

**NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
(POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS)**

**Discipline of office-bearers according to article 66 of
the church order in the Reformed Confessing
Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
(RCCC)**

**Thesis submitted for the degree Doctor of Philosophy (Church
Polity) at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother and all my Professors at the North West University, South Africa (Potchefstroom Campus), who taught me how to pray, work and revere and worship God, the Heavenly Father.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses the procedure used to discipline office-bearers according to article 66 of the Church Order of the Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Most of the members of the above-mentioned church belong to the Bantu-Luba people. According to their cultural faith, they do not believe that they are born sinners, but that a sin is something that comes from outside, something that one may either get hold of if one wishes to, or avoid if one does not wish or like to have. We may therefore assume that, in addition to the Bantu-Luba people, many other Bantu people in Africa likewise have this conception of sin.

Our study of the Bantu-Luba people's false concept of sin show according to the Muntu-Luba, to sin means to harm one's fellowman, or to transgress the ancestors' law. However, we will show that God is not involved in all this. This is one of the many reasons why office-bearers become angry and cause trouble and when they are to be disciplined for transgression. This is what inspired me to try and shed some light on the matter by means of the Word of God which stress that man is a born sinner and that sin comes from his heart.

To achieve this goal, we have to examine church history, especially that of the Reformation in the 16th century, a period known as "the theatre" of the greatest religious revolution. There we see the importance of "ecclesiastical discipline" which is the third mark of a true church. A disobedient church is a church on the way to its downfall.

Two case-studies are used, one on adultery and one on simony, to show how the application of the prescribed procedure according to article 66 of the church order has openly caused trouble and problems in the church.

We propose the amendment of one part of the article which contains a hierarchical element in order to give back authority to the Church Council as the appropriate body entitled to decide on the suspension or dismissal of office-

bearers (Pastor, Elder, and Deacon) with consultation of the deputies of the classis and of the Provincial Synod.

Finally, my intention is to submit the above-mentioned amendment to the General Synod as a proposal to be approved and to be included as the procedure for the discipline of office-bearers, and to serve as the replacement of the current article.

Key words: discipline, office-bearers, Church Order, Reformed Church.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. ORIENTATION

1.1. Actuality

There is currently great uncertainty and confusion in the Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo about how to apply the Biblical imperative of disciplining office-bearers. The Congolese peoples experience the prescribed procedure as strange and alien to their culture.

According to interviews conducted with a great number of church members and ordinary people, we have come to realise that they associate the particular article of the Church Order with Western culture, and are not convinced that the same procedure should be applied in the Congo (DRC), given the socio cultural context of the Congolese people. An in-depth investigation is therefore called for in order to prevent tension and dissatisfaction amongst congregations and to provide clarity about the issue.

1.2. Current Position

The Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (RCCC) is relatively young. It was established 26 years ago and subscribes to the Reformed creeds/confessions, such as the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dordrecht and the Rochelle Confession (France). In principle, we may see that it has adopted the Reformed Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church of North America (Kayayan, 1988: 5).

The congregations are spread over a vast country and are eager to uphold the Reformed principles. But the churches find it difficult and expensive to come together in major assemblies, even though they realise the importance of unity

and coherence. As a matter of fact, the Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (RCCC) is in need of strong leadership and clarity on the issues concerning the government of the church.

At present, many members of our denomination will agree with the observation that a church council or classis is likely to encounter some of the following problems when it wishes to discipline erring office-bearers:

- The office-bearers refuse to be disciplined. They hold the leadership of church office-bearers in the same esteem as that of the leader of the village or tribe (Ntumba, 2001:46);
- In the light of their cultural background (customs and ethos), the assembly of believers wish to participate in the decision-making process in major assemblies. They are not satisfied merely to be informed of the decision afterwards;
- Church members are afraid to provide public testimony against each other because they believe that this would undermine their friendship and tribal relations. This situation is similar to that in a Western church (Jescheke, 2005:30-32);
- When church members have sinned, secretly or publicly, they are apt to argue that they should not be judged, because all people are sinners. This attitude is a misinterpretation of Matthew 7:1. They are quick to point fingers to powerful ruling elders and pastors who do not submit to discipline. In this regard, Kgatla (1990:153) argues that such people have become spiritually impoverished. What Kgatla says is still valid in our context;
- Dissatisfied and obstinate office-bearers who have been disciplined often take their case to government officials. A case in point is that of a certain elder who was disciplined by his church council. He took the case to the local court of justice where he laid a charge against- **an elder who stood firmly by the decision that had been taken** (see annexure: invitation from local court of justice); sentence not clear enough!
- A lack of professionally trained office-bearers in the early days of the church.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

This dissertation focuses on the problem of how to successfully apply article 66 of the church order within our context in order to bridge the gap between the Biblical principles reflected in the confessions and the Church Order of the Reformed Churches on the one hand and, on the other, the ethos, attitude, culture and scepticism of the Congolese people who belong to these churches. A number of specific problems can be identified:

- Limited knowledge of the Word of God regarding the way the leaders have to be disciplined by the church;
- Limited knowledge of the church order, especially of article 66 which deals with the discipline of ministers;
- A lack of experience regarding the way ministers have to be disciplined;
- Adherence to certain customs and traditions by church members in the procedure of disciplining.

2.1. God is a God of holiness and good order

In the Bible we are taught that God is holy and that He commands us in turn to be holy (1 Peter, 15-16). As Bridges (1978:19) says: "God calls every believer to live a holy life". God's hatred of sin is demonstrated by the punishment of his people through the ages: from the beginning in Genesis, through Sodom and Gomorrah, the exile in Babylon and in the New Testament. The exemplary character of punishment, as a method of teaching and correcting, is manifested in the public execution of justice. In this respect, De Vaux (1976:2409) states that "justice was administered in public at the gate of the town". Cases in point include Achan in the Old Testament (Joshua 7:1-26) and Ananias and Saphira in the New Testament (Acts 5:1-11, 1Corinthians 14:40). In the Old Testament the priest had the responsibility to exclude sinners (Leviticus 13:5; Number 9:7; Chronicles 23:19). The apostle Paul says: "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin

are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

Thus, let us assume that God’s aim with punishment is to correct his people, so that they can return to their initial and ideal vocation, that is, “holiness”. Therefore, the discipline of excommunication applies to both ordinary people and leaders. The people of both the Old and New Testament complied with the commandment and example of God, namely to punish wrongdoers with the above-mentioned aim in mind. We know that the church received a mandate to exercise the authority of God (Matthew 16: 19; John 20:23; Titus 3:10). Du Plooy (2003:61) therefore says that “Christ gives the keys to the Church”. This implies that the church has the responsibility and ministerial jurisdiction to serve Christ and his church. Berkhof (1933:303) comments that the church is duty-bound to guard its holiness by the exercise of proper discipline so as to implement the law of Christ concerning the admission and exclusion of its members, and to promote the Spiritual edification of the members by securing their obedience to the law of Christ.

2.2. Application of these principles in church government

In the Western world, the Reformation followed the paths of the Old and the New Testament. For instance, by common consent and mutual agreement, the Reformers established the church order so that “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Their organisation of the church is a combination of Biblical doctrine and minimal consideration of the norms and principles of the society.

Following the example of the Western Reformed Churches, the African Reformed Churches likewise have to establish order according to the Old and New Testament. However, the African tribes (Church members) are traditionally eager to uphold their heritage, customs and culture. In addition, we find that, in Africa, a leader is regarded as a prominent person who represents his people

(Van der Walt, 2006:125). In the Reformed Confessing Churches, the office-bearers likewise consider themselves as representatives of the church members. This state of affairs should be considered in the disciplining of office-bearers.

Due to the lack of formal or effective training and the necessary equipment, erring office-bearers are often unwilling to subject themselves to discipline by the church council or classis. In the same vein, the church members resent their exclusion from the proceedings and object to the procedure in which they had no part to play.

In the light of all this, the problem can be presented as follows:

- a) How can the gap be bridged between the Biblical requirements for the discipline of office-bearers, and the cultural and traditional views of the members of the churches in the Congo (RCCC)?
- b) How can the churches, including office-bearers, be persuaded and taught to accept and apply the Biblical principles and the articles in the Confessions and the Church Order in this regard?
- c) How can these principles be applied in such a way that the members of a specific culture do not feel estranged from the procedure or forced to face almost insurmountable difficulties?
- d) How can the discrepancies and tensions among church members be overcome in order to manifest the true church of God in the Congo?

3. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

3.1. Main aim

To formulate a Biblically founded procedure that will fit into the cultural background and environment of the current situation of the Reformed

Confessing Church in the Congo (RCCC) in order to restore and maintain good order.

3.2. Specific objectives

- 3.2.1. To highlight the importance of the Biblical principles and their practical application in the light of Scripture and the Confessions.
- 3.2.2. To try and bridge the gap between the Biblical principles of holiness, good order and discipline in the church of God, and the cultural background of the Congolese church members.
- 3.2.3. To investigate how churches could be guided to understand and accept the Biblical principles encountered throughout the Old and the New Testament and adopted by the Western culture, against the background of their own culture.

4. CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

The article dealing with the discipline of office-bearers according to Biblical principles (as formulated in the Church Order) will have to be amended and implemented in the Reformed Confessing Church in the Congo, once the following aspects have been considered and solved:

- 4.1. Acceptance and general approval of the Biblical principles and the amended formulation of the article in question by the National Synod.
- 4.2. Bridging the gap between the traditions and cultural environment of the Congolese people and the revelation in the Word of God with regard to good order and discipline in the church.

5. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

- 5.1. A thorough study of appropriate literature on Church Polity will be conducted.

- 5.2. An in-depth investigation will be made of information in other theological disciplines, such as Dogmatics, Biblical Sciences (Old and New Testament), Exegesis, Church History and Pastoral Care.
- 5.3. African traditions, cultural background and customs will be investigated in general literature relevant to this thesis.
- 5.4. Calvinist literature will be used as a guide throughout this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF REALISING THE MARKS OF A TRUE CHURCH IN THE REFORMED CONFESSING CHURCH IN THE D.R. CONGO

2.1 INTRODUCTION

With regard to the history of the Church, one can distinguish a number of movements and trends, such as, Gnosticism, Donatism, Marcionism, Humanism, Renaissance, Modernism, Reformation, Counter-reformation, etc. It is well known that there were many heresies, controversies and conflicting views and opinions in the history of the Church. This sometimes led to schisms and divisions. In the history of the Church, the Reformation of the 16th century may be singled out as a prominent movement which had immense influence on and consequences for the Church worldwide.

The Reformed Confessing Church in the Congo is part of the family of the Reformed churches in the Calvinist tradition; they are churches which confess the three marks (*notae ecclesiae*) of the true Church of Christ, the Lord, namely the pure proclamation of God's Word, the correct administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline (See Belgic Confession, article 29; Berkhof, 1949:577-578; Williamson, 1964: 190-191; Grossmann, 1996:17-18).

In the light of what is going on in the life of this Church in our time, we intend to discuss the proper use of the three marks of the true Church of Christ so as to reroute the Reformed Confessing Church in the Congo to the good road and once again achieve the status of the true Church.

2.2 THE CONCEPT: “MARK”

2.2.1 Meaning

A mark is “a sign that a quality or feeling exists” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2006:902; Nouveau Petit Larousse, 1968:628). In Reformed theology this term has almost the same meaning. It refers to the above-mentioned three elements which distinguish the true Church of Jesus Christ from the false church. Roman Catholic theology, on the other hand, uses attributes to identify the true church of Christ. In this respect, Dulles (1999:14–28) writes: “In catholic apologetics from the 16th century until a generation ago, the four properties were regularly used as «notes», with a view to proving that the Catholic Church alone, was the true church of Christ». (Cf. Yong, 2002: 46; Jean Paul, 1992:178-190; Cogley, 1963:23). In the same vein, Crowley (1930:95) says, “The marks are essential properties and characteristic signs that help to reveal the thing to which they belong.”

In the Bible we read that the Church of Christ must be one, holy, universal and apostolic church. Owing to the corrupt state of the church in which it was and its suffering during the time of the reformation in the 16th century, sects and other religious groups flourished. Therefore it was necessary to identify certain criteria to distinguish the true Church from the false Church. In paragraphs 2.2.3 and 2.2.4, we shall explain the how church fathers, scholars, and the Reformers chose the terms "mark", "notes" or “properties” to identify the true Church.

However, we shall first discuss the attributes that the Church uses as marks to identify what it considers to be the only true Church of Christ.

2.2.2 The Attributes and their Interpretation

We are not going to discuss the matter in detail but merely outline the interpretation of the attributes of the two churches (Roman Catholic and Reformed) in the light of theological debates during past centuries.

a) The First Attribute: Unity

Jesus Christ established a Church, a religious society which people should enter to be saved. This church should be recognized by the marks which its Divine Founder gave it.

According to the Roman Catholic Church, the Church is said to be one. This means that it has a single Lord, confesses a single faith, springs from only one baptism, constitutes a body, animated by a single Spirit, has the unique hope that all its divisions will be surmounted to become the unique Church of Christ, the one that our Saviour, after His resurrection, handed to Peter to become its pastor, and instructed him and the other apostles to spread the Word. This Church, as an established and organized society in the world, is realized in the Roman Catholic Church governed by the successors of Peter and the bishops who are in communion with him (Cf. Jean-Paul, 1992:178-180; Yong, 2002; 54; Dulles, 1998:17-20); Rahner and Vorgrimler, 1970:495-496).

With regard to the visible unity of the church, Berkhof (1949:572) says that Roman Catholics ordinarily recognize only the hierarchically organized ecclesia as the church. The unity of this church manifests itself in its imposing world-wide organization, which aims at including the church of all nations. Its real centre is not found in the believers, but in the hierarchy with its concentric circles. There is first of all the broad circle of the lower clergy, the priests and the other inferior functionaries; then the smaller circle of bishops next the still narrower one of the cardinals; the entire pyramid being capped by the Pope, the visible head of the whole organization, who has absolute control of all those that

are under him ...” (See also Paraliou, 1985:123; Kayayan, 1981:94-95; Rahner and Vorgrimler, 1970:495-496).

Calvin, on the other hand, maintains that the visible universal Church and the entire multitude adopts God's truth and the doctrine of His Word, no matter the type of nation nor the distance between regions, as far as there is unity between the ties of their faith. In fact, wherever the preaching of the Gospel is reverently listened to, and where sacraments are not neglected, there appears for a while a type of Church which we cannot doubt, and the authority of which is not licit to disdain either the admonitions, or reject the advice, or to have the reprimands of it mockery (Calvin, 1958:21, 22).

