



# Mission awakening in the Dutch Reformed Church: The possibility of a fifth wave?



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The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) had a strong missionary DNA since the planting of the church. This missionary focus and fervour, however, ebbed and flowed during the history of the church. Saayman described that the mission upsurges in the DRC in four waves or 'periods of extraordinary mission endeavour'. The current research aimed to develop this theory through a literature study on the sociopolitical context and the developments in the ecclesiology and missiology of the DRC since the planting of the church up to 2013. The research found strong evidence to define a fifth wave. The fifth wave was influenced by contextual changes (e.g. a secularising, a more integrated multicultural society and the realisation of the needs of the poor) and loss of influence and money by the DRC. Furthermore, the growth in the church's missional identity can be seen in the following aspects: the influence of theologians like Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch; a belief that mission is not something the church does but something the church is; a shift from a Christocentric theology to a Trinitarian theology; a holistic view of salvation; a commitment to the local context of the congregation and a focus on bringing healing to their local communities; and lastly, the success of the Gestuurde Gemeentes network and, more recently, the Mission Shaped Ministry training.

**Keywords:** Dutch Reformed Church; Congregational studies; Missional church; Missional ecclesiology; Missional identity; Wave of mission.

## Introduction

To understand the current missional impetus of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), it is useful to look back on the mission history of the DRC. The DRC has had strong missionary inclination since the planting of the church (Du Toit 1984:618). This missionary focus and fervour ebbed and flowed during the history of the church.

Saayman (2007) describes that the mission upsurges in the DRC in four waves or 'periods of extraordinary mission endeavour' (Saayman 2007:9). This research will suggest a fifth wave in the missionary focus of the DRC. In doing this, a literature study on the sociopolitical context and the development in the ecclesiology and missiology of the DRC since the planting of the church up to 2013 was conducted. The results of this study will be given at a high level of abstraction. More detail will be given in the discussion of a possible fifth wave.

## A first wave (1779–1834): The Early Dutch Reformed Mission

In discussing the missionary upsurges, account will be taken of the sociopolitical contexts of these upsurges. Saayman (2003:195) emphasises the close link between the sociopolitical context and the development in a church's missiology. The sociopolitical dimension of DRC's missiology is prominent in the racial categories as well as the colonial and political agendas that influenced its development (Saayman 2007:7).

## Sociopolitical context

The Cape Colony was changing from a refreshment post to a colonial society. This led to many changes in the administration, population and economy of the Cape. Economic changes were the most important drivers of the development of the Cape Colony (Saayman 2007:16).

Population growth and the consequent need for more land and resources led to the *trekboer* phenomenon. The *trekboere* were colonial farmers who settled further away from the capital.

**Note:** The Church in need of Change (agency), sub-edited by Erna Oliver (University of South Africa).

There were serious administrative shortcomings in dealing with the needs of these farmers, as well as a lack of schools and churches to serve them. The administration in the Cape was designed to deal with a refreshment station, not a growing colony. All these factors led to a growing rift between the *trekboere*, the more prosperous bourgeoisie (administration officials and business men) in Cape Town and the colonial administration (Saayman 2007:18–19). In Cape Town, the richer bourgeoisie came under the influence of the Dutch Patriot movement, a resistance movement against the Dutch rulers in line with the European revolutionary spirit. The *trekboere* were influenced by the French Revolution, which was carried inland by discharged French soldiers who were acting as temporary teachers (Saayman 2007:17–18). By the end of the 18th century, the white colonists no longer saw themselves as European, but as Afrikaners. The early Afrikaners had no explicit racial categories, although there were strong colonial stereotypes. These colonial stereotypes led to an ethnocentrism that viewed European culture and Christianity as superior to African culture or religion (Saayman 2007:20).

### Missionary revival

Saayman notes two basic understandings as a framework for interpreting the history of DRC mission: firstly, that mission was essentially evangelistic and something done by white people (subjects) to black people (objects) (Saayman 2007:7).

Central to the first missionary revival in the DRC was the work of Rev. Helperus Ritzema van Lier and Rev. Michiel Christiaan de Vos. Both were heavily influenced by the continuing Reformation (Gerstner 1991:95–96).

Their ministry was marked by a strong Pietist spirituality and mission calling. Van Lier and De Vos started the first organised mission work within the DRC: Van Lier in 1786, while De Vos succeeded Van Lier in 1794 until 1802. Despite the different attitudes towards missionary work, it was clear that the DRC felt a calling to reach non-Christians. While there was a missionary awakening among the Cape Town congregations, the same was not true among the *trekboere* on the Eastern frontier (Saayman 2007:31).

Before 1843, the DRC was not very active in missionary work, apart from individuals like Van Lier and De Vos.

Possible reasons could be that up to that stage, the DRC in the Cape was under ecclesial and political control of, firstly, the Dutch, and then the British, who did not encourage missionary work; secondly, the shortage of ministers and the fact that those who were available were liberal. Lastly, the Boers had a negative perception of the local missionaries because of their criticism of slavery (Paas 2016:352). During this period, mission was conceived as mission to the slaves. The slaves were the most obvious group of non-Christians that the missionaries encountered. The Cape Town congregations focused on evangelisation and providing educational opportunities to the slaves. Evangelisation and

education were closely linked because of the Reformed focus on the believer's ability to read God's Word and the relationship between Christianity and Western civilisation. This last aspect was strongly influenced by a colonial mindset.

