’s judicial system. ‘Cheap reconciliation’ does not only relate to the transgressors alone, but also refers to those who accord favours to the transgressor, because, in one way or another, they encourage such behaviour and promote lawlessness in the church of God.

Discipline as a mark and disciplining others, with reference to leadership within the URCSA, can also be looked upon in the light of precedence, principle and pragmatism, as explained by Beattie; “there are three forces that drive groups in making decisions - principle, precedent, and pragmatism” (Beattie 1999:3). This simply means that when one has done wrong, these three factors are interrogated in order to arrive at a decision to either discipline or not. Principle refers to an action, which is either stipulated or has been done before and has merit, which in turn creates a principle, whereas precedence relates to an act which was carried out previously, whether right or wrong, and that decision would have set a precedent in making a decision. Precedents somehow carry a negative connotation in that they become used as scapegoats in attaining the desired outcome. Pragmatism, on the other hand, denotes what is workable and what can be measured against a law, for example, when the law stipulates processes to be followed in a particular setting, it is pragmatic in that it shows how realistic the procedure is. Within the pragmatism rule, things are normally tested against how achievable are they or not. Hence, in a case of disciplinary process there will be

investigations to build a case if it is prosecutable. The aforesaid constitutes a pragmatic approach to disciplining members of the church and will indicate whether the case could be won.

Discipline within the URCSA as a third and final mark of the reformed tradition, which represents a sinew that binds the kerygma and Eucharist together, is present only in the guiding documents of the church but is absent in practise. The absence thereof renders the church of Christ incapable of maintaining its holiness and becoming the true church of Christ.

Finally, in this chapter, the researcher summarises the findings based on the aims of the research study and the research questions. These findings allowed the researcher to forward the recommendations to resolve the existing problem. Subsequently, the researcher concluded with the summary in the form of a future solution to the problem, that is, the absence of discipline as a third mark of the church of Christ and the sinew that binds the church of God together in the URCSA, with specific reference to the Southern Synod.

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Appendix A

Consent Request

On 30 May 2014, at 9:48 AM, Billy Pitikoe <billy@phutinare.co.za> wrote:

To: Moderamen of Suid Transvaal Synod

Att: Moruti B.B Senokoane

Dumela Moruti

I like to greet, you and the Moderamen in the most wonderful name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The abovementioned refers. I am currently studying for my Masters degree, and chose discipline within our church as my area of research.

Most importantly discipline within the Suid Transvaal synod. It is in this regard that I request

permission to utilize all the cases which appear in the “Aktes” as my case studies.

However I know and understand the sensitivity and the intricacies of these cases, hence I am making a

Commitment to the church, that I shall be professional in my approach and not make mention of the names of the people involved in these cases,

in my research but will only look into the procedures followed and the outcome of the processes. I believe that

with this research that I aspire to embark upon, I shall be in a position to utilize it as a tool that can better the future of our church.

The title of my topic is as follows:

Topic:

The evaluation of Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

in relation to the three marks of the church:

With specific reference to Discipline in the Southern Synod.

One of my greatest contention in life is that, now and then we need to “take stock”/review our policies as a church

and to check whether are they in line with the current epoch that we all cohabit?

I hope that you find my request in order and view it in the light of advancement of our church.

Yours in Christ

Billy Pitikoe

Northern Theological Seminary

Uniting Reformed Churches of Southern Africa

Masters Programme Student - UNISA

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billy@phutinare.co.za / bpitikoe@yahoo.com

Appendix B

Consent Letter

On 23 Feb 2016, at 11:52 AM, "Senokoane, Boitumelo" <senokbb@unisa.ac.za> wrote:

Dear Mr Billy Pitikoe,

We confirm receiving your email requesting to utilize minutes, AKTA, and case laws of the Southern Synod. On behalf of the Moderamen I hereby grant you that permission without prejudice.

Yours in Christ,

Rev BB Senokoane

Southern Synod Assessor