With regard to the visible unity of the church of Christ, Luther takes a stand against the claim of the hierarchy and the papacy; he is against the doctrine of the Church constituting one “societas perfecta” or a christi mysticum body”. When we consider the Church as the mystic body of Christ, we realize that the “prolonged Christ ” becomes immanent in the Church; He is no longer its Head and sovereign Lord of its active freedom. Hierarchy and papacy become powerfully active intermediaries (Dictionary of Theology, 1988:626; Mendonca, 1988:95-107; Leonard, 1950:28-36).

Emery (1963:116) backs Luther’s contention that the only invisible Church is biblical. There is the Christian church where true faith in God and in Jesus exists, where baptism and the Lord’s Supper are administered, and where the Gospel is regularly preached. Christ is the only Head of the Church (Ephesians 4:15). The ecclesiastic power should not hinder the action of God's Word. Nicole (1972:141) writes-: “Luther rejected the authority of the Pope and those of the Councils, and he had leaned on the Bible”

In this respect, Gisel (1995:490) comments: “From the beginning of his altercations with the Roman Church, Luther distinguishes between the true

Church and the false one. The papist Church is the den of the Antichrist; it is set against the true church established on God's Word. "

Johner (2010:37) supports Calvin, as we do: "... at the age of 27, Calvin, in this founding text, says that the main part of the Church is situated in the transcendence and in the invisible." He says this in reaction to Immanentism and the abuse of power attributed to the papacy. Calvin denounces all human imputation of sovereignty to the Church and declares the Lordship of God and Christ over the Church: "Indeed, the Church is said to be one with a single Lord, a single faith, a single body animated by the only Spirit." Everything that is said about the succession of the Popes and the bishops cannot make the Church "one".

The Reformed standpoint is expressed by Berkhof (1949:572) when he writes: "The unity of the church is not primarily of an external, but of an internal spiritual character. It is the unity of the mystical body of Jesus Christ, of which all believers are members. This body is controlled by one Head, Jesus Christ, who is also the King of the Church, and is animated by one Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. There can be no doubt about the fact that the Bible asserts the unity, not only of the invisible, but also of the visible church. The figure of the body, as it is found in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31 implies this unity". Berkhof refers to the Belgic Confession, article 27–29: "We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation of true believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit".

Nicole (1986:245) writes as follows about the papal succession after the apostle Peter to ensure the unity of the Church: "It goes without saying that the pope's role is not only superfluous, but harmful in this respect." In the priestly prayer, Jesus does not utter a word about any special responsibility laid on the apostle Peter to realize the unity of the believers, nor do other writings speak about it. Moreover, Peter himself in no way attaches importance to his person, but stresses that it is only through Christ that we are able to build God's house.

Throughout the ages, since the Cyprian Period (3rd century), through the schism of the East (1054), the Reformation and until the current ecumenical efforts, the papal claims have invariably constituted an obstacle to the unity of the Christians, rather than promoting it. (See Westminster Confession; to chapter 25, paragraph 6; Abate, 2000:143; etc.).

In other words, the unity of the Church, that is, the unity of the Christians of this world, may be conceived on the basis of the unity of God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ (Cf. John 17).

b) The Second Attribute: Holiness

Jean-Paul (1992:182) writes as follows about the holiness of the Church: “The church is holy while it comprises within it sinners, because it has in itself another life than the life of the grace. It is while living of its life that its members sanctify themselves; and it is in conceals themselves from its life that they fall in sins and disorders which hamper the radiation of its holiness. That is why it suffers and repents for these faults for which it has the power to cure its children by the blood of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

In other words, by canonizing certain believers, that is, by proclaiming solemnly that these believers bravely and loyally practised virtues through the grace of God, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of the holiness, and at the same time, sustains the hope of the believers and regard them as models and intercessors. The saints, men as well as women, had always been the source and origin of renewal in the most troubled times in the history of the Church. In the person of the happy Virgo the Church has already achieved perfection and purity. Christians still do their utmost to grow in holiness by conquering sin: that is why they raise their eyes towards Mary: in her, the Church is already all saints (Cf. Dulles, 1999:20-22; Berkhof, 1949:574; Rahner and Vorgrimler, 1970:437-438;).

But contrary to the Roman Catholic Church's view of the holiness of the church, Calvin, (1958:29-30) comments as follows on Ephesians 5:25-27: "This judgment is not less true, that the Lord works in the daytime in day to erase wrinkles and clean mackles: which shows that its holiness is not completed yet. The Church is thus holy in a way that daily it takes advantage, and still has not its perfection; daily it goes forward, and has not yet come to the purpose of the holiness".

According to the Reformed theology of the Calvinist tradition, the church is absolutely holy in an objective sense, that is, as considered in Jesus Christ. By virtue of the mediatory righteousness of Christ, the church is accounted holy in the eyes of God. In a relative sense, Calvinists also consider the church as being subjectively holy, that is, as actually holy in the inner principle of her life and destined for perfect holiness. Hence, it can truly be called the community of saints. We can therefore see that holiness is also attributed to the visible church. The latter is holy in the sense that it is separated from the world in consecration to God, and also in the ethical sense of aiming at, and achieving in principle, a holy conversation in Christ". (Berkhof, 1949:574; Confession, article 27).

Certain canonized believers are considered as holy, as model saints and intercessors; they, in the Roman Catholic Church, also assume that in the Virgin Mary the church has already achieved perfection. However, we Calvinists ask where this can be found in the Bible, and Crossman (1996:19) writes as follows: "No one reaches the goal of perfection during his life on this earth. Therefore, when we are looking at the true church and at the true Christians, we are not looking at an organization, at individuals in whom there is no sin."

According to one of our confessions which really interpret God's Word, we find that the Roman Catholic Church is wrong to canonize certain members of the Church as model saints and intercessors for other church members. La Rochelle Confession, article 24 clarifies the matter as follows: "Because Jesus Christ was given to us to be our only Lawyer and because He allowed us to

directly address his Father in His name, and because it is allowed to pray only according to what God prescribed us in his Word, we believe that intercessors are humanly invented, an abuse and Satan's guile to divert the Church from the way of praying indeed". (Cf. I John 1:8-9; Abate, 2000:143).

In the same vein O' Donovan, (1992:357) tells us: "The Bible suggests and encourages no contact between the living and the dead. God had formally forbidden the alive to evoke the dead. (Deut.18:10-13). Doing it is a sin".

c) The Third Attribute: Catholicity

Concerning the attribute "Catholic", Jean-Paul, (1992:182-183) asserts: "The Church is catholic in a double sense:

- first of all, because in it Christ is present. Where Christ Jesus is, there is the Roman Catholic Church. In it remains the plenitude of the body of Christ united with its Head; this implies that it receives from Him the plenitude of the means of salvation which He wanted: right and complete confession of faith, integral sacramental life and ordered ministry in the apostolic succession. In this way, the church was fundamental and catholic in the day of Pentecost, and it will always be until the day of the Parousia.
- secondly, it is catholic because it is sent into mission by Christ in the universality of the human race (Cf. Yong, 2002:56-62; Dulles, 1999:22-24).

In reaction to what the Catholics say about the Catholicity, our Belgic Confession, article 27, points out: "We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit. This church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end, for Christ is an eternal King who cannot be without subjects. This holy church is

preserved by God against the fury of the whole world, although for a while it may look very small and as extinct in the eyes of man. Thus during the perilous reign of Ahab, the Lord kept for Himself seven thousand persons who had not bowed their knees to Baal.”

We can assume that the catholic point of view on the apostolic succession is the same throughout the Catholic Church. Rahner and Vorgrimler support this view when they argue that “the apostolic succession is the legitimization of the ministry and the power in the Church by the fact that they result authentically from apostles (the twelve), with which Christ had communicated Himself”.

This church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons; it is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. It is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith (Cf. The Apostles’ creed; Nicene creed; Berkhof, 1949:575; Williamson, 1964:187; Westminster Confession, chapter 25, art. 1–6).

To sum up, the holiness of the Church was ordered by God, the Creator of His Church (Cf. Leviticus 19:2; I Peter 1:16).

d) The Fourth Attribute: Apostolicity

Jean-Paul, (1992:188) from a Roman Catholic view, writes: “The Church is apostolic because it is based on the apostles and this in a triple sense”:

- it was and remains built on the foundation of the apostles (Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14);
- it keeps and passes on, by means of the Spirit which lives in it, the teaching, the good deposit, the healthy words heard from the apostles;
- it continues in being taught, sanctified and managed by the apostles until the return of the Christ, grace to those who succeed then in their pastoral

responsibility: the bishops' college, assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter, supreme pastor of the Church.

This Church is indestructible and infallibly imbedded in the truth: Christ governs it through Peter and the other apostles, present in their successors, the Pope and the bishops' council.

As far as the duality of power (order and jurisdiction) is concerned, it should be noted that the succession has two facets: the sacrament of ordination by bishops, legally consecrated and able therefore, to be attached to the apostles as their successors; and the plenary, legally justifiable membership, which integrates and subordinates a Minister to the society that forms the Church of Christ, in hierarchical communion with his highest ministry, the pope through whom, as legal successor of the Head of the apostolic College, is communicated the legal power.

Paraphrasing Rahner and Vorgrimler (1970:456-457), we may assume that the principle of the apostolic succession, as constituent element of the church and as criterion of the true Church, should not be abandoned. Otherwise, the church would stop being a historically noticeable reality and remain just an abstract idea. In addition, a community, as a historic greatness should be based on the legitimacy of the succession. Moreover, we should remember that in the apostolic succession, it is the universal episcopate, represented by the pope, which is considered the successor of the apostolic college, the head of which was Peter. The individual bishop, as a member of this church, is then viewed as the successor of the apostles.

Gisel, (1995:75) adds:” the Ministers have the sacred power, they are the watchmen of the ministerial tradition inherited from Jesus-Christ who called the 12 apostles to participate in His mission. The Lord has instituted the apostolic college supervised by Peter; by making a hierarchical community of the Gospel. Through time, apostles chose successors who, in turn, will do the same until

today so that the authority delegated by Christ has never ceased to be present and represented in the Church: the pope and the bishops are carriers of this charisma” my translation).

But along with Godfrey (2000:14) we realize that there is a contradiction between two traditions in presence. For example, the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church teaches us that the pope is the head of the church, a bishop over all bishops. Whereas, Gregory the great, pope and saint at the end of the ancient church period, said that such a teaching came from the spirit of Antichrist.

Calvin (1958:95-96) rejected the system of the apostolic succession and the hierarchy in the Roman Church. This is how he describes the matter: “Certainly, the whole system is so different from the institution of Christ, even opposed to this one, so remote and diverted from the former way, violating the nature and the reason, that we would not know how to make a bigger insult to Jesus Christ than claim his name to describe a regime quite vague and overwhelmed ... I would ask them, on the other hand, what they have in common with the apostles. Because it is not a question of a hereditary dignity, which comes to a man by sleeping, but of the service of the preaching, which they avoid so hardly. Certainly it seems that such as they have it, they did not receive it either from Jesus Christ, not from his apostles, or from holy Fathers, or from the ancient Church.”

In the same line of thought, Nicole (1986:247) emphasises the matter, adding that through centuries there was always, in the breast of the official Churches and outside the official Churches, a lineage of witnesses to proclaim Jesus Christ's pure Gospel. “For the succession is not favoured by the Bible.”

Abate(2000:143) comments:” The apostolicity of the church, means that the church is built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as chief corner stone (Ephesians 2:20)”. In other words,

Apostolicity means a historical continuity of bishops which goes back in succession to the first apostles of Christ, but in conformity with the apostolic faith. Edmund, (1995:101) is more specific when he writes: "Above all, the Reformers emphasized the meaning of apostolicity. To be apostolic, the church must be built upon the doctrine of the apostles (1 Corinthians 3:10-11; Ephesians 2:20; 3:4-5). Not the pretended chair of Peter, but the teaching of Peter was the real mark of apostolicity".

Note that the Bible does not tell us about the succession of apostles for the continuity of the Church; but it describes different gifts which Christ gave to people for the continuity and edification of His church (Ephesians 4:11-16).

To strengthen our case, we support Du Plooy (1993:108) who maintains that Christ never transfers his authority to the office bearers in the church, but charges them with the task of proclaiming his Word and ministering to the church. The office bearers are nothing more than instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit. That is why the Confession of Rochelle, article 28, condemns the assemblies of the papacy, because God's truth is banished from them. According to this Confession, we find that the sacraments in these assemblies are corrupted, distorted, falsified or totally annihilated, and all types of superstitions and idolatries are in fashion there. We therefore believe that all those who join them are cut off from the body of Jesus Christ. We agree with Ruff (1963:117): "The Lutherans absolutely reject any teaching that God has delegated authority over the soul of His celebrity to any man."

In short, we believe that the attributes discussed above are appropriate for the church, but do not qualify it as the true Church. The only thing which can make the church true is the Word of God, by applying it in our daily life, while remaining faithful and obedient to it. To repeat, let us assert that the Reformed interpretations of the above attributes are faithful to the Word of God.

2.2.3 The concept mark of the true Church

In Nicole (1990:14), we read that since its creation in the period 28 to 33 AD, the Church was influenced by many movements and experienced internal and external pressures. Through the centuries, the men or the Fathers of the Church, as they were called (Cf. Heussi and Peter, 1967:19), fought against all such movements to protect the authenticity of the Church. In so doing, they thought it wise to earmark signs by which the true Church should be identified and known. This is exactly what Berkhof (1949:576) tries to explain when he writes: "When heresies arise, it becomes necessary to point to certain marks by which the true church could be recognized. The consciousness of this need was already in the early church; it was naturally less apparent in the Middle age, but became very strong at the time of the Reformation".

Based on the saying, "there is no smoke without fire", we may certainly realize that there were numerous causes which divided the Church, so that we talk about the Roman Catholic Church on the one hand, and the Reformed Church on the other hand. Both bear the marks of the suffering during the Reformation, from which the "notae ecclesiae" were born so as to distinguish the true church from the false one.

In the second century, when Christianity was still in its infancy, the church faced challenges with the appearance of religious Gnosticism, a doctrine which claimed to have the knowledge to penetrate the divine mystery. Heussi and Peter (1967:26) reacted against the heresies (Gnosticism, Montanism) of that period: "The Roman Catholic Church brought out a constitution, and decisions in the years 160-180 to resist the outer and the internal dangers ... and, as fixing doctrinal standards by which we were able to know henceforth who was a Christian and who was not."