The Synod of 1824 – the first Synod of the DRC – formulated a plan for educating non-Christians living within the boundaries of congregations. Another important decision was to ordain lay members (evangelists) of the DRC working among non-Christians. These were evangelists who could administer the sacraments to their congregations. Because of the success of their work and the growing number of black converts, the subsequent Synod of 1829 had to deal with the question of interracial worship. The Synod made a clear decision that no one could be excluded from worship. Despite this decision, many congregations continued to have separate worship services. A second important decision by the Synod was that non-white members who were baptised and catechised by ordained ministers would become full members of the local DRC (Saayman 2007:34–37).

### A second wave (1867–1939): Crossing borders

In the period between the first and second missionary wave, the Great Trek took place. The main reasons for the migration were political marginalisation, lack of security, and the need for more agricultural land and workers for the farms (Giliomee & Mbenga 2007:108–110). Another concern for the trekkers was the policy of social equality (*gelykstelling*) between black and white people in the Cape Colony and the emancipation of slaves. The trek had a marked influence on the missionary fervour of the DRC. The trekkers would come into contact (mostly confrontational) with large numbers of indigenous Africans and saw them as objects of mission. Another effect was that the Afrikaners saw themselves, in terms of the Old Testament covenant, as God's chosen people who had to promote the Christian civilisation among the heathen (Giliomee 2004:175; Saayman 2007:38).

The second wave started after the settlement of the trekkers in their new homeland and the discovery of diamonds. Economically, the landscape was changed forever by this discovery in 1867 because it brought interest from mining capitalists and foreign governments and led to industrialisation and urbanisation (Saayman 2007:45).

### Sociopolitical context

This period was crucial in the formation of an Afrikaner identity (Saayman 2007:46): firstly, because the early traces of Afrikaner nationalism could be seen during this period; secondly, religiosity became a strong feature of the Afrikaners and lastly, the Afrikaner's experience of being called on a divine mission to bring the gospel and civilisation to Southern Africa. The group that headed to the interior were, however, plagued by squabbling and strife among the leaders of the various groups as well as within the groups of trekkers. Their dream of being the covenant 'volk' that

would bring the Christian civilisation to the heathen was soon conflicted by violent clashes with the indigenous groups that killed many on both sides. The governing structures in the newfound republics were also too weak to hold real power and to support their people (Giliomee 2004:163–166, 179). It was during this phase that the racial categories became more pronounced among the Afrikaners.

While most of the trekkers still belonged to the DRC in the Cape that advocated against racial exclusion, the practice of separate worship services was widespread among the trekkers. For some, the idea of racial equality was so abhorrent that they joined Rev. Dirk Van der Hoff<sup>1</sup> in forming a new church, the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk van Afrika, that advocated for racial exclusivity (Giliomee 2004:125, 167–177).

### Missionary revival

By the time of the second wave, the DRC had become a national church albeit a church in two different contexts and ecclesiologies. The Cape Colony Church was led by ordained ministers in paid positions, and an established church structure. In the inland it was still a developing church; at first, there were no ordained ministers who served the trekkers and congregations only developed once the trekkers were settled. Once settled the trekkers formed congregations that were served by missionaries who were available. To their great disappointment, the Cape Synod disapproved of the trek (1937) and refused to send them ministers. They were, however, still loyal to the church of their forefathers (Giliomee 2004:176). Oliver (2006:1474–1475) argues that while the influence of Pietism was strong in the Cape Church during this phase, it had little to no influence on the *trekkers* and the church in the interior. They found their identity as the covenant nation in Old Testament terms.

The Cape Colony government had stopped paying the salaries of ministers, and individual congregations were forced to accept responsibility for their ministers. The influence of the government on ministers and the church decreased significantly and the DRC became closely identified with the Afrikaner people (Saayman 2007:46). The Afrikaners furthermore saw a strong link between their future survival and their faithfulness to their calling to bring faith to their new homeland.

This period was the official start of the DRC's organised missionary work. The Cape Synod of 1857 appointed a mission committee to organise missionary work inside and outside the borders of the Colony (Saayman 2007:50). Dr W. Robertson was sent to Europe in 1860 to recruit foreign missionaries. The first European missionaries were sent to work in a 'foreign' country, the present Pilanesberg and Soutpansberg<sup>2</sup> areas. From 1877, missionaries were sent

to work in the current Botswana (1877), Malawi (1889), Zimbabwe (1891), Zambia (1899), Nigeria (1908), Mozambique (1909) and Kenya (1944) (Du Preez 2002:138–140). It must be said that it was not only congregations in the Cape Colony that were active in missionary work, but also congregations throughout the rest of South Africa. The church in the Free State decided to contribute towards the Cape Synod's missionary work until they were able to start their own (Saayman 2007:55).

It was during the second wave that John and Andrew Murray Jr and N.J. Hofmeyr started their ministry and further developed the Evangelical-Pietist DNA of the DRC. These three ministers had a strong influence on the second wave of missionary work. The growth of a revivalist spirit in Britain and America in the 1880s – brought to South Africa by European ministers and missionaries who had been exposed to it – also influenced the DRC's fervour for missions. Various organisations with a missionary aim were formed, such as the *Predikante-Sendingvereniging* in 1886. Among these organisations were two that would have a significant impact on youth ministry in South Africa. The first was the *Christelike Jonglieden Vereniging* (1874), which later developed into the *Kerkjeugvereniging*. The second was the *Christen Studente Vereniging*, formed in 1896 with the aim of ministry to scholars and students (Heyns 2002:132–133).

During this period women played a major role in the DRC's mission work. Robert (1993:103) argues that without the women's encouragement, fundraising, organisational ability and eagerness to work as missionaries, the DRC's mission work would not have been possible. The moral, intellectual and spiritual foundations of these women were laid in the girls' schools founded during this period. One example is the Huguenot College (opened in 1874) in Wellington, founded by Andrew Murray Jr. to raise the educational standards of Afrikaner women. The first teachers at this institution were all recruited from the famous Mount Holyoke seminary in the United States, which trained teachers and missionaries. The founder of Mount Holyoke, Mary Lyon, said that the 'purpose in education was to bring her pupils to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and then to channel their lives into self-sacrificial Christian service' (Robert 1993:105). These teachers instilled in the girls a Christian ethos and a strong calling to work in the Kingdom. By 1897, 51 of the Huguenot College alumni were active in the mission field. In 1890, the *Vroue Zending Bond* was formed (Saayman 2007:52), which started doing ministry work among children that later became the *Kinderkransbeweging* (Landman 2002:154). After the Second South African War, women were also active in the *Transvaal Vrouesendingvereniging*, formed in 1905 (Saayman 2007:58).

The Second South African War between Britain and the Orange Free State and Transvaal Republics (1899–1902) had a profound influence on the Afrikaners' self-understanding. Politically and economically, the Afrikaners were brought to

1. Note the article of Oliver and Pont (1990) that highlights the stabilising influence of Rev. van der Hoff in a context of strife and disunity among the Afrikaners in the Transvaal.

2. These areas are currently part of South Africa, but at the time, they were part of the South African Republic (independent of the Cape Colony) and were deemed foreign by the DRC in the Cape Colony (Saayman 2007:51).

their knees. Despite the trauma and financial and human cost, the war also brought spiritual depth and increased mission fervour into the hearts of Afrikaners. Notably, 200 of the prisoners of war in India, Ceylon and St Helena volunteered for mission service after the war. Because many of them did not have the academic credentials to attend the seminary in Stellenbosch, a special institute for mission, the Boer Mission School, was opened in Worcester. The renewed spiritual commitment of the Afrikaners during the war led to increased involvement in and contributions to mission work (Saayman 2007:61).

The missionary enthusiasm of the second wave would, however, subside during the early 1930s because of various factors, including the urbanisation of black Africans, the start of the black trade union movement, the development of the African indigenous churches, the drought of the 1930s, world economic stagnation, poverty among white Afrikaners and the split among the Afrikaners on the decision to join the Second World War as part of the Allies against Germany (Saayman 2007:63). Between 1939 and 1945, the DRC was transformed from a rural to an urban church, with 71% of its members now living in urban areas. Urbanisation had a detrimental effect on the involvement of DRC members. By the 1940s, only 30% of DRC members still attended church and Holy Communion in Johannesburg. The Afrikaners also felt increasingly threatened by Anglicisation and the increasing number of Africans.

## A third wave (1954–1976): Crossing inner boundaries

When writing about this period, the first difficulty the researcher encounters is to differentiate between the sociopolitical and the ecclesial context of the time. The lines between these two aspects of life in South Africa were so blurred that you start writing about the one and end up writing about the other. During this period, the National Party government's idea of separate development and the DRC's strategy of homogenous churches were closely related.<sup>3</sup> The Afrikaner people still experienced a divine calling to bring Christianity and civilisation to the Southern tip of Africa, but this calling was balanced with the ideal of preserving the racial purity of the Afrikaner nation. These aims played out in new Apartheid laws and the mission fervour of this period (Saayman 2007:71–72).

### Sociopolitical context

Afrikaner nationalism gathered steam between the second and third missionary wave and became institutionalised with the victory of the National Party in 1948. The apartheid system was nothing new in 1948; Saayman (2007:70) believes apartheid was rooted in 300 years of Western colonialist ethnocentrism. It was, however, true that the apartheid ideology became entrenched in politics and law after 1948.

3. The DRC was by no means the only church that supported the NP government and Apartheid system. A church like the Gereformeerde Kerk was even more influenced by neo-Calvinism. They emphasised the Afrikaners as a covenant community who are set apart from the other nations (Livingston 2014: loc. 393).

The idealistic dream of apartheid was the separate development and self-determination of each cultural group in South Africa (Livingston 2014: loc. 288). Apartheid was not only a political ideology, but also part of the DRC's theology.