As a result, we see that, in the third century, the problem of catholicity caused division in the Church. Edmund (1995:100) describes the situation as follows:

“The renovations separated from the church, judging it apostate because it readmitted penitence which, under persecution, had offered incense to Caesar. Only separatists would be regarded as members of the true church.

We should be reminded that there had been plenty of movements which unsettled the church since its birth. We can obviously not discuss all of them in this dissertation, but we are going to trace some important movements of the 16th century, a period described as the theatre of the biggest religious revolution known by Christianity.

2.2.3.1 The Renaissance as one of the movements unsettling the Church in the 15th Century

In spite of its scientific conceptions, the Renaissance in the West prepared the people of the 15th century to open their minds and look for a high moral values. As Heussi and Peter, (1967:117-121) put it:

"The two powers which dominate the West decline little by little. The empire is darkened by states where the national feeling develops; the Papacy collapses on the political and religious level. It is the time of the "captivity" of Avignon and the big schism ... The disastrous consequences of the Schism soon appear in the religious and economic life of the peoples. The popes excommunicate mutually; all the Christendom is under prohibition by the one or by the other. The believers are seized by the doubt and the anxiety as for their salute. Financial charges increase. It appears to the eyes of all that a reformation is absolutely necessary. "

We saw, however, that far from being an external movement, the Renaissance became an internal revolution. That is to say, it entered the Church and had a serious effect on the development of the Church: although the people of the Renaissance tried to make their talents blossom and to excel at everything, they did not neglect the Reformation of the Church.

2.2.3.2 Humanism

With Humanism, the Church benefited from the publishing of God's Word in many languages. For instance, Erasmus, known as the father of Western Humanism published a significant section of the New Testament (which Luther used for his translation) in 1518, his dialogues and an annotated translation of the Epistles of Saint Paul (1512). Heusi and Peter (1967:130-131) indicated how it avoided a schism; the humanism preferred a reformation or the next renewal of the Church.

Considering the contribution of humanism to the church, we are obliged to mention the useful work of other Reformers-Humanists (in this period) who influenced Europe, and especially Rome, the city in which papacy ruled supreme.

Girolamo Savonarola (a radical Dominion Monk) is reported to have come to Florence in 1490. He took residence at San Marco (where his monastic cell is still to be seen today) and began preaching fiery sermons about the last days. A zealous preacher like Savonarola saw Florence as a city filled with evidence of the devil's work. Free-thinking was common, as were the signs of the vast Medici wealth. He saw the entire city going straight to hell, and made sure that everyone heard the message. He claimed to have the gift of prophecy, and foretold that Lorenzo would die soon (which turned out to be true). Savonarola must have been a very persuasive preacher, because he soon held the city in the palm of his hand. Even Botticelli, the painter of beautiful pagan paintings, fell under his spell. The Medici had no choice but to flee the city, and Savonarola took charge of Florence in 1494. He set about cleansing the city and returning it to God.

He had an enormous public fire made in the Piazza della Signoria that came to be called "the Bonfire of the Vanities". Florentines came to cast all kinds of evils into the flames, including books and manuscripts, symbols of wealth, jewellery,

ancient relics and statues, cosmetics, fine clothing, mirrors, musical instruments and many priceless works of early Renaissance art. Botticelli cast his own paintings into the flames. No one knows how many works were destroyed by the artist himself, but it must have been truly gut-wrenching for him. His work was his life, yet he feared – as many Florentines did – for his eternal soul and had no other choice (http://w.w.w.frontline.org.za/articles/thereformation_Lectures.htm; Italian history and Art by Stromberg, March 5, 2011).

According to Nicole (1972:129-130), arts and letters, as well as the corruption of the antiquity was at its peak, at the very time that this Dominican Monk started preaching repentance in Florence, bringing a fiery, apocalyptic message. He attacked the corruption of the Clergy and had such a success that the frivolous town changed and became austere. So that carnival rejoicings made room for a fire where all “vanities” were consumed.

Roubiczek and Kalmer (1951:244-249) comment that in Savonarola’s sermons, he did not stop repeating that the Church ought, to be cleansed and renewed as soon as possible. These two critics found that Savonarola based himself on the Holy Writings for renovating the Church as he took care of the explanation of the Writing to the monks and to the interested laymen. The Reformers dreamed of transforming Florence into a city of God, a new Nazareth where from the religious revival would extend to the other religions of Italy and from Italy to Europe (Cf. Emery, 1963:100).

But insisting on the unique authority of sources, John Huss protested against the worship of images, the trade in indulgences, and the corruption of the clergy. Chased out of Prague, Huss began preaching in the countryside. In spite of the papal ban, his popular and warm preaching left a profound impression everywhere. A pure and simple renunciation was asked from him. He had said that he did not want “to scandalize” the people whom he had guided to the truth (Nicole, 1990:131-132).

One of the points on which Huss differed from the doctrine of the council of his time was that he taught that the office of the pope did not exist by Divine command, but had been established by the Church so that things might be done in an orderly fashion (a view that he shared with Thomas More). (http://w.w.w.frontline.org.za/articles/therformation_lectures.htm; Matthew Spinka, John Huss and the Czech reform, (U Chi Pr, 1941; 1966).

Emery (1963:98) acknowledges the work done by Huss when he writes: "... by the simple life of Huss and by his frank and affectionate predication quite at the same time, Huss acquired a big authority on the people and the nobility. And also especially his support to the reformers' views of Wycliffe of whom he had writings, his ardent criticism against the clergy's behaviours, the public disapproval which he made of the crusade published by pope Jean XXIII against king of Naples, enticed to Huss the hatred of the clergy and the papal court".

Another significant feature of this movement is that these driving forces considered that the Word of God in the Bible was a "unique source of the Christian religion." They questioned the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, of the Popes and of the councils, by granting great importance to the internal capacities of a person, for instance faith and charity (Emery, 1963:102).

From the above discussion it is clear that the Reformation had begun long before this period. There were no sudden events that provoked it. In addition, it was not everybody who could accept renewal of the Church and the creation of other churches. But the resistance and the monopolization of everything in the Church on the one hand, and the false preachings on the other hand, paved the way for more churches. Yet the question remains unanswered: do the people who left the Catholic Church and those who remained in it still continue to practise the biblical principles in their life?

We shall endeavour to find an answer throughout our discussion. First we should remember that Jesus Christ said: “Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21-23).

2.2.3.3 The Internal Movements: The Reformation and its causes

As already mentioned, the awakening did not happen like a bolt from the blue. There were causes and events which prepared and preceded it. Along with Heussi and Peter, (1967:134-135) we may consider the following as the general causes of the Reformation:

- a) the awakening of Nationalism which questioned the political hegemony of the pope;
- b) the radicalism of certain spirits (Occam, Marcile Ficin, the spiritual Franciscans);
- c) the big schism and the scandal of a double papacy;
- d) the conciliary movement (the Council above the popes who support especially the Parisian professors);
- e) the collusion of Nominalism and Gallicanism (search for a parliamentary Church where laymen and nations have their place);
- f) mystic individualists or communities which weaken, to a certain extent, the authority of the hierarchy;
- g) several trends of Humanism;
- h) secret activities of the sects, though less numerous than in the previous centuries;
- i) the opposition from civil authorities, cultivated city-dwellers and farming communities;
- j) especially the immorality in many convents and at all the levels of the hierarchy.

Although Heussi and Peter list the above-mentioned causes, we believe they were mistaken in sustaining the worship of the saints, the cult of Mary, the fact that every house, every institution, every individual has his protector saint, believing all these elements to have livened up the church in 1517 and heralding the revival of the church. We realize that Heussi and Peter misunderstood the real causes of the heresies which provoked the Reformation. Above all, we may assert that the above-mentioned elements, considered as theological elements of order, and many others, constitute a long list of abuses committed by the Roman Church.

Apart from the above mentioned causes, Nicole (1990:135) mentions the Word of God as another cause of the division in the church: "It is the study of the Bible that appears as the underlying cause of the Reformation, before being its result. In front of the requirements of the God Saint of the Writing, many feel that they cannot be saved by the thin merits which the Church suggests them to acquire. The comparison between the scriptural truth and the official education hastened the movement". Kayayan, (1989:178) adds the practice of the indulgences among the many others which had started the religious crisis of the 16th century, causing the Reformation to spread to almost every country in the West.

Before we proceed, we shall try to explain what "indulgence" means and how it was practised. We first look at its catholic meaning, then focus on its reformed meaning.

From the catholic viewpoint, Jean-Paul (1992:316) explains that indulgence is forgiveness granted on behalf of God by means of the temporal punishment of sin which is then erased. It is a forgiveness that a believer can arrange on certain specified conditions, through the action of the Church which, as the dispenser of redemption, distributes and applies by her authority the treasure of the sanctifications of Christ and the saint. This is the view that the Roman Catholic Church still holds up to now.

The Reformers and other historians believe that: "an indulgence" is the letter which was delivered to the believers, to their living and also to the dead relatives after having paid a certain sum of money to decrease the duration of their stay in Purgatory. This practice is based on an anti-biblical doctrine of the praiseworthy works which we call "surrogatory" (Cf. Kayayan, 1989:178; Heussi and Peter, 1967:137; La Rochelle Confession, article 24; Emery, 1954:73).

In other words, the sum of money paid saved the sinner through the Church, and also the dead sinner. In this respect, Ruff, (1963:113) reminds us: "Luther had learned from Scripture that full forgiveness of sin is promised through faith in the merciful God revealed in Christ. This central idea led Luther to criticize many Roman Catholic teachings and practices." It is this false doctrine of indulgence (around the salvation) and so many others mentioned hitherto which motivated the Reformers, the Fathers of the Church and the scholars to identify the marks which can help to distinguish the true Church of Lord Jesus Christ from the false church.

In paragraph 2.2.2 we discussed the attributes which the Roman Catholic Church consider to be the "marks" of the true church. We shall now look at the three marks which the reformed churches regard as the distinctive features of the true church of Jesus Christ (Cf. Belgic Confession, article 29; Scottish Confession of 1560, article 18; Berkhof, 1949:578; Grossman, 1996:17-20; Johnson, 1997:90; Edmund, 1995:101). The Lutherans accept only two of these, namely the right preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments (Cf. Sunshine, 2004:469).

2.2.3.4 The Types of Marks

Reading Grossman (1996:17-20) and other critics, we find that the Calvinist reformed tradition recognizes three marks which distinguish the true Church of Christ from the false:

- a. the right preaching of the Word of God;
- b. the right administration of the sacraments;
- c. the faithful exercise of disciplines;

In the paragraph 2.3 we are going to explain the right preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline. We shall try to highlight the application of these three elements in the Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

2.3. THE REFORMED CONFESSING CHURCH AND THE MARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH IN THESE DAYS

2.3.1 The Correct Preaching of the Word of God

a) The preacher

At the outset, we should ask ourselves why the preaching of the Word of God is emphasized and why it occupies the first place among the marks of the true church. The emphasis put on this element is justified by the fact that the people who stressed that the preaching should be correct referred to the 16th century when the Roman Catholic Church and sects abused of the Word of God. This was common in the Roman Church which equals its traditions with the Word of God and centralizes the worship in the sacrament of the Eucharist. To illustrate the matter, we refer to Jean Paul (1992:265) who writes: "... by following this

analogy, we shall explain at first the three sacraments of the Christian initiation (first chapter), then, the sacraments of cure (second chapter) and finally, the sacraments which are to the service of the communion and of the mission believers (third chapter). This order is, certainly, not the only possible, but it allows seeing that the sacraments make a body in which every particular sacrament has its vital place. In this body, the Eucharist holds a unique place as the "sacrament of the sacraments". All the other sacraments are ordered to this one at their end.

Sweazey, (1976:4) says: "John Calvin was vehement against those who minimize preaching to magnify the Eucharist. Without the Word, the sacrament is but a dumb show; the Word must go before ...".

In the light of this we should try to find how a minister of the church today should act. In his article Kallemeyn (1994:16) tries to answer this question by pointing out that: "a minister is the one by whom the people of God is fed, accompanied, trained and confirmed in the practice of His gifts; the one by whom the believer is made capable of becoming attached even more to the author of any gift, his real minister".

We can therefore assert that the correct preaching of the Word of God must be a true reflection of what the Word of God reveals to his church. It excludes human interference and requires responsible exegesis and sound biblical and theological insight and knowledge. In addition, it must come from a competent minister, qualified, initiated, trained in the Church School of Theology, elected, examined and ordained to this end. In other words, to preach in the correct way, a minister must be properly trained (cf. La Rochelle Confession, article 25; Ordre et Discipline Ecclésiastique de l'Eglise Réformée Confessante au Congo, articles:6-11; Institution Chrétienne, livre 4, chapitre 3, points:10-16; Church Order of GKSA, articles: 5-16; Scottish Confession of 1560, article: 22; La Confession de Foi des Eglises Réformées en France, chapitre:29; Belgic Confession, article: 31). In addition, the competence of the minister is not

enough for correct preaching. The assistance of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary, as De Klerk and Rensburg (2005:12) point out.

In addition to trained ministers in theological church schools, our Church Order opens doors for brothers who have the talent, piety, Christian humility, wisdom, and the ability to preach and allows such exceptional brothers to preach (Cf. Church Order of GKSA, article 8; Church Order of Christian Reformed Church in the USA, the article 7).

In short, we should bear in the mind that a minister is an instrument God uses to speak about Him to his people. This is not an easy task. It requires deserving behaviour in the person of the minister towards God who elected him for this end, and also towards the congregation for which the mission was entrusted to him: to preach the Word, to teach the biblical doctrine, etc. ... (I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9; Ephesians 4:11-15).

To support this, a comment from Calvin (1958:15) can tell more: It is God who inspires us the faith, but by the organ of His Gospel, as Saint Paul warns that faith comes from hearing (Roman 10:17), as the power to save lies in God (Roman 16). He continues assuming that although He can raise at a moment his people to the perfection we may see that God, nevertheless, wants them to slowly grow under the feeding of the Church: preaching.

Sweazey, (1976:306) writes: “The preacher, who tries to speak for God to people and for the people to God, must be well connected on both sides. Unless his friendship with God is kept close and growing, his friendship with man will be disappointing ... our only hope in any of the work of the ministry, which is so far beyond our powers; is in staying close to God”.

Thus when we are not connected to God, our ministry might not be fruitful. A minister who respects himself and honours his God prepares his preaching

properly. An unprepared sermon ends in a failure; it shames the minister who preaches it and the congregation who ordained him as its minister.

b) Preaching

Preaching is the task of the preacher who must prepare his sermon before delivering it. Preaching means interpreting the Word of God. To succeed with a sermon from the beginning (preparation) till the end (delivering), prayers to the Holy Spirit to guide the preacher is essential. In this respect, De Klerk and Van Rensburg, (2005:12) advise us about the major role which the Holy Spirit plays in this matter: "The Holy Spirit does not only equip the preacher for the specific task of preaching, but is also working in the preacher during the whole of the exegetic and homiletic process. That is why reliable communication of the Word of God is conditional, the condition being that the exegete/preacher be filled with the Holy Spirit. Whenever mention is made of witnessing and preaching in the book of Acts, it is evident that the condition is being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:31; 9:17-20; 13:7-10)".

Being filled with the Holy Spirit makes you especially eager to witness that:

- the Spirit gives deeper insight into the knowledge of God.
- He is the One who leads the preachers in the preparation of sermons, because it is through his work that the preachers are made aware of the greatness of the salvation of the Lord (Eph. 1:17-20; 3:18);
- He is the Spirit of revelation; He leads the preacher to accept the salvation by Christ;
- He is also the Spirit of Wisdom: He gives a deeper insight into the revelation of God and the drive to testify, under the security of this wisdom;
- It is He who enables us to powerfully preach and sympathetically counsel from the Bible without fear and with all trust and humility (Acts 4:29, 31).

That is why Evely (1972:36) says: “The only authority in the church is the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit that no one can monopolize, control, or manipulate. The Spirit moves where, when and in a manner that it wishes.” Sweazy (1976:1) writes that, after the preacher has prayed and is filled by the Holy Spirit, “the preacher needs help with such matters as:

- what preaching can do;
- how to use words effectively;
- where to find enough material for sermons every seven days;
- how to draw a congregation together in love and trust;
- what makes people want to listen;
- how to use the Bible and;
- how not to abuse it;
- the way to lessen resistance to what may be unwelcome;
- what make a sermon march towards a worthy goal.

In addition to the above-mentioned questions the minister has to ask himself in the preparation of a sermon, there is plenty of advice to be sought, an exercise which a preacher should use as to make the sermon successful (Cf. De Klerk and Van Rensburg, 2005:12-145). To be properly prepared is indispensable to full-time as well as part-time ministers in order to deliver a good sermon.

As far as methodology in preaching is concerned, De Klerk and Van Rensburg, (2005:142) tell us: “The method (of delivering an unprepared sermon) is not recommended at all, because you, as a preacher cannot fulfil your responsibility to minister God’s Word.” With Sweazey, (1976:1) we assert that: “It must be recognized, however, that preaching is not a natural skill; the methods that will make it effective can be taught, and the mistakes that will spoil it can be pointed out. Even the most talented artists need instruction.”

At present, however, we notice that most of the ministers (trained ministers and leading elders) of the Reformed Confessing Church in Congo "ERCC" are abusing God's Word in Sunday worship as we shall explain this in the following lines.

We see that most of these Ministers appear on the pulpit without a properly prepared sermon. The audience can sense this when the minister is delivering his message. And to hide it, the ministers fill the service with lots of hymns and religious songs before or after the sermon, leaving insufficient time for the sermon. As a result, the local churches fail to grow qualitatively and quantitatively. They should remember that preaching is at the heart of Christianity, because it is the chief means of imparting the redeeming truths. It conveys and explains these truths and helps Christians to keep on growing (Sweazey 1976:6). Berkhof (1949:595) adds: "By giving His Word to the church, God constituted the church, the Keeper of the precious deposit of the truth. While hostile forces are visibly pitted against it and the power of error is everywhere apparent, the church must see to it that the truth does not perish from the earth, that the inspired volume in which it is embodied be kept pure and unmitigated, in order that its purpose may not be defeated, and that it be handed on faithfully from generation to generation."

To tell the truth, we found that it is common practice among the Ministers of the Word of the Reformed Confessing Church in Congo to deliver their sermons without having prepared them. Thus, we wonder what the future of these local churches will be.

2.3.1.1 The Role of the Church Council with regard to the Preaching of the Word of God

Article 21 CO of the Reformed Confessing Church in DRC stipulates: "The task of the elders consists in overseeing with the Pastor the local herd, by taking care in the fact that everything occur in order and according to the ecclesiastical

discipline and within the framework of institutions recognized by the Synod. They also supervise the work of the mission and the evangelism "(Cf. Church Order of Christian Reformed Church, article 24; Church Order of the Reformed Churches in South Africa, article 23; Church Order of the Reformed Liberated Churches in the Netherlands, article 21).

When reading the above article we clearly see the role of the Church Council towards the minister of the Word, namely to take particular heed of the minister of the Gospel. Therefore, it is of prime importance that these ministers preach and teach correctly and effectively, and that their labours are performed in all faithfulness (Van Dellen and Monsma, 1967:98).

In our context, however, it is not easy to give particular heed to the ministers of the Gospel because they sometimes consider themselves superior to other members of the church. A certain competence is needed. That is why Vorster (1999:46) writes "... For this purpose, the elder himself must be a student of the Word of God." Otherwise, the elder cannot supervise the minister of the Word. However, most local church councils are incapable of controlling their respective pastors. Taking all this into account, we would suggest that the church councils be composed of mature people who have enough knowledge of the Word of God, and who study the Word continuously.

2.3.1.2 The Task of the Congregation with regard to the Preaching of the Word of God

Broadly speaking, it may be assumed that all the Reformed Christians know that the preaching of the Word constitutes the central activity of the Sunday worship. They know that the Christian Church is the result of the preaching of God's Word. Therefore, they ought to attend the service every Sunday, partake in biblical study meetings and obey the Word of God. A well-prepared and delivered sermon benefits the local church and may contribute to the growth of Christianity itself. We therefore agree with Sweazey, (1976:4): "Good preaching

can be at the heart of everything a church does, in its building and outside of it. In other words, the congregation must listen and respond with faith. In addition, the congregation ought to have much respect for the preacher (pastor); it must love and obey him (Cf. Rochelle Confession, article 25). In return, the preacher must have the same feeling towards the congregation. He should behave according to the knowledge he absorbed during his many years of training. According to Evely, (1972:318): “Congregations teach their preachers; a minister learns more from his church members than he ever learned from his seminary. They best of all teach him the meaning of faith, the secrets of the human heart, and the skills of his profession. Devoted, loving, wise congregations make devoted, loving wise ministers.”

We see, therefore, that there is much room for improvement in our local churches with regard to both the pastors and the church members.

2.3.2. Correct Administration of the Sacraments

2.3.2.1. Meaning of Sacraments

Many reformed theologians claim that the word “sacrament” is not found in the whole Bible. But Nicole, (1990:266) writes: “The word sacrament comes from the Latin word “Sacramentum” which sometimes appears in the Latin translation of the New Testament to render the Greek word *mysterion*; translated in English as “mystery” and which means a hidden truth to the profanes, but which is revealed by God to his children. Thus, a sacrament is a truth that must be considered as holy.”

On the other hand, Berkhof (1949:617) regards the sacrament as “a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which by sensible signs the grace of God in Christ, and the benefits of the covenant of grace, are represented, sealed and applied to believers, and these, in turn, give expression to their faith and

allegiance to God” (cf Williamson, 1964:200; Belgic Confession, article 33; Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 27).

The Heidelberg Catechism is more explicit when it describes the sacraments as: “holy, visible signs and seals. They were instituted by God so that by their use He might the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the Gospel. And this is the promise: that God graciously grants us forgiveness of sins and everlasting life because of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q, A 66).

As we may gather, the word “sacrament” has several meanings among the Latin authors, but it usually means “oath”. In the Bible and for the ecclesiastical authors, it means a “hidden and sacred thing” and it corresponds to the word “mystery”. Therefore, we may deduce that its special meaning is an “effective sign of grace”. From all the above definitions, we may assume that the sacraments are visible signs of grace, established by Jesus Christ to strengthen our faith and to seal the promises of the covenant. Along with Crowley (1930:199) we may consider them visible signs, because they are ceremonies or external actions that represent in a sensitive way, the internal grace they produce in our souls.

2.3.2.2. Types of Sacraments

Under this heading, we are going to categorize the sacraments according to the conceptions of different churches:

- a The Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox Churches distinguish seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation or for the Greek Orthodox, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction for sick people, the Order and the Marriage (Cf. Jean-Paul, 1972:265; Douropulos, 1963:82; Williamson; 1964:201; Berkhof, 1949:620; Pelikan and Hotchkiss,1:2003:679-751)).

- b The Reformed Churches, Lutherans and Pentecostal Churches, recognize only two sacraments instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ: Baptism and Holy Communion (Mat. 28:18-28; I Cor. 11-23; Belgic Confession, article 33; Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 27; Institution Chrétienne, book 4, Chapter 18; Pelikan and Hotchkiss, 2:2003:205-662).

In short, we maintain the two sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, because they were established by Christ. Nowadays, we find that various opinions prevail in certain Churches about these two sacraments, and Nicole, (1990:267) describes the details of these opinions: for the Roman Church, the sacraments are effective in themselves to pass on a grace. They are the inescapable channel of grace. They are wholesome only for the one who receives them with good capacities, but it should be noted that the Catholic Church is not too much demanding in this matter. It is enough if the beneficiary does not put obstacles to the entrance of the grace. It is what we call the efficiency *ex opere operato*, by virtue of the accomplished action. The position of the Greek Church does not differ from the Roman's (Cf. Jean-Paul, 1972:277-303; Berkhof, 1949:626; Williamson, 1964:202; Paraliu, 1985:282; etc.).

To illustrate the matter, let us take the case of the pure sacrament of the "Lord's Supper" to throw biblical light on the various interpretations which in the past tore the Christendom in Europe and elsewhere apart. The partisans of the transubstantiation (Roman Church, Greek Church) teach that any substance of the bread and the wine evaporates, even if the outer characters remain there, and even if by a supernatural transformation what we eat and drink, is Jesus personally. So, we think of rendering justice to the word: "This is my body" (Nicole, 1972:277).

The Catholic, Jean-Paul (1972:296-297) provides the following comment: "The mode of presence of Christ under Eucharistic species is unique. He raises the Eucharist over all the sacraments and in fact 'as the perfection of the spiritual life and the end at which aim all the sacraments'. In the very holy sacrament of

the Eucharist are contained really and substantially the body and the blood, together with the soul and the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently, the whole Christ. This presence is named 'real', not exclusively, as if other presences were not real, but par excellence because it is substantial, and because by it Christ, God and man, makes himself present entirely". The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the time of the consecration and lasts as long as the Eucharistic species remain. Christ is present in each of the species and in each of the parts in the way that the fraction of the bread does not divide Him (my translation).

But contrary to this opinion, backers of Consubstantiation (Lutherans) maintain that "bread and wine remain what they are, but there is in the Lord's Supper nevertheless a mysterious and miraculous real presence of the whole person of Christ, body and blood, in, under and along with, the elements" Lutherans sometimes deny that they teach the local presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, but then they ascribe to the word "local" a meaning not intended by those who ascribe this teaching to them (Berkhof, 1949: 652).

We see that Nicole (1990:277) supports the above-mentioned idea, by asserting that Christ is materially present with, in and under the species of the bread and the wine according to the Lutherans. As we may gather, there is a difference between this conception and that of the Roman Catholics, because Lutherans believe that there is no alteration of the substance: the bread remains bread, the wine remains wine, but, in a mysterious way, the body and the blood of Christ are physically present. To put it more clearly, the bread and wine symbolize the body and the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Lutheran position as described by non-Lutherans is substantiated in Lutheran writings and by Luther himself. Lienhard (1989:126-127) provides us with the summary of his ideas: "... But what is essential for the Lutheran comprehension of the Lord's Supper, it is that Jesus-Christ Himself is the one who acts in the Lord's Supper, the crucified and resuscitated Lord. The words of the Lord's Supper are His words and they are part of an event during which He

unites with the bread and with the wine to be absorbed by us in His body delivered to the death and in His blood poured for us. So, Luther can write that Christ is for us, in the Lord Supper at the same time cook and servant, food and beverage ... He is at the same time the donor and the donation”.

On the other hand, Reformed Theology (of the Calvinist tradition), as quoted by Berkhof (1949:653), maintains:

“The sacrament is connected not merely with the past work of Christ, with the Christ who died (as Zwingli seems to think), but also with the present spiritual work of Christ, with the Christ that is alive in glory. He believes that Christ, though not bodily and locally present in the Supper, is yet present and enjoyed in His entire person, both body and blood. He emphasizes the mystical communion of believers with the entire person of the Redeemer. His representation is not entirely clear, but seems to mean that the body and blood of Christ, though absent and locally present only in heaven, communicate a life-giving influence to the believer when there is in his act of receiving the elements. That influence, though real, is not physical but spiritual and mystical; it is mediated by the Holy Spirit, and is conditioned on the act of faith by which the communicant symbolically receives the body and blood of Christ”.

To sum up, we find it not necessary to discuss the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Last Supper, because everything was made clear by Calvin, who came to the following conclusion “I thus say that in the Last Supper, Jesus Christ is really given to us under the signs of the bread and the wine, even his body and his blood, in which he achieved any justice to acquire us the salvation. And that it is made in the first place, so that we are united in only one body; secondly, so that being made participating of His substance, we also feel His virtue, by communicating with all His goodness” (Calvin, 1985:359).

In other words, Calvin sees there an outside sign by which God seals in our consciousness the promises of his will to confirm the weakness of our faith; and

we, in our turn, testify both in front of him and the angels and in front of the men that we consider Him as our God. That is why he adds that there is "nothing more with the sacraments, except that they are instruments which would be useless and vain without the operation of the Spirit, nevertheless that they are full of effectiveness when the Spirit toils by inside ... (Cf. Belgic Confession, art. 33; Berkhof, 1949: 641; Bonnell, 1963:145).

Hence, we may summarize all these views with Williamson (1964:203): "The sacerdotal view is that the saving grace of God is contained in the sacraments and conveyed by their administration. The Reformed view is that God the Holy Ghost works when, where and how He will in conferring saving grace, and that the sacraments are dependent upon and subordinate to His sovereign operation. It is because He is pleased to use the sacraments to exhibit and to confer grace that they become efficacious".

Our particular focus here should be on how these sacraments are administered in our Reformed Confessing Church. In the lines below, we are going to discuss the matter.