The 1880 decision of the DRC to form separate churches for mixed race people (the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, founded in 1881), for black Christians (the DRC in Africa, founded in 1951) and for Indian Christians (the Reformed Church in Africa, founded in 1968)<sup>4</sup> is an example of this (Naudé 2005:165–166). The close link between politics and religion was influenced by the theology of Abraham Kuyper, who saw Calvinism as an all-encompassing life system. Within the Neo-Calvinist understanding of theology, the line between service to the nation and service to God was difficult to distinguish. Livingston (2014) states that:

Every dimension of life exists under the common grace of God, and has its own unique 'sovereignty'. Because the various spheres exist under God's common grace, rooted in the creation order itself, Kuyper discerned a theoretical basis for 'Christian Nationalism', a Christian ordering of society and culture. (loc. 433)

The sociopolitical attitudes of most DRC members were reflected in the mission policy of the church. The DRC was, however, not unique in its handling of cultural issues in mission. The work of the prominent German missiologist Gustav Warneck<sup>5</sup> (1834–1919) was used to justify and entrench the theology of separate churches<sup>6</sup> (Du Toit 1984:622). Warneck believed that the aim of mission was *Volkschristianisierung* [Christianising of whole nations] (Bosch 1983:26–27). It was only a short leap from Christianising a whole nation to Christianising a whole nation on its own (Naudé 2005:166).

This period was the height of the apartheid system, and the government and church had full confidence in their project. The DRC had a lot of power and influence and was in a financially healthy position. During this period, two commissions were appointed by the apartheid government that would have a fundamental influence on the missionary work of the DRC. The first was the Eiselen Commission (on 'Bantu education') and the second was the Tomlinson Commission (on the 'socio-economic development in the proposed black homelands'). The government believed that education was central to the long-term success of the apartheid system. The Eiselen Report was implemented as the *Bantu Education Act* of 1953,<sup>7</sup> and the Christian

4. Naudé (2005:166) indicates the dates for the start of the DRC in Africa as 1911 and for the Reformed Church in Africa as 1951. Cronje (1982:51) and Livingston (2014:24) use 1951 for the first Synod of the DRC in Africa. Cronje (1982:79), Hofmeyr (2002:24) and Livingston (2014:24) agree that the first Synod of the RCA was held in 1968. The difference in dates seems to be between the date of the DRC Synod's decision to start a new church, and the date of the new church's first Synod, which is the date used in this thesis.

5. Warneck's view was popularised in Afrikaans through the work of J. du Plessis, Wieselgaan (Bosch 1983:27).

6. For more on the relationship between Warneck and the DRC missiology, see Naudé (2005).

7. Saayman (2007:73) makes a valid argument that the farm school system played an important role in the economic and educational disparities in South Africa.

National Education system was created (Du Toit 1984:625; Saayman 2007:73). The Tomlinson Report (1953) had an even bigger impact. The report dealt with all aspects of the proposed black homelands, which included a prominent section on Christian missions. The report highlighted the need for more missionaries in the black homelands.

The 1960s was also the time when the black resistance movement started to influence the apartheid system.

The Sharpeville and Langa demonstrations were met by draconian security measures. Tension within South Africa and resistance against the apartheid system were on the rise. There was an increase in criticism from ecumenical bodies on the DRC and government as well as many dissenting voices within the DRC and in the DRC family of churches (Saayman 2007:79). Early voices from within the DRC were those of professors Johannes du Plessis, Bennie Keet and Ben Marais and the very prominent Rev. Beyers Naudé. Among later strong voices were Professors Jaap du Rand, Ben Marais, Nico Smith, Johan Heyns and Dawid Bosch. These individual voices were soon supported by many other ministers and members of the DRC. The dissenting voices followed two strategies: sympathetic critique and confrontation; the first strategy was followed by most dissenters. During the 1980s the resistance against these dissenting voices grew and many were pushed out of the church. It would later emerge that their efforts were not in vain, but the pace of change was very slow (cf. De Gruchy 1979; Lubbe 2001; Serfontein 1982).

### Missionary revival

The influence of the Tomlinson Report could be seen in the upsurge in the missionary work of the DRC in Southern Africa (Van der Watt 2003:216). With the support of the National Party government, there was an increase in missionaries being sent to the homelands. Mission stations, church buildings, institutions for the blind and deaf and hospitals were built with government subsidies (Saayman 2007:76). Various congregations were planted for Christians from an Indian background, and there was also work among the Muslim and Hindu communities (Van der Watt 2003:217). The emphasis in the DRC's mission work shifted from crossing international borders to crossing internal boundaries in South Africa.

The aim of the mission of the DRC was to win souls for the Kingdom, planting of churches and organising of denominations (Van der Watt 2003:215); a commendable aim, but with the undeniable small print – as segregated churches. White South Africans rarely crossed into a black person's world except for the missionary work that was done. It is no surprise that many of the missionaries who were confronted with the realities of the black community became champions of the anti-apartheid movement.

The approach to mission was holistic. Not only was evangelism done, but social services were also delivered by

the church. At this stage, there were 3000 mission schools educating 220 000 children, 38 mission hospitals with 8000 beds, seven schools for the blind, six for the deaf and eight theological seminaries (Van der Watt 2003:217).