2.3.2.2.1. The Administration of the two Sacraments in the Reformed Confessing Church of Congo

2.3.2.2.1.1 Baptism

In our church, baptism is administered by a Minister of the Word (pastor) in Sunday worship, right after the proclamation of God's Word; because we cannot separate God's Word from the sacrament in the sense that the latter speaks about God's Word, and God's Word is contained in baptism (Cf. Williamson, 1964:208; Belgic Confession, art. 34; Westminster Confession of faith, to chapter 28; the Confession of the Netherlands, the art. 28-29; Scottish Confession, art. 22; Church Order of the Reformed Churches in South Africa,

art. 57-58). Baptism is administered by immersing the person in water or by sprinkling of the water. But who should be granted this sacrament?

Generally, baptism is administered to the children of the believers and to adults, after a proper biblical instruction (for instance, by means of the Heidelberg Catechism to the parents or guardians of the children). However, we see that many of the Ministers administer this sacrament without providing effective instruction or sometimes even without instruction at all, even though they had been educated to do so. They should, therefore, learn from the example of the Ethiopian who after instruction, was baptized (Acts 8:36). That is why it is crucial that instruction should precede the administering of baptism. Williamson (1964:213) provides us with the following lesson about the neglect of baptism: “If neglect of circumcision elicited the wrath and displeasure of God against Moses (Ex 4:24-26) and if the spurning of the baptism of John by the Pharisees and lawyers is likewise condemned (Luke 7:30), then how much more ought we to consider the gravity of a like disposition towards that which our Lord commanded.”

We therefore urge the church councils of the local churches of the Reformed Confessing Church in Congo, to take their responsibilities seriously. It is our duty to ensure that the Pastor has given instruction about baptism before its administration (Cf. Church Order of the Reformed Confessing Church, article 55).

2.3.2.2.1.2 Holy Communion

In our church, the sacrament of Holy Communion is administered by the ordained minister to adults and to the young people who had publically confessed their faith in front of the Church, and who walk with dignity according to the Gospel in their faith. This sacrament is administered after the proclamation of the Word of God. Before administering it, the minister delivers several inspiring sermons to the members of the Church two or three Sundays

before the Sunday of the celebration of the sacrament. This is to warn the believers not to come to the table of the Lord without repentance and to explain the dangers which can result from it (Cf. 1Corinthians 11:29).

Concerning the materials to be used as symbols during Holy Communion, the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ used unleavened bread and fermented wine (Matthew 26:17-29; Luke 22:23; 1Corinthians 11: 23-26). But today, we have noticed that in our local churches and in other denominations, we use in lieu of the unleavened bread, anything from bananas to fritters and yams, and instead of fermented wine, we use juice or water (Anon, 2009:140). What a deviation! Where does it come from? Is it due to the poverty of our local churches or to the imitation of other denominations? If this deviation has its origin in the poverty of our local churches, this can be overcome by decreasing the number of times this sacrament is celebrated. And if by imitation of other denominations who do not tolerate the alcohol contained in the wine and use water, juice, or other soft drinks instead of the fermented wine, why did Jesus Christ Himself use fermented wine for this purpose?

In this respect, our local churches should use the materials that Christ Himself used. Failing to use them is an abuse. What other sects and denominations around us do is not proper and has no biblical grounds. Our churches should not imitate them. With modernization, fermented wine is available worldwide. That is why we should act as God's Word advises us: "You will deduct nothing; but you observe the commands of the Eternal, your God, such as I give them to you ..." (Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19).

2.3.2.3. Discipline

2.3.2.4. The Concept “Discipline”

The term "discipline" has several definitions:

1. The practice of training people to obey rules and orders and punishing them if they do not; the controlled behaviour or situation that results from this training.
2. A method of training your mind or body or of controlling your behaviour; an area of activity where this is necessary.
3. The ability to control your behaviour or the way you live and work.
4. An area of knowledge; a subject that people study or are taught, especially in a university. (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2006:415).

And the Nouveau Petit Larousse, (1968:322) defines "discipline" as a “set of regulations which govern certain bodies, certain assemblies, as the Church, the army, the judiciary, the schools”.

Kwakkel (1990:40) regards discipline as a mutual surveillance of the parishioners, the admission to the sacraments, the excommunication etc. It is the latter definition that we find suitable for the situation in our Reformed Churches. This corresponds with the idea of the great reformer, Bucer, who defines discipline as the sum of all the efforts of the church to encourage piety and to maintain a Christian standard of behaviour (Sunshine, 2004:470).

We should proceed from this standpoint to find out how the church council applies discipline in our local churches. This is the concern of the following point.

2.3.2.5. The Task of the Church Council in the disciplinary Action of its Office-Bearers

Before discussing the task of the church council in this situation, we shall first of all speak about the authority which was given to them. Reading in the Bible, we find that all the authority given to men on earth comes from God (Roman 13:1). In the Church, it is the same God, author of the church who gives the ministerial authority to chosen persons to edify and lead His Church (Ephesians 4:11-16; Matthew 16:17-19; 18:17). And this ministerial authority is, according to Du Plooy, (2001:62) threefold: “*Potestas doctrinae, potestas jurisdictionis and potestas in legibus ferendis*”. The disciplined ecclesiae is part of the *potestas iurisdictionis*, the latter being the responsibility to govern the church”. This responsibility to govern the church by Word and Spirit was given to the church, especially to the Apostles as the leading group (Matthew 16:18-19). And today this responsibility is in the hands of the elders, not in the hands of one person whom the members of the Roman Catholic Church call the vicar of Christ or successor of the Apostle Peter (Cf. Paraliu, 1985:123; Williamson, 1964:232; Berkhof, 1949:589).

The mandate of the church is always to serve and administer the authority of Christ who is the only One with *auctoritas* as the only Head of the church. Grossman (1996:23) explains: “The authority of church-officers in the biblical government is carried out not through ecclesiastical councils. By declaring church councils to be the proper method for the exercise of Christ’s authority by officers in the church, Belgic and other Reformed and Presbyterian Confessions take a specific stand with respect to the age-old struggle within the Roman Catholic Church about the authority of councils as opposed” (Cf. Bruijn, 1999:119).

We should therefore realize that the church council of each local church plays a very important role in the field of discipline in the church. It has to follow and observe what the Word of God says and deal with it through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For, it is the Spirit of Christ that leads us in all in our faith in the

trine Godhead. Wray, (1978:1-15) supports this view: “The exercise of discipline is a command from the Lord of the church ... The failure to administer discipline is equivalent to a tacit admission that there is no spiritual power or authority in the act, but simply a breaking of outward ties.”

Though we are talking a lot about the church council when dealing with the church members' discipline (our priesthood of believers) the Reformed principle should not be forgotten, especially that of the local church members' cooperation to check if there is an objection about the decisions taken. We should also see that these objections are acceptable if they are in accordance with the Word of God. This is confirmed by Grossman (1996:25): “... the authority of the government comes from God, its rules are declared in His Word, the Bible, and it is administrated by church members who exercise Christ's authority when they carry out His commandments for Church rule.” But, when they do not carry out the commandment of Christ for Church rules, they are not disciples of Christ. True disciples always subject to His discipline which He administers in many ways, chiefly through the church and its duly appointed officers. The very Scriptures themselves are to be an instrument of discipline (2 Timothy 3:16), and should be taught “with all authority” (Titus 2:15; Wray, 1978:8).

In other words, discipline rests on the Word of God; but the latter cannot rest on discipline. Everything done in the church should be carried out in the light of the Word of God. To support this, Belgic Confession, article 32 reads:

“We believe that, although it is useful and good for those who govern the church to establish a certain order to maintain the body of the church, they must at all time watch that they do not deviate from what Christ, our only Master, has commanded. Therefore we reject all human inventions and laws introduced into the worship of God which bind and compel the consciences in any way. We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God. To that end, discipline and excommunication ought to be exercised in agreement with the Word of God”.

“For the Word of God insists on proper discipline in the church of Christ” (Berkhof, 1949:578).

This brief account of the task of the church council may pave the way to understanding the application of the marks of the true church.

2.3.3.3 Realization of the Marks of the True Church in the Life of Reformed Confessing Church today

As mentioned hitherto, we can say that the Reformed Confessing Church in the Congo will not reflect the image of the true Church of Christ, unless it manifests the real and effective presence of the three marks of the true church of Christ in everyday life (inside and outside the Church). They are: God's Word should occupy a central place in our worship; its preaching should be prepared well in advance, that is in these preceding time (ideally 6 days before Sunday), in spite of his other pastoral occupations, a pastor needs to reserve at least three hours to the preparation of the sermon until its delivery on Sunday. We should add that, before beginning the preparation of the sermon, the pastor should ask God for the assistance of his Spirit, because from the experience of the first Christians, we read that they were filled with the Holy Spirit when they preached. Besides, the Bible reads: “And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation”. Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added "(Acts: 2:40-41).

When the Word of God is well prepared and well preached, the result is, in the first place, qualitative, and, in the second, quantitative. The believers' faith comes necessarily from the Word of God as it is preached when they follow it and when they apply it in their daily life. That is the reason why the Apostle Paul advises Timothy: “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16). Therefore Godfrey

(2000:24) warns “We must listen to the scriptures so that we will act as God’s Word teaches us to act.”

We have noticed that some ministers in our local reformed churches of Africa do not have a second worship on Sundays in which the sermon is prepared from the Heidelberg Catechism. This is a mistake by the Church Councils of those Churches.

That is why knowledge of God’s Word lacks substance in those Churches. Sunday is the day which is reserved for the glorification of God.

The administration of the sacraments is to be effective, and it has to be respectfully made according to the established liturgical order. The materials to be used should be those the Lord Jesus had Himself used (fermented wine and unleavened bread) when he established the sacraments: “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:17-20); “And therefore go and make followers of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

In addition, we should not omit to celebrate the Lord’s Supper for one or two years, and to administer baptism as it is customary here. This implies that we disobey the order of Christ; and if we disregard His instructions, it amounts to abuse. The local Churches which obey the order of their Leader, in spite of financial difficulties, can celebrate the Lord’s Supper twice or even once per year, instead of four or six times. This must be compulsory and it will depend on each local church’s organization.

The general discipline of the Church has to be applied without fear, without consideration of social position, and without shame to the members of the family, the clan, tribe or ethnic group. The members of our local Churches have

to fear Jesus Christ, the Leader of his Church, who has instructed the Church to treat the stubborn sinner as a pagan or as a tax collector (Matthew 18:15-18).

Discipline should be effective, and to render it effective, it should be in agreement with God's Word; because it rests on it. This Word guides us to proceed with patience, love, and objectivity to glorify God by obeying his instructions for the maintenance of proper church government. The object of every type of discipline, whether it is gentle correction, admonition, rebuke, or excommunication, is always the restoration of the offender to maintain the purity of the church (Wray, 1978:2-4).

Apart from this general discipline which includes everybody (church members and office-bearers), there is also a more special type of discipline, that of the office-bearers who are in charge of preaching, teaching and defending God's word. They also watch over themselves and over the flock of the Lord (Acts 20:27-28). When they fail to do what they teach, they ought to be severely punished (James 3:1) (Cf. Monsma Van Dellen, 1967:322-325; Vorster, 1999:145-147).

More information on this matter appear in chapter four, which deals with special disciplinary cases in the past, and discusses the new process that can be suitable in our context. It may be accepted that, nowadays, there are pharasaical and unconverted people in our local churches. But if they practise the Word of God loyally, administer the sacraments correctly and apply the discipline of the church correctly, we dare believe that they may serve Jesus Christ, our Lord in obedience. In the light of this, we realize that the Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo is required to manifest itself to be the true Church of the Lord. To achieve this goal, it must be characterized by what Williamson (1964:189) explains below: "thus we may say that the true church becomes visible, not by an identification of persons, but by an identification of presence. The true church of Christ (his body of elect persons) will manifest itself, not by a disclosure of certain things that true believers will do (even though there be hypocrites mixed in with them). They will

profess the true religion and maintain fidelity to Word, sacraments, and discipline, which is required of a true visible church. It is the presence of these activities of elect persons which makes the body of Christ visibly evident.”

2.4. SUMMARY

In this chapter, we dealt with the absolute necessity of the true manifestation of the three marks of the true Church of Christ in the Reformed Confessing Church in our country. Although these marks do exist in our church, they are sporadic. That is why, with this dissertation I attempt making an urgent appeal to the local churches of the Reformed Confessing church to apply the Reformed principles of church government.

We looked back at the history of the Church, particularly the period of the Reformation in the 16th Century, to the causes of this Reformation, and highlighted the marks of the true Church of Christ to distinguish it from the false church. Although the Church was divided at that period in such a way that there were many Churches, sects and communities, that was not the Reformers' intention.

Seeing the diversity of the churches of the Reformation and fearing to lose its standing, the Roman Catholic Church named four attributes (Unity, Holiness, Catholicity and Apostolicity), to identify herself as the only true Church of Christ. On the other hand, the Churches born from the Reformation claimed and maintained that the three marks which identify the true Church of Christ from the false church are: the pure preaching of the Gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the correct exercise of church discipline. By doing so, they did not pretend to be the only true church, like the Roman Catholic Church did, but they believed that, where these three marks were practised with loyalty according to God's Word, there the true Church of Christ was to be found and the Church needs to show and display the attributes (imperative) which the Church received as gifts from the Lord Himself (indicative). (Cf. Belgic Confession, art. 29; Williamson, 1964:190; Berkhof, 1993:577-578; Du Plooy, 1982:121-179)).

This chapter has been an attempt from the perspective of reformed theology to alert the ministers of our reformed local churches, their church councils and their members to respect the Word of God and do what it tells us to do.

Now that we have looked at the manifestation of the three marks of the true church in our local churches, we noticed that we are mostly concerned about the discipline; because it is applied when there is sin. However, the Bantu-Luba people and members of our church do not understand sin in the way it is depicted by the Bible. That is why we would proceed to discuss it in the light of the Word of God to help understand discipline and its application in the church of Christ.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF THE BANTU-LUBA PEOPLE'S CONCEPT OF SIN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Bantu-Luba people regard sin as something which comes from outside and has nothing to do with the heart. Contrary to what the Bible says, a Muntu-Luba is born without sin. From a Christian perspective, sin is the transgression of or disobedience to God's law or to His will or any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God (Cf. Westminster Shorter Catechism, question and answer 14, Tenney, 1977:444; Brown, 1978:573; Freedman, 1992:31). We realize that this erroneous conception of sin by the Muntu-Luba comes from the conflict between their tradition and the Word of God.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, most of the members of the Reformed Confessing Church are from the Bantu-Luba community. They are scattered all over the four main provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, namely: Katanga, Eastern Kasaï, Western Kasaï and Kinshasa, the Capital city of the country. For this reason, and in order to foster a true understanding of the concept of sin among these people, an analysis of the concept will be made in the light of the Word of God. To achieve this goal, we are going to discuss the following points:

- Who are the Bantu-Luba people?
- What is the Bantu-Luba people's concept of sin?
- What influence does the Bantu-Luba people's concept of sin have on the church?
- What is the Reformed Confessing Church's view of the concepts "sin" and "sinner"?

3.2. WHO ARE THE BANTU-LUBA PEOPLE?

3.2.1. Identification

Discussing the races of Africa, Seligman (1966:117-122) says:” The Bantu are a congeries of peoples, belonging predominantly to central and southern Africa, named from and defined by the peculiar type of language that they speak, which is generally considered to have originated in the neighbourhood of the Great Lakes. On the basis of geographical distribution, but taking into account cultural and, to a lesser extent, historical factors, the Bantu may be grouped as follows:

- (i) Eastern Bantu, stretching from Uganda in the North, through Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique North of the Zambezi.
- (ii) Southern Bantu, South of Zambezi and Kunene River; a vast region including Rhodesia, the Southern half of Mozambique, East and central parts of the Republic of South Africa (RSA), Swaziland, Botswana, Basutoland (Lesotho) and South West Africa (Namibia).
- (iii) Western Bantu, from the Atlantic North of Kunene River to Northwest Zambia and the Rift Valley (the line of the Great Lakes) and extending in the Northwest to Gabon and the southern Cameroon. Politically, the area of Western Bantu comprises the Cameroon, Rio Muni (Equatorial Guinea), Gabon, Congo (Brazzaville) and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Bantu-Luba peoples are one of the subgroups within the Western Bantu group. According to Mudiba, (1975:57-59) these peoples present nearly the same structure in their languages, customs, physical and cultural features. They constitute the majority of the population of the central African countries.

3.2.2. Origin and present geographical situation

a) *Origin*

According to Mudiba, (1975:70-71), the Bantu-Luba people originally came from Haut-Lomami (Upper Lomami) in the Katanga province. This concurs with the oral tradition which assumes that all the Bantu-Luba came from one location known as Nsanga-a-Lubangu. According to Mbwebwe, (2002:46) this is, “a big and tall tree; it is a meeting place, a station”. This place is what Lukunyi, (2000:9) describes as “a point of dissemination for these people”. Tshijuke, (2006: 18-19) accurately places it in Bukama, which is a big modern city today, close to the Kisale and Upemba lakes. It was at that time under the reign of the great traditional chief, Kongolo Mwamba (Cf. Pâques, 1974:102-103; Mwadyamvita, 1987:19; Nkulu, 1992:13; consultants: Mishika Muanza M.; Moïse Badibanga).

b) *Present Geographical situation*

Although the Bantu-Luba are found all over the Democratic Republic of Congo, as already mentioned, they are mostly concentrated in the above-mentioned four main provinces. In Western Kasai, they occupy five territories, namely: Demba, Dibaya, Kazumba, Dimbelenge, one portion of the territory of Tshikapa (diamond site), and Kananga, the capital city of the province and Luebo. Tshijuke, (2006:13) explains that these territories are situated between 5 and 7 degrees latitude in the South, and 21 and 23 degrees longitude in the East. The nearest neighbouring tribes are: Kuba and Kete people in the North, Bindji in the East; Kete Bayombo, and Tshokwe people in the South-West, and Pende people in the West.

In the Eastern Kasai (Mbuji-Mayi), the Bantu-Luba are made up of four main groups, as described by Nkamba (2006:9): Bakwa Kalonji ka Cimanga, Bakwa

Bowa, Bakwa Ndobu and Bena Kanyiki. These four groups settled in a region limited

- in the West by Mbuji Mayi river, Kasekeye up to Lubilanji river,
- in the East by Luilu river and Banda with Mbuji Mayi rivers,
- in the South, Banda and Mbuji Mayi rivers and finally,
- in the North by Mbuji Mayi, and Lubilanji rivers.

In Katanga province, in the South of the country, the Bantu-Luba constitute the majority of the population. They are found in many territories, namely: Bukama, Malemba-Nkulu, Kamina, Kanyama, Mituaba, Kabongo, Lubudi, Luena, Nyunzu, Kabalo, Manono, and in Lubumbashi, the capital seat of the Katanga province.

In Kinshasa (the capital city of D.R.C.) the Bantu-Luba are found everywhere. Some people claim that they constitute the majority of the population in the city.

3.2.3. The Bantu-Luba people's culture

a) About God, His name, His worship and His role

According to the Bantu-Luba tradition, the concept of God's existence was not unknown to them before the missionaries' arrival in their area to evangelize them. The following names are given to God: Nzambi (meaning God), Lesa (meaning God), Mulopo Maweja (meaning Official messenger), Mvidie Mukulu (meaning Original Spirit), First Ancestor, Fertilizer, Master, Owner, Creator, Lawgiver, Supreme Being (Tshijuke, 2006:50-52; McVeigh, 1974:92; Mulago, 1973:83; Kabemba, 1983:175; Consultant: Abraham Kumuimba).

That is why Vansina (1965:169) says that : "... all the people believed in a Creator, the Nzambi of Kasai, the Vidiye of Katanga, the Efile of Songye. He was always considered as a kind of first ancestor. The ancestors and the names intervened frequently in the life of the living." The following example shows that God's existence was known to the Bantu-Luba: During public ceremonies and before offering sacrifices to the deceased ancestors, the name of God was/is called upon (Mulago, 1973:83). Adeyemo (1992:91) supports this view: "in all things, the African peoples are very religious. The fact of existence of God does not present any problem to them; their big problem is how to reach Him." In the same vein, Van Der Walt (1988:11) writes: "Before the Africans even had contact with the Bible, God already spoke in their interpersonal relationships superior to the western." In other words, God is worshipped by the Bantu-Luba, as are their deceased ancestors.

The many names above which have been given to God testify to His power, His holiness, His providence, His majesty, etc. These names can differ from one tribe to another, but they basically have the same meanings. This results from the fact that the Bantu-Luba tribes constitute one unique ethnic group "Luba" within which people sometimes speak different dialects (Mudiba, 1975:57-59).

As far as worship is concerned, the Bantu-Luba worship and revere God secretly through the deceased ancestors (Kabemba, 1983:176), Nyom (1983:129) explains that the ancestors' spirits are the mediators between God and man because they possess great power and are closer to the Supreme Being, source of life and force. Kabemba's opinion concurs with Turaki's who says that the belief in the ancestors is the most fundamental religious creed and tenet among African peoples. The religious institution surrounding this religious belief is what other peoples call "the cult of the ancestors" (Cf. Hofmeyer, J.W. and Gerald, J.P., 1994:20-23; Paw, 1963:33; Nkulu, 1992:33).

Although the Bantu-Luba worship God (Supreme Being) through the ancestors' spirits, they do not consider the spirits as the subjects from whom the replies to

their request come; but they serve the established order and hierarchy of God (Nyom, 1983:129), thereby believing that God is the source of blessing.

The culture of regarding the ancestors' spirits as the mediators between God and Muntu (man) is a reality of the Bantu-Luba people's adoration. However, this is not the proper way to worship the True God. The Word of God is against this practice. In Deuteronomy 18:10-12, Lord our God says: "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his own son or daughter in the fire, who practises divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord." Scarin describes the correct way of worshipping God: "Christ is the channel of communion with divinity, source of the vital forces and of the authenticity. In Him African man finds security and run-up to build his humanity and to reach the plenitudes to which he aspires" (Scarin, 1983:361).

Therefore, we may deduce that the beliefs and practices of calling upon the names of the ancestors as the mediators between God and men (among Bantu-Luba people and among many other people) do not come from God, the Creator. They come from Satan's plan (God's enemy) to draw the attention of the people away from God to him. Buijn (1999:34) urges us to reject the ancestors' role as mediators between God and us.

Be that as it may, we find that among the Bantu-Luba people, God is known as the provider of life, the leader and the protector of men. All good things come from Him (Kabemba, 1983:180).

3.2.3.2. *About the muntu (man) himself*

A Muntu-Luba is a very religious human being. He believes in a Supreme Being, Creator of everything and his own Creator. Because Maimela (2006:5) clarifies that: "it is believed in the African traditional religions that a person is

created by God even though this is not often explicitly expressed in the theological terminology”.

The Muntu-Luba enjoy their life on earth, and for them life continues after death. That is the reason why they have a strong belief in the deceased ancestors. In order to protect their life, they use any means to increase their vital force. For instance, they make protection amulets, fetishes; are opposed to every person or every spirit who tries to take away their life. Life makes sense and is successful when they have good relationships with their neighbours, the community, the ancestors, and finally with the Supreme Being. Maimela (2006:5) explains this idea: “an African is made fully aware that the individual’s life and its pursuit are not attainable in isolation and apart from one’s fellowmen because he is a communal being and is possible only in the network of mutual interdependencies between an individual and his or her community”. In addition, Mbiti (1990:274) writes that in the African traditional worldview, the well-being of a man is intimately connected with the well-being of the total creation. In the same respect, Van der Walt, (1988:1) says: “On the African continent, man is a group being, he has herd instinct.”

Finally, we see that a Muntu puts himself in the centre of life. As, Van der Walt (1988:1) puts it: “A Muntu is always thinking of being in the centre of life ... but not in the sense of the Western anthropocentrism which has mostly been individualistic”.

3.2.3.3. The wellbeing, progress, and morality of the community

With regard to the wellbeing and progress of the Muntu-Luba, we should know that Muntus are taught and educated by their family how to respect other people, and how to maintain good relationships with other people, from the youngest up to the oldest living peoples, as well as the deceased. This concurs with the Word of God. In Timothy 5:1-2, the Apostle Paul advises Timothy: “Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat

younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.” (Cf. Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16).

Muntu are taught through their oral tradition how to uphold the ancestors' norms. In community life they are afraid to break their relationship with their brothers or sisters. That is why Tempels (1959:71-72) writes: “For the Bantu, man never appears in fact as an isolated individual, as an independent entity. Every man, every individual, forms a link in the chain of vital forces, a living link, active and passive, joined from above to the ascending link of his ancestry and sustaining below him the line of his ascendants.” As a matter of fact, we may conclude with Meeus (2001:38) that “the feeling of dependence towards the ancestors, the respect given to elder people makes the foundation of their belief and their condition the vital forces and the clan's continuity” (Cf. Nkulu, 1992:22-27).

We find that the Muntu-Luba are hospitable people. They welcome visitors and foreigners to their homes. This seems to contradict what Turaki (1997:68) says about other African peoples: “An outsider has no right or protection and anything done to him has no moral and ethical value. It is an insider who has rights, privileges and protection under ethnic, racial or tribal laws.”

The Bantu-Luba provide education to the youth for the enhancement of their community. Their education lays stress on the central issue of their life: “marriage”. Therefore sexuality is an important topic in the curriculum of Bantu-Luba education. Tshijuke (2006:64) best illustrates the matter that from the age of 8 to 15 years, young Bantu-Luba (girls and boys) receive initiation in a special camp known as “Mukanda”. In this camp, young boys are circumcised; they are all trained to reach the conscience of the sexual existence of the group. After this training, a young man of 18 to 20 years old may get married with a girl of 14 to 18 years old and have children.

We can emphasise that according to the Bantu-Luba's conception, children are the community's assets. Mudiba (1975:161) remarks: "Children contribute to the Bantu-Luba's family prestige and economy." Psalm 127:3 underlines this: "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him." A Muntu-Luba who contracts marriage and who does not bear children has no standing in the community. They are sometimes regarded as witches or sorcerers.

As far as the community structure is concerned, we find that the Bantu-Luba people are organized in two types of families:

- The restricted or linear family, which is made of the father, the mother and the children;
- The large or expanded family, which is a limited group of restricted families with an aged person as the leader (Meeus: 19). This is followed by the clan, the tribe and the ethnic group.

3.2.3.4. *About a Muntu-Luba's Morality*

From the cultural point of view, we see that Bantu-Luba morality is based upon ancestors' codes, norms or laws. Turaki (1997:68) describes it thus: "What may be considered right or wrong depends upon the groups. Moral and ethical interpretations, considerations and applications vary as one moves from his group to another group".

Though the norms and laws are set for the wellbeing of the community, the Bantu-Luba nevertheless consider themselves to be without sin from their birth. But they are sometimes influenced by evil spirits to do wrong.

According to Tshiamalenga (1974:128) we see that wrongdoing or error seems to be an external reality with which a Muntu-Luba may get into contact. The Muntu-Luba have no consciousness of being conceived in sin, but they can be

guilty. Conradie and Sakuba (2006:58) write: “In African traditional culture, there is a tendency to regard human wrongdoing as the product of external evil forces beyond the control of the individual”. But we find that it is a mistake because, as a Christian, a Muntu should be filled with the Holy Spirit. We should not always blame outsiders. Sometimes, our hearts do what is forbidden to do.

When we analyse the way the Bantu-Luba understand the concept sin, we discover that there is no difference between their conception and that of the Pelagians; because the latter even deny the concept of original sin. However, the Word of God is clear about a man’s heart and original sin. Genesis 8:21 reads: “Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said to his heart: never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood.” And Psalm 57:2 prays: “Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”

With the above-mentioned quotations, we have made it clear that the Muntu-Lubas’ understanding of sin is wrong. They ought to know and acknowledge that they are born in sin and that they are tainted from birth. One of our confessions reads: “We believe that through the disobedience of Adam original sin is extended to all mankind; which is corruption of the whole nature and a hereditary disease, wherewith even infants in their mothers’ wombs are infected, and which produces in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof, and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn all making.” (Belgic Confession, article 15; cf. question and answer 7 of Heidelberg catechism; Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter. 6:point 1-6).

According to Muntu-Luba social justice to a person who is found guilty of any wrongdoing within the community is judged according to ancestral laws and norms. Justice is rendered to everyone. And, as the Bantu-Luba community is a fragmentary society, wrongdoers are judged by the chief of the lineage or by the chief of the clan. Judgement for both the community leaders and the other members of the community are rendered in public sessions. But, for the

community leaders, the verdict is made by a narrow circle of the community members. Because a Luba saying goes: “Mukalenge katu wangula nkashama”, which means that a community leader cannot be accused of having been caught red-handed. He is considered to be someone sacred (consultant: Kabamba Kanyuka). The philosophy behind that is that a chief is a role model for his community. If a common member of the community is informed about the chief's mistakes, he may use this as an excuse to follow the model and misbehave himself. That is why, commenting on this, Van der Walt (2006:126) concludes: “A leader is a redeemer, who is honoured as divine.”