The church became one of the main partners of the National Party government in delivering social services to the homelands (Saayman 2007:77). It remains one of the ironies of the apartheid ideology that a system that was so harsh and inhumane, on the one hand, could also be a system that invested so much in bringing the gospel and delivering better social services, on the other hand. The idea of holistic mission must be qualified because mission was still very much within Andrew Murray Jr's Evangelical-Pietist tradition, which emphasised personal conversion. Providing social services was auxiliary to this main aim (Durand 1985:42–43; Saayman 2007:88).

Another reason for the strong growth in mission projects during this period was a better organisational structure within the church, and mission secretaries who were appointed to coordinate the mission projects of the church.

Mission was driven and largely organised by the various Synods and not by local congregations (Van der Watt 2003:219). More money was also available because of the economic boom (Saayman 2007:90). Mission was still something done by white DRC members to and for black people. The DRC's involvement in social services was also driven and funded by the government's need to have partners in delivering services in the homelands.

The 'foreign' mission projects (Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Namibia) of the DRC did not experience the same explosive growth as that in the homelands, but continued on the same level as during the previous wave (Saayman 2007:77).

The third wave of the DRC's missionary activity was filled with disparities and ambivalence. A biblical commandment to mission was mixed with racist ideologies (Saayman 2003:2010). Authentic mission fervour was coloured by attempts to protect the Afrikaners' political and economic interests. Mission history tells the story of successful mission projects in Southern and Central Africa, of which many have grown into mature churches and that are still successful even today, even though they were started in a period of mixed motives.

### A fourth wave (1990 onwards): To the ends of the Earth

Saayman (2007:100) dates the start of the fourth wave as the end of the 1980s, during the dying years of the apartheid system. It was a time of fundamental changes in the self-understanding of the Afrikaners. Power was slipping from their hands, and this created serious questions about the future of the Afrikaners and the DRC in Africa. Importantly, was there still a need for a white church to bring faith and

civilisation to Africa? The sea change of 1994 forced the Afrikaners and the DRC to reflect on their own identity and the role in Africa.

### Sociopolitical context

During the 1980s, the National Party government was still firmly in control, but economically, South Africa was hurting and sanctions were taking their toll. Violence and demonstrations made parts of the country ungovernable. The government and the anti-apartheid movement were in a stalemate and another way out had to be found. Secret negotiations were started with the ANC in 1986; these negotiations led up to the announcement by President F.W. de Klerk in February 1990 that liberation movements would be unbanned, and political prisoners would be released. Neither the National Party supporters nor liberation movement supporters were prepared for the announcement made that day (Saayman 2007:103). The members of both parties were still heavily invested in protecting their own interests. The announcement especially came as a shock to many DRC members.

The 1994 democratic elections and the New South Africa had mixed consequences for the Afrikaners. On the one hand, they were relieved about the smooth, violence-free transition to a democratic South Africa. The world opened to them, and they were now able to travel and work abroad. The end of sanctions also brought economic relief to the country. On the other hand, the reality was that it would mean the end of the privileged position of white South Africans. The urgent need for equality among all the people of South Africa resulted in black economic empowerment and affirmative action. Although it would take many years to correct the imbalances caused by the apartheid system, these new laws and actions created uncertainty among Afrikaners.

### Missionary revival

The end of apartheid came so suddenly that the DRC was not prepared to offer adequate pastoral leadership to its members. Dutch Reformed Church members, along with most Afrikaners, had to digest the fact that 'communists' would now govern their 'Christian country' (Saayman 2007:104). The church that had given them spiritual leadership for so many years was discredited in many people's eyes for its support of the apartheid system (Lategan 1999:409). The National Party capitulated and disappeared shortly after the end of apartheid. Would the same happen to the DRC?

The feelings of confusion, vulnerability and uncertainty about the future led to a complete loss of mission fervour for Africa among DRC members (Saayman 2007:106). The mission focus of the DRC during the first three waves was closely linked to the Afrikaner's self-understanding as being called by God to bring faith and civilisation to Southern Africa. The uncertainty surrounding the DRC's role in South Africa caused by the end of apartheid now made the DRC turn its focus to mission further afield.

Since the previous mission wave, the number of full-time missionaries in Southern Africa had declined significantly; from 1973 to 1977, the number decreased from 1078 to 551 (Van der Watt 2003:222). There were several reasons for this, among them the tension between the apartheid government and the Southern Africa governments. This led to the rejection of many visa applications by white South African missionaries (Van der Watt 2003:221). Saayman (2007:109) argues that the first three waves were driven by a colonial mindset of bringing faith and civilisation to Africa. Within this mindset, white South Africans were in a position of power and were able to create a European environment within an African context. The end of the colonialist mindset and a new, democratic South Africa brought home the reality that they were a white minority within an African context. The result was that their vision turned inward, and they started focusing on self-preservation.

Between the third and fourth waves, there was still much confusion about how to define mission. In 1986, a conference of the Dutch Reformed family of churches helped to mould a new understanding of mission, and a new definition of mission was formulated that was incorporated into the official mission policy of the DRC. Mission was formulated as God's mission (*missio Dei*), from which the church's mission (*missio ecclesiae*) would flow. The mission of the church would have different dimensions, namely, *kerygma*, *diakonia*, *koinonia*, *leitourgia* and *maturgia* (Van der Watt 2003:223–224). The concept of the *missio Dei* was now starting to become more prominent in the discussion of the church's calling.