In addition, judgement is rendered by means of different competent judicial organs. Tshijuke (2006:44) mentions the following: family council, village council, and tribe council, in such a way that the customary court is composed of a chief, a fire keeper, a war advisor, and judges. He adds that the members of the team to make the judgement are selected according to the following criteria:

- having an analytical mind,
- presenting a teamwork spirit,
- being competent,
- displaying authority in the concerned matter and above all,
- displaying moral integrity.

3.3 THE CONCEPT OF SIN AMONG THE BANTU-LUBA

The term “sin” is not frequently used in Bantu-Luba language. They use the word “cilema”, which more or less means “fault” or “error”, as the equivalent of sin.

In this third part of our chapter, we are going to rely on knowledge acquired from interviews since there is not enough literature on this matter. We are going

to discuss and analyse the concept in the light of the Word of God, and our particular attention will be focus on the punishment of erring community leaders.

Our aim is to see how the Bantu-Luba people traditionally judge community leaders; because we find that this process has a direct influence on the church members when dealing with erring church leaders.

3.3.1 *The Bantu-Luba people's understanding of sin*

The word "sin" and its equivalent "fault" (cilema) are understood by the Bantu-Luba people as a transgression of the ancestors' rules and regulations, norms, and customs. When a Muntu-Luba (person) errs, he errs against his fellowman, and in the process hde breaks off the relationships between himself and all his community. In other words, the Muntu-Luba understanding of the term or the concept "sin" is totally different from the biblical one, as already mentioned. Conradie and Sakuba (2006: 59) put it more clearly when they write: "Sin is not understood as alienation from God; but it is understood in terms of breaking the moral codes of society."

Sin originates from outsiders. It does not originate from within a Muntu-Luba's heart. It is something which someone may possess, something he can leave out when he does not like it and which he may keep when he feels like doing so. This leads us to conclude that the Muntu-Luba have a light and I inadequate consideration of sin.

In the light of the above, we believe that the Word of God has not totally touched the hearts of the Bantu-Luba members of the Reformed Confessing Church of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Therefore, in the Bantu-Luba's philosophy of sin, God is not fully acknowledged. He is viewed as a supreme referee. This conception is erroneous, as God the Creator of everything is thereby belittled and downgraded. This is exactly what Blocher (2000:20) means when he asserts that God is not concerned with our sin as if He were the

origin of it or someone who sides with it; we should not forget that inside the wrongdoing man remains hostile towards God while the latter is totally, radically, and absolutely good.

3.3.2 Types of sins (faults)

According to Bantu-Luba tradition, sins are grouped into two types, namely: major sins and light or minor sins (consultant: Mishika Muanza). Major sins are sins which can create disaster, faults that can lead to death, famine, accidents, and adversity. This happens when people violate the norms of the society or the rules and regulations of the community. Light sins, on the other hand, are sins that are less likely to lead to disaster.

a) Major faults (sins)

The following faults (sins) are categorized as major sins: murder, adultery, burning down of a house, witchcraft, child abuse, fighting, insulting, and disrespect for parents or in-laws, or to the elders of the family and the community.

b) Minor faults (sins)

Faults such as getting or being angry, cheating, stealing small things and lying are considered to be less serious in the Bantu-Luba community and there is no punishment for a person found guilty of any of them. The Bantu-Luba find it unnecessary to punish an offender for light faults. To illustrate the matter, Adeyemo (1992:55) provides the example of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, who behave in the same way as the Bantu-Luba of the Democratic Republic of Congo. For the Yoruba people, “no serious punishment is attached to minor sin. Sometimes the offender is scolded in the family circle or by friends”.

3.3.3 Punishment

3.3.3.1 *Ordinary community members*

In Bantu-Luba society, any person who committed a major sin towards another member of the community in public, is punished for the major fault. However, there is no judgement for a secret major fault. The offender is free until he or she has been proved to be guilty. In Bantu-Luba society the punishment of an offender is an elaborate process. The people organize a judiciary court led by a team made up of the chief of a clan, the chief of a tribe, or the chief of an ethnic group assisted by his notables.

To avoid objections after the judgement, the verdict handed down must be based on the impartial analysis of the elements presented. The procedure in the judiciary court is the following:

1) Listening

At this level --

- 1) the person who is wronged brings his complaint to the chief.
- 2) the chief summons his notables and inform them about the case and explains the matter.
- 3) the chief summons the accused and listens to him/her .
- 4) And then follows the confrontation of the two parties.

2) Confrontation

In this step, the chief summons the accused, the wronged person and the audience (village). As already mentioned, the judgement is public. The judge

leads the judgement in the presence of the chief and his notables, questioning them and their witnesses.

3) Discerning/assessment

Here, particular attention is accorded to the witnesses. And at the end, the decision to punish the wrongdoer is made with the consensus of all the members of the audience. This public judgement is called “Masambakanyi” (Tshijuke, 2006:44). But if the case is complicated or needs more consultation, no decision is taken; the chief says “bulale bufuke” (consultants: Albert Kulambi; Paul Mbuyamba). These are the words used when it is difficult to decide upon a case on the spot. It means: “Take time, night will bring wisdom and lead to a solution”.

However, when there is a proof of a transgression, and if the accused person does not accept his/her fault, then the poison test was used to confirm the accused’s guilt. This poison is called “Tshipapa”. It is a mixture of poisonous plants and the skin of a leopard. In former times, it was given to a suspected wrongdoer to drink, after which the accused would die instantly if he were really guilty (consultant: Benjamin Badibanga). This practice was fortunately abolished by the Belgian colonizers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, they realized that the poison in the “tshipapa” could kill anyone, thus innocent persons as well.

The punishment of a wrongdoer further depends on the seriousness of the fault committed. The punishment of an offender ranges from the fine of a chicken, goats, money, expulsion from the community, up to mutilation. A sin such as murder obviously calls for capital punishment; there is a Luba saying which goes: “Batapa wa tapa bieba, kutshinyi muela dinkenke.” This means: when somebody hurts you, you have to hurt him also (eye for eye, tooth for tooth). We know, however, that this custom goes against the Word of God.

3.3.3.2 *Punishment of the community leaders*

In Bantu-Luba communities, the punishment of leaders is treated with circumspection and happens very rarely, because of the following reasons:

- First of all, the leaders are regarded as sacred persons and representatives of ancestors and God on earth. They are considered as role-models and mirrors of the community.
- Secondly, leaders are supposed to embody the ancestors' norms, rules, and regulations. People want to see leaders set an example and be a model of good conduct. When they err, they are considered to have betrayed the community.

The procedure for the punishment of the community leaders is nearly the same as that used to punish an ordinary member of the community. It also occurs in public, but with a small selected group of the community members composed of the chief, the judges and some notables.

One can ask why a leader is judged by a small group of people. The reason lies in the following Bantu-Luba words of wisdom: "Mukalenge katu wangula nkashama", that is, a chief cannot commit a public fault; to fine a chief is disgraceful. And to make a judgement depends on the seriousness of his fault.

3.3.3.3 *The purpose of punishment*

Bantu-Luba justice is a community justice. It aims at reconciling the community members who have violated their good relationships. Wrongdoers are punished so as to restore them to order, to re-establish the smooth relationships which were broken with other community members when the fault was committed. In this regard, Adeyemo (1992:55) comments: "Character makes for good social

relations, it is laid upon every member of the community to act in such a way as to promote always the good of the whole body.”

In other words, we may say that by punishing wrongdoers, the community would like to see the punished persons tread on the good path, so that their life will make sense for all. Otherwise, the stubborn person will be excluded from the community by the chief. There is a Luba saying: "Luswa lumue luakabolesha nswa yonso", that is, one rotten ant can make other ants rotten.

3.4 THE INFLUENCE OF THE BANTU-LUBA CONCEPT OF SIN ON THE CHURCH

As mentioned hitherto, the Bantu-Luba regard sin as something which comes from outside; it is seen as something evil that people do against others in terms of the ancestral norms. However, there are also other views about sin.

From the Christian perspective, sin is understood as a transgression of the law of God, including the evil done against another person. But this evil comes from a person's heart, not from outside. Traditionally, the Bantu-Luba do not believe that sin comes from the heart of a man, because the heart of a Muntu-Luba is clean from sin (Tshiamalenga, 1974:139).

When a Muntu-Luba commits a fault (what we call sin) against his fellow man, he disobeys the ancestral norms. But after this has happened, he must find where it comes from, why it happened and what to do to set it right again. God the heavenly Father is not involved in the matter (of sin). He is regarded as a referee, a Sacred Being. Naturally, the way the Bantu-Luba understand sin (fault) influences today's Bantu-Luba church members.

Bantu-Luba church members still consider themselves blameless, pointing fingers to outsiders when they sin. This kind of conception denies the presence

of God among His people. It pushes Him away, it brings forth confusion and generates conflicts, divisions, etc. Unless all church members understand sin as it is revealed in the Word of God as we shall discuss it in the following point, then the church will not have peace, harmony, will not know what forgiveness in and through Christ really means and finally it will not bear holiness.

3.5. THE VIEW OF THE REFORMED CONFESSING CHURCH OF SIN AND SINNER(S)

3.5.1 Sin

3.5.1.1 Definition

Of course we find the main terms used in the Old and New Testaments for the word “sin”. Adeyemo (1992:59) says that no single Hebrew word is able to exhibit the Old Testament concept of sin fully. In spite of that, all the words for “sin” has nearly the same meaning.

For example, “**ht**” means to be mistaken, to be found deficient or lacking, to be at fault, to miss a specified goal or mark; “**ps**”, signifies wilful, knowing violation of a norm or standard; “**w**” is not used to indicate moral guilt or iniquity; “hamartia” means a missing of the mark; “parabasis” means transgression, and “paraptoma”: a fall. In the New Testament sin is called: *harmatia*, *adikia* and *anomia* (Freedman 1992:31-32; Adeyemo 1992:59).

In Christian theology, however, sin is defined as transgression of the law of God, or a lack of conformity to the law of God (Alexander and Rosner, 2000:782; Berkhof, 1993:233). Freedman (1992:36) clearly regards it as a conscious and responsible act, by which a man rebelled against the unconditional authority of God in order to decide for himself what way he should take, and to make God’s gifts serve his own ego (See also de Bruyn, 1997:277;

Blocher, 2000:28-36). The doctrine of sin has certainly been of crucial importance for the Church.

In addition, we see that in ancient times, sin was a serious matter in the Israelites' religion. Freedman (1992:31) confirms this when he says that the plethora of Hebrew terms and their ubiquitous presence in the Hebrew Bible testify to the fact that sin was a dominant concern of the Israelite theologians. Likewise, many of God's Prophets and Apostles such as Ezekiel, David, Paul, and John have spoken of sin and how it disturbs the relationships between God and man.

3.5.1.2 *Origin of sin*

Almost five centuries ago, a number of church-fathers, Reformers, Christian thinkers, theologians and scholars debated and have written about the doctrine of sin. They held different views, especially with regard to its origin and transmission. Some of those views were misleading and gave a wrong understanding of sin. As far as the origin of sin is concerned, the Reformed view is that man is the author of sin, not God. To repeat ourselves, the Belgic Confession, article 15 reads: "We believe that by disobedience of Adam, original sin has spread throughout the whole human race. It is a corruption of the entire nature of man and a hereditary evil which infects even infants in their mothers' womb".

As a result, it engenders all sorts of sin in us, and therefore it is so vile and abominable in the sight of God that he condemns the human race. It is neither abolished nor eradicated even by baptism, for sin continually streams forth like water welling up from this noxious source. The Canons of Dordrecht, third and fourth heads, article 3 reads: "Therefore all men are conceived in sin and are born as children of wrath, incapable of any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in sins and slaves of sins. And without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit,

they will neither nor can return to God, reform their depraved nature, or prepare them for its reformation.”

In addition, numerous Scripture references testify to this: Proverbs 4: 23; Psalm 51: 5; Luke 6:45; Matthew 15:19-20. God, the Creator is Holy and He cannot be the author of sin. He hates it but loves a sinner. It is for that reason that He sent his Son Jesus Christ to take away our condemnation, to absorb his wrath and show the wealth of God's love and grace for us. Alexander and Rosner (2000:517) write that the holiness in the Bible is used to describe God's absolute goodness in contrast to the sinful state into which the human race has fallen. One has to bear in mind that the holiness of God is as necessary to him as his being, and it originates in him.

We see, thus, that the origin of sin was denied by certain ideologies many centuries ago and even now. For instance, Monism teaches that God created everything, including sin; and Dualism maintains that since God cannot be the origin of sin, sin must have its origin in another reality than God (Conradie and Sakuba, 2006:60).

3.5.1.3 *Transmission of sin*

In this regard, Berkhof (1993:240) writes: "Several passages of scripture teach that sin is the heritage of man from the time of his birth, and is therefore present in human nature so early that it cannot possibly be considered as the result of imitation" (Cf. Rochelle Confession, article 10).

It can be noted that the above-mentioned statement rejects all ideas which deny the transmission of sin from Adam to all human races. To emphasize the matter, the Holy Scripture in Ephesians 2: 3 reads: "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath". Matthew (2003:2309) comments on this verse in this way: "The Jews were so,

as well as the Gentiles, and one is as much so as another by nature, not only by custom and imitation, but from the time when we began to exist, and by reason of our natural inclinations and appetites. All men being naturally children of disobedience are also by nature children of wrath.”

3.5.1.4 Hierarchy of sin

We have already mentioned that Bantu-Luba people used to distinguish between major and minor sins. No serious attention is paid to minor sins. We see that in general the distinction between sins is still in use in both Western and African culture (Jean Paul, 1992:390).

But before God, there are no minor and major sins; I John 5:17 tells us that all wrongdoing is sin. Alexander and Rosner (2000:518) comments that God does not know the hierarchy of sin but regards every form of disobedience as equally wrong, and therefore equally forgivable. The Word of God indicates that all wrongdoing is a sin, and therefore equally forgivable. But what we should know is that, though there is no hierarchy of sin as the Bible says, one has to bear in the mind their gravity. For example, the law of God forbids people to kill, but there may be a man who killed another man, and a second man who murdered five others. The sin of the latter man is very serious, which means that the punishment for the two killers is not the same. Therefore, we should speak of the seriousness of the sin (fault) instead of the hierarchy of sin.

We should bear in mind that sins have consequences, as the Word of God shows in many places. For example, we read in Galatians 6:7, 8: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction.” (See also Romans 8:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21; etc.).