Although the motivation for more mission work within Africa waned, the missionary DNA of the DRC was still strong, and the church started to look further afield for mission opportunities that were not a threat to their position in Africa. The focus of many congregations shifted to the ends of the earth, so to speak.

Projects in ex-Soviet countries, the '10/40 window', India, Pakistan and even Western Europe were started (Van der Watt 2003:226). Other significant changes in the missionary work of the DRC also took place, such as (Van Niekerk 1997:414):

1. a shift from work done by Synods to work done by congregations
2. the role of ordained ministers as missionaries taken over by lay members
3. a move away from central control by Synods to decentralisation
4. a change from work within the church structures to partnerships with para-church organisations.

### A fifth wave: Missional awakening – 2003 onwards?

Niemandt (2010:93) argues convincingly that Saayman's typology of the fourth wave as reaching 'to the ends of

the earth' does not consider all the facets of the DRC's mission. The reasons given centre around the development of a missional ecclesiology in the DRC. Furthermore, the missional self-understanding of the DRC developed into a global and a local focus (glocal); in other words, 'to the ends of the earth' but also in Jerusalem. The current research would like to build on the opinion of Niemandt, among others, in looking at the possibility of a new fifth wave of mission within the DRC.

## Sociopolitical context

Much has changed in the sociopolitical context of South Africa since the start of the fourth wave. Young adults who are currently part of the DRC were born in the dying years of the apartheid system or early in the New South Africa, and thus grew up in a multiracial society. Being white in the New South Africa, they may be experiencing some pessimism about their economic future. At the other end of the spectrum, the cohort of members that grew up under apartheid and retired around the beginning of the New South Africa era are growing older and are playing a smaller role in society and the church.

Cross-cultural dialogue in everyday life is increasing (Hofmeyr & Kruger 2009:384). In some situations, it leads to conflict, but Robert Schreiter (in Taber 2002:191) argues that cross-cultural dialogue helps to expose ethnocentric thought patterns and to deconstruct culture. These two aspects are helping to create an openness towards and acceptance of other cultures.

The impact of secularism in South Africa has also become more prominent. According to a WIN-Gallup poll (WIN-Gallup International 2012:n.p.), 83% had indicated that they were religious in 2005, but this figure dropped to 64% in 2012. There could be many reasons for this, one being a greater openness to disclose being non-religious. Still, the implication is that DRC members are now living in a much more secularised society.

## Missionary revival

In the last 20 years, three prominent movements within the DRC have helped congregations discover their calling. The first was the *Gemeentebou* [congregational development] movement, the second was the Congregational Studies movement and the third was the missional church movement.

The *Gemeentebou* movement became organised around the *Gemeentebou* programme, which started in the mid-1980s with the work of Nel (1986), and later Hendriks (1990) and Bischoff (1991). Nel (in Ungerer & Nel 2011) defines *Gemeentebou* as 'die bediening waarbinne die gemeente opgelei en begelei word om:

haar eie wese en bestaansdoel te verstaan; self, as gemotiveerde gemeente, haar eie funksionering te evalueer, doelwitte vir haar doelgerigte funksieervulling te formuleer en op beplande wyse

te bereik; self, soos nodig, op 'n voortgaande basis strukture, wat die heilshandeling van die drie-enige God in kerk en wêreld dien, vir die gemeentelike funksionering te ontwikkel. (p. 2)

Although the *Gemeentebou* programme was influenced by the Church Growth Movement in the United States, the programme was given more theological depth in South Africa by Nel (Burger 2014:n.p.; Naudé 2004:36). The programme was set on two main pillars: helping individuals to accept Christ and to have an effective testimony as well as developing a stronger sense of community among the members of a congregation (Burger 1991:15). The programme had mixed success, but created an awareness that congregations are not only spiritual entities, but also have sociological aspects to them (Burger 1991:16). The programme brought about a shift in the ecclesiology of the DRC, as members were starting to realise that ministers and elders were not the only people called to bring the gospel to the world; it was the task of every believer. Recent research by Ungerer and Nel (2011) indicated a slight-to-moderate improvement in mission activity in congregations involved in the *Gemeentebou* program. Ungerer and Nel (2011:10) are, however, of the opinion that the *Gemeentebou* programme had little success in helping congregations to develop a missional identity.

The second approach was Congregational Studies (1989). This field was developed in South Africa by Coenie Burger (1991) and the institute led by him called Buvton (later *Communitas*). Their aim was to understand how congregations function, and to use that understanding to help congregations be more effective. This approach wanted to distance itself from the Church Growth movement because of its 'ingrown conception of the church' (Burger 2004:310).

Congregational Studies programmes have helped churches to be more effective through the training of ministers, research and the facilitation of processes of change in congregations. Although *Gemeentebou* was strongly focused on evangelisation and helping congregations grow, Congregational Studies went a step further in helping congregations develop a Kingdom focus.

At synodical level, General Synod called for a 'Year of Hope' in 2001 that focused on the church's calling to make a difference in the local community (not only at the 'ends of the earth'). Missionary diaconate was now becoming a focus area for the church, and there was a growing realisation within the DRC that the integrity of the witness of the church was dependent on the church's involvement in poverty relief and service to the community. As far as church polity was concerned, the General Synod's Commission for Mission and the Commission for Diaconal Services were now also moving closer together in their work (Van der Watt 2003:227).

The third movement that would impact the DRC is the missional church movement. Around the late 1990s, the work of David Bosch was becoming popular in academic circles in

South Africa. His emphasis on the missionary nature of the church, the Trinity, the *missio Dei*, was starting to influence the theology in the DRC.

The work of the Gospel in Our Culture Network (built on the work of Lesslie Newbigin) was also starting to have an influence on South African theologians. Burger (2014) recalls how he received an, as yet, unpublished manuscript of *Missional Church: A vision for the sending of the missional church in North America* (Guder 1998) from Guder while doing research at the Princeton Theological Seminary (1997), and realised that this was the theology that was needed in South Africa. Although the external task of the DRC was still seen as missionary (*missionêr*) in nature, many in the church had started to realise that the gospel also had implications for the church's involvement in social justice issues. Burger also met Keifert and invited him to visit South Africa. Keifert spent a sabbatical in South Africa during 2001 and 2002 and introduced the Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) (*Vernootskapvir Gestuurde Gemeentes*) to South Africa.

The PMC saw the church as a cultural system and not an organisation (Keifert 2006:39). The aim of the PMC was to bring missional transformation to congregations through 'spiritual discernment that focuses on cultural change and mission confirmation' (Keifert 2006:39). The PMC focuses not only on behavioural change, worship style, leadership or organisational structure, but also on real, deep cultural change. Because the PMC takes the *missio Dei* seriously, spiritual discernment is central to their process. Spiritual discernment starts by asking the question: 'What is God's preferred and promised future for our local church?' (Keifert 2006:64). Spiritual discernment is done through dwelling on the Word, as well as in the world, and listening to where God is sending the church to become part of his mission.

The arrival of the PMC was an important step in developing a missional ecclesiology within the DRC. It helped congregations to make the transition from focusing on church growth to focusing on Kingdom growth, from having a mission to being missional. This transition was also reflected in the decisions of the General Synod of the DRC. For example:

The official mission policy of the DRC adopted in 1998 reflected the growing realisation that everything the church does is built on the *missio Dei*.

The Statement of Calling 2002 (*Roepingverklaring 2002*) (Ned. Geref. Kerk 2013) of the General Synod laid the foundation for the development of a missional theology within the DRC. The document had the following commitments:

1. The church is committed to God who planted his church in Southern Africa.
2. The church is committed to the continent, especially Southern Africa.
3. The church is committed to unity with other churches.
4. The church is committed to getting involved in the healing of the country.

At this stage, the missionary involvement of DRC congregations was still very much directed towards the 'ends of the earth' (Saayman 2007:112). Within this context, the Statement of Calling 2002 was leading the DRC back to its roots in having a vision for building the Kingdom in Southern Africa (Van Niekerk 2014:4). The Statement helped the church to see the need and the pain in Africa, as well as her calling to bring healing in Africa (Mouton 2007:4).

Statement of Calling 2002 would indicate a new direction for the DRC, a move in the direction of becoming a missional church. The commitment of calling (*Roepingverbintenis*) of the General Synod 2004 followed this direction in emphasising that the DRC is called as a community to join God in His mission. Emphasis was furthermore placed on discernment (a church that takes the *missio Dei* seriously will want to discern where God is already working) and on the church's calling to bring healing to those who suffer because of the brokenness in creation.

The 'Season of Listening' (*Seisoen van Luister*) launched in 2005 is an example of the transformation within the DRC to be a more discerning and serving church. This initiative by the General Synod encouraged congregations and Synods to listen to God, each other and the context they are in. This listening attitude created an awareness of where God (i.e. *missio Dei*) is working and of the broader needs of the world (Niemandt 2010:100). The Season of Listening climaxed in a programme launched in 2009 called 'Growth across borders' (*Groeioorgrense*). The aim of this programme was to help congregations to react to what they heard during the Season of Listening and to cross borders in following God where he was already at work (Niemandt 2010:100).

The Statement of Calling (*Roepingsverklaring*) by the General Synod of 2007 (Ned. Geref. Kerk 2013) reconfirmed the DRC's calling to focus on the local community in bringing healing and building the Kingdom.

It was emphasised that the local congregation was the embodiment of God's mission to the local community, and every member of the congregation was a missionary. The fact that church was literally starting to move out of the building and the position of the church as a servant to the world were emphasised. A clear message was sent that the church had given up any pretension of power in striving to be a missional church.

The 2013 General Synod continued this trend in developing a missional ecclesiology for the DRC. Critical to this was the report *Raamwerkdokument oor die Missionaleaardenroeping van die NG Kerk* (Ned. Geref. Kerk 2013). The report was the most comprehensive report on a missional ecclesiology for the DRC yet. It was strongly influenced by the WCC document *Together towards life: Mission and evangelism in changing landscapes* (Niemandt, *Together towards life and mission: A basis for good governance in church and society today* 2015:4).



## Arguments for a new fifth wave

The current research wants to suggest the following arguments for identifying a fifth wave in the missionary development of the DRC.

### Contextual changes between 1994 and 2000:

The illusion of a white Christian South Africa was fading fast after 1994 and the reality of a post-Christian context was becoming clearer. The 'lost' was no longer only found at the 'ends of the earth' but in the home of the next-door neighbour. There was a growing realisation that the future of the DRC and white South Africans lay rooted in the future success of a democratic South Africa and Christianity in Africa as a whole. From 1994 the needs of the poor started creeping closer to the everyday lives of the DRC members. Informal settlements were now on the doorsteps of middle-class neighbourhoods.

### Loss of influence and money:

Between 1994 and 2000, the DRC still had some residual influence and money from before 1994, with DRC members were still occupying prominent positions within government and industry, and financial stability following years of growth. This would soon change because of affirmative action and black economic empowerment. The DRC lost its position of power and influence, and had to look for new ways to bring change to South Africa. New ways were found in the realisation that white Christians need to follow Jesus in serving their communities. The influence of congregations no longer lay in their ability to wield power, but in their ability to serve and to love – a characteristic that is central to a missional church. The finances for sustaining international mission projects were also decreasing. Congregations had to rationalise their involvement in many international mission projects because they were no longer sustainable. The energy, focus, and finance that went into international projects were now starting to shift to local projects.

### Growth in the church's missional identity can be seen in the following aspects of the DRC ecclesiology:

A shift came about in the identity of the DRC from a church with a mission to a missional church, seeing mission not as something the church *does* but something the church *is*.

A shift from a Christocentric theology to a Trinitarian theology that sees the church as part of the Trinity's movement towards creation.

A shift towards a holistic view of mission that sees personal salvation as one aspect of God's Kingdom. The ecology, justice, equality, and freedom from poverty and discrimination are all important aspects of God's Kingdom.

A commitment within congregations to bringing healing to South Africa and Africa. Congregations were no longer just sending missionaries to other mission fields, but they were getting involved in mission work in their local environment. (Van Niekerk 2014:4)

The success and influence of the *Gestuurde Gemeentes* network and, more recently, Mission Shaped Ministry training.

Against this background, there are strong indications of a shift in identity within the DRC. Up to 2000, the church was still predominantly within a Christendom mindset, seeing

mission as something the church does to convert the heathen. Van Niekerk (2014:4) argues that this new fifth wave of mission 'is a continuation of the focus on the African context of the first three waves, but it is also a paradigm shift to a new understanding of the content and character of mission'. Congregations are not only sending missionaries to Africa but are also understanding themselves as being sent to their local context.

A missional transition can also be seen in the writings of theologians during the 1990s and the decisions of the Synods during the first decade of the new millennium. These influences were steadily diffusing down to congregational level, and congregation members started to realise that the Spirit was doing new things through the church. Many congregational leaders are becoming interested in developing a missional ecclesiology in their congregations and are looking for strategies to do so. Some congregations are also starting to tell hopeful stories about what God can do in congregations once they start to have a missional imagination.

There are, however, some factors inhibiting congregations in developing a missional ecclesiology. Among these are anxiety about the financial sustainability of local congregations and negativity about South Africa because of high crime and corruption. These aspects trigger the '*laager* effect' among Afrikaners and an inward focus. Other factors include an ageing membership with less drive and capacity for work in the Kingdom as well as stubborn, colonial and racial paradigms of mission that are still prevalent among members. Lastly, the high average age of ministers who were trained to serve congregations within a Christendom context.

The scope of this research is limited to identifying a fifth wave and describing its context. In thinking about the DRC mission, one is always reminded of the ambivalence of motives of the mission. Some critical reflection will have to be done on how racism and a colonial mindset are influencing the fifth wave of mission development in the DRC.

## Conclusion

The DRC had a strong missionary DNA since the planting of the church. This missionary focus and fervour, however, ebbed and flowed during the history of the church. The research found strong evidence to define a fifth wave. The fifth wave was influenced by contextual changes (e.g. a secularising, a more integrated multicultural society and the realisation of the needs of the poor) and loss of influence and money by the DRC. Furthermore, the growth in the church's missional identity can be seen in the following aspects: the influence of theologians like Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch; a belief that mission is not something the church *does* but something the church *is*; a shift from a Christocentric theology to a Trinitarian theology; a holistic view of salvation; a commitment to the local context of the congregation and a focus on bringing healing to their local communities; and lastly, the success of the *Gestuurde Gemeentes* network and, more recently, the Mission Shaped

Ministry training. There are, however, also factors inhibiting the development of a missional ecclesiology, like anxiety about crime and politics that leads to self-protection, ministers that are not trained to lead congregations in a secular context, colonial and racial conceptions about mission and congregations that are not financially sustainable. The hope is that the DRC will engage with these factors and challenges, and that the fifth wave of missional awakening will help congregations too to join the movement of the Trinity in the world and to be a sign, instrument and foretaste of the gospel.

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### Authors' contribution

C.R.B. did the research for this article as part of his research to complete a PhD. C.J.P.N. supervised the research, contributed sections of the article, edited the contribution and compiled the final submission.

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