When someone sins, he separates himself from his Creator, because he sins against God (Psalm 51). He breaks the law of God. In this regard, Berkhof

(1993:255) is strongly of the opinion that: "Sin is a very serious matter, and it is taken seriously by God, though men often make light consideration of it. It is not only a transgression of the law of God, but an attack on the great lawgiver himself, a revolt against God. It is infringement on the inviolable righteousness of God, Which is the very foundation of his throne". To break communion with God is a terrible thing. Man was created by God with the purpose of knowing and glorifying Him. That is why the first part of the Heidelberg Catechism, page 23 reads: "God created man good, and after His own image; that is, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his creator, heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal blessedness to praise and glorify Him." Therefore, when a person sins, he misses God's purpose for him.

When we look further, we see that the new Age Movement holds that there is no distance between God and man because of sin, because man is in God and God is in man (De Bruyn, 1997:47). Such an idea does not concur with the Word of God. God hates sin, He is the holy One. How can the Holy One be in a sinner and a sinner in Him?

Secondly, sin changes a person into a slave. All people are corrupted since their conception. Their hearts are full of evil things and they cannot do good things unless they are freed from the bondage of sins by knowing the truth. Our Lord Jesus Christ told the Jews: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free everyone who sins, is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever" (John 8:31-35). As slave of sin, man cannot escape suffering in his life, which is a result of sin in this world. That is why we may conclude with Berkhof (1993:259): Sin brought disturbance in the entire life of man. His physical life fell a prey to weaknesses and diseases, which result in discomforts and often in agonizing pains, and his mental life became subject to distressing disturbances."

Thirdly, sin makes man the enemy of his neighbour. Yet man is urged by God to love Him with all his heart and with all his soul and with his entire mind. And

then, he is to love his neighbour as he loves himself (Matthew 22:34-40). (See also Blocher, 2000:44-57). However, we see that, because of sin, man does not obey the law. Instead of loving, he hates and makes his neighbour suffer.

3.5.2 Sinner(s) in this life and the afterlife

3.5.2.1 A sinner in the present life

The noun “sinner” comes from the Latin word “Peccator”, which means “the one who commits sins” (Nouveau Petit Larousse, 1968:754). Freedman (1992 43) explicitly states that the noun “sinner” often (not always) indicates a worse state: a life which is not oriented around obedience to the will of God, but which is rather lived apart from him entirely. So, we may assert that a sinner is someone who lives a sinful life; someone who does not obey the law of God, and who is not afraid of God’s judgement. Who is driven by sins? In (John 16 8-9) a sinner is qualified as the one who does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the present life, a sinner must repent in Jesus’ name. We trust that, through Christ and God’s grace, the doors are open to sinner(s) to believe in Jesus Christ for their salvation. For, grace gives what someone does not deserve (Piper 2004:36). Besides, it is said: “Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10 43).

3.5.2.2 A sinner in the afterlife

In afterlife, all the sinners and those who do not believe in Christ will undergo the last judgement. Sinners (not believers in Christ) will be judged according to God’s law and condemned to eternal death for not believing in Jesus Christ. Believers of Christ Jesus will deserve to be condemned and punished, but will find redemption in Christ who paid for our sins. To illustrate the matter, the Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer 10 and 11 reads: “God is terribly

displeased with our original as well as actual sins and He will punish them by a just judgement temporally and eternally. His justice requires that sin which is committed against the highest majesty of God, be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul.” That is why we need salvation from outside ourselves in and through Christ alone.

Though in African culture, the majority of people do not expect any form of judgement in the hereafter (Adeyemo, 1992:68) The word of God explicitly states that no immoral, impure or greedy person, such as an idolater, will inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:9, 10).

3.6 SUMMARY

To sum up, we see that sin is viewed by the Bantu-Luba as a wrongdoing against a person. It comes from outside (evil spirits or people with evil spirits) so that in this matter, God the Creator is excluded. He is considered only as a referee and a judge. The Muntu-Luba are born without fault (sin); but their relationships with other people in the community can sometimes make them sin. They make a distinction between major and minor sins. The first category deals with sins that require a fine and punishment, whereas the second category has less consideration in the Bantu-Luba community.

But from the Biblical point of view, sin is first of all disobedience, a wrongdoing against God the Creator, and secondly, a wrongdoing against another person. In this way, it originates from our heart, because we are conceived and born with sin (Psalm 51:5). Therefore, we cannot shift the blame towards other creatures, or towards God. We should accept our responsibility when we sin. As a matter of fact, sinners are exhorted to believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. This is the only way to get salvation. The Word of God is very clear and states: “In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22). Jesus Christ shed his blood for us took away our sins. He is

the way, the truth and the life. And there is no forgiveness of sins and salvation without Him.

We see, however, that many Christians are guilty of sin every day by word, by acts and by omission. The word of God says: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9). Because God, the Creator loves his creatures in spite of our disobedience. He still gives us the opportunity to better our relationships with Him through Jesus Christ our Lord.

After having discussed the erroneous conception of sin by the Bantu-, we want to try and correct their error in the light of the Bible. We shall describe the main sins witnessed in the life of certain local churches, and then show how the sins are treated by article 66 of the Reformed Confessing Church of Congo. Thus, the following chapter will focus on the difficulties encountered in this article with regard to its formulation, incomprehension, improvement, and application in the Congolese context.

CHAPTER FOUR: APPLICATION OF ARTICLE 66 OF THE CHURCH ORDER IN THE PAST

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the application of article 66 of our Church Order. We will evaluate the procedure which was used for disciplinary action against an erring minister of the Word during the past years.

The Word of God teaches us that the church is a holy Assembly of God; and it has been commanded by Him to be holy and retain proper order (Cf. I Peter 1:15-16; I Cor.:14-40; Belgic confession, art. 27; Bridges, 1978:14; Vorster, 1999:14; Church Order of Dordrecht, art. 71 – 80). It is the church's duty to obey God's demand. In this regard, Berkhof, (1993:303) explicitly says: "The church has been given the duty to guard its holiness by the exercise of a proper discipline ... and to promote the spiritual edification of the church members by securing their obedience to the law of Christ."

We shall first of all attempt to translate article 66 from French into English. We shall try to see how this article is understood and interpreted by the church members of today and how it was applied in the past. Finally, we shall recommend a new procedure with the aim of improving our church. We shall conclude with a summary of the chapter.

4.2. ARTICLE 66

This article is an adaptation of the combination of articles 88 and 89 of the church order of the Christian Reformed Church in the USA and Canada (Kayayan, 1988:354). It reads:

Outre la discipline générale s'appliquant aux membres de l'Eglise, les ministres font, eux aussi, l'objet d'une discipline lorsque leur doctrine, leur prédication ainsi que leur conduite se sont plus conformées à l'Évangile ou contredisent la Confession de Foi réformée.

La discipline sera précédée par des mesures préliminaires de suspension de l'exercice du ministère, pendant le temps nécessaire à l'examen du cas et les nécessaires exhortations et avertissements.

Il incombe au consistoire de prendre la décision disciplinaire et l'exclusion du ministre, en avertissant et en informant le Conseil Presbytéral dont ce dernier est le pasteur. La disposition définitive du pasteur devra obtenir l'approbation des représentants du synode général.

La suspension des mesures disciplinaires peut être effective lorsque le ministre en question aura suffisamment des preuves de sa repentance et de sa volonté de changer de conduite.

4.2.2 English version

In addition to the general discipline applied to church members, ministers shall also be submitted to a special discipline when their doctrine, their preaching and their conduct no longer comply with the Gospel or when they contradict the Reformed Confession of Faith. That discipline can lead to the dismissal of such a minister from his ecclesiastical office.

The procedure will start with the preliminary measure of suspending the minister from exercising his ecclesiastical office during the investigation of the case, and the time for the necessary exhortations and warnings.

It is the responsibility of the classis to make the disciplinary decision, provisionally exclude the minister, issue warnings and inform the Church Council of the pastor. The pastor's final dismissal-decision should be approved by the deputies of the general Synod. The disciplinary measures can be suspended if the minister in question displays sufficient proof of his repentance and his will to change his behaviour

4.3. HOW THE CHURCH MEMBERS OF TODAY UNDERSTAND ARTICLE 66

Article 66, third paragraph, states: "It is incumbent upon (the responsibility of) the classis to make the disciplinary decision and provisionally exclude the minister, issue warnings and inform the Church Council of the pastor." Both the Church Council and the church members think that they are excluded from the pastor's disciplinary action procedure. They say that the Church Council's authority has been taken away and confiscated by the classis. They feel to still be trapped within a hierarchical system, that was condemned during the Reformation; a system where a man or a church body could use its power to make decisions on behalf of all the church members. In this regard, Bruijn (1999:155) warns: "It is incumbent upon the classis to make disciplinary decisions with consultation of the church council or else a door can be opened for the introduction of a hierarchical style and action which may finally lead to disorder in the church.

The church members' feelings of being excluded are motivated and explained by their belief in the completeness and responsibility of each local church. On this basis, they attach no importance to the meeting of the deputies of the churches in the same classis or regional synod. They argue that in the New Testament Church, each local church was called a church; a full church and not one part of the church (Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:27).

The Apostle Paul's words in the above-mentioned verse is true; even in our time the completeness of the local church is still respected as in the case of the forefathers in the Reformation. For, what is essential in the life of a local church is the pure proclamation of the Gospel, correct administration of the sacraments and proper application of church discipline. If all three are observed under the control of the faithful office-bearers, then the local church is a complete church (Belgic Confession, article 29, 30; Sara Little, 1965:143).

As a complete church, and as part of the fellowship of neighbouring churches in the denomination of the Reformed Confessing Church, the question is what the role and the responsibility of the local church, on the one hand, and of the denomination, on the other hand, are in the process of the dismissal of office-bearers like pastors. This will be discussed later. Vischer (2006:78-79) writes as follows about the active participation of the church: "By the nature of its own order the church is a sign of participation. It must champion participation. It must champion a communicative, transparent and participatory society. It must oppose all forms of coercive repression and tyranny." What Vischer states about the participation of the church applies to all matters of the church; but is it also true for the whole church, namely to take part in the disciplinary action of its ministers? This question can be answered in the following way:

In our tradition (Reformed – Calvinist), the participation of the whole church in disciplinary action against a communicant member or office-bearer is implicit in the announcements during the church service. The Church Order of Dort, article 74, reads: "By means of the various public announcements, a consistory (Church Council) enlists the involvement or participation of the congregation. Not only does church discipline begin with the congregation; it also ends with the congregation."

4.3.2 The Reformed Principles with regard to article 66.

First of all, pastors are elected men of God, whose mission is to teach His will from the Bible. Jesus Christ, the Head of the church (Revelation 1:20) mandates his office-bearers to serve the authority of Christ, so that they can guide and build up His church with various gifts to them (Ephesians 4:11-13). As Christ's servants, pastors have to follow His prescriptions and example taught in the Bible.

Since pastors, elders and deacons as leaders have been given the responsibility (Latin *potestas*) to bind and to loosen on earth (Matthew 16:16; 18:18); it is now their turn to bear special qualities and display true faith in the Christian lifestyle and the gifts of the spirit required for various ministrations (Vorster, 1999:145). And also as leaders, they are called to be different. In this regard Möller (1997:125) says: "The true shepherd acts in a way that he sets an example in all things, so that the congregation can follow him willingly". This is true according to the above-mentioned quotations. But there is false teaching by certain church leaders who oppose what is said. Some Congolese leaders teach people to follow what they are saying and not what they are doing". The problem is to know when there is a difference between what people say and what they do.

Another issue to be mentioned is that of the equality of ministers. In our system of church government, which of course is Reformed, all office-bearers are equal. There is no regional, national, or local office-bearer with any supremacy over and against other office-bearers. All of them have exactly the same authority whoever they are, as they are all ministers of Christ, the only Universal Bishop, and the Only Head of the church (Belgic Confession, art. 31; Rochelle Confession, art. 30; Grossmann, 1996:22). The ministers have exactly the same status as other members before God. As we may gather, this Reformed system is different from the Papal or the Episcopal one where the ministers are highly regarded and where a hierarchical structure exists.

As far as equality among church members is concerned, one thing to be mentioned is that, although the equality is recommended among believers, they are admonished to submit to Christ's authority and serve Him.

With regard to sins which call for disciplinary action, article 66 speaks of doctrine, preaching and conduct which are no longer in conformity with the Gospel or the Reformed Church Confession of Faith. In addition to this, disciplinary action for public and gross sins must be exercised against ordinary church members and office-bearers alike.

In the Reformed tradition, we distinguish between kinds of sins: public and secret sins. In the following lines, we are going to explain what each of them entails.

4.3.2.1 Public Sins

A public sin is any sin which is a disgrace to the church publicly, or which deserves punishment from the church authorities (Vorster, 1999:144; Kwakkel, 1990:49-54; Church Order of the Reformed Liberated Church of the Netherlands, articles 75, 80). When a minister of the Word (pastor) has committed a public sin, the first golden rule is that the Church Council as the governing body of the local church where the erring minister is a pastor must suspend the minister as a preliminary measure on the basis of a written complaint signed by two or more witnesses, and after the rule of *audi alteram partem* was applied (1 Tim. 5:19). Bouwman, quoted by Vorster, regards this principle as a very important one, because it serves to restrain the Church Council from acting on rumours without any proof (1 Tim. 5:19; Vorster, 1999:145). This is true even in our culture and in antu-Luba wisdom, where people say: "Tshimuna babidi katshitu mivilu to", which means that the testimony of two persons cannot be denied.

It often happens among the Congolese that people refuse to bear witness in a trial. Then the Church Council itself can bring a complaint and sign it. Meanwhile, the erring pastor has to be suspended preliminarily while the case is being investigated. One may ask to know why the minister is suspended from his functions while the case is still under investigation. The reply is very simple: Suspension is not dismissal. It is a temporary and preventive measure to allow the investigation of the case. The sins of which the pastor is accused involve his spiritual life, and in the process, also his ministry work, the church and finally God who called him to that service. That is why the pastor has to be prevented from carrying out his task and work. With regard to such sins, Johnson (1997:97) says: "Due to their public nature they are to be dealt with by consistory without delay so that the good members will not suffer added temptation to sin occasioned by delay."

It is during this procedure that the erring accused pastor has to be invited, to defend his case before his Church Council, as is his right, as well as afterwards after the preliminary suspension, and before the classis and the deputies of the regional synod must decide whether he should be suspended for a period of time or be permanently dismissed. In this regard, Vorster (1999:147) writes: "It is important that the accused pastor be allowed to defend himself and that the principle: <listen also to the other party > (*Audi et alteram partem*) must be applied". When the assembly of the deputies (classis) finds that the accused pastor is not guilty, then they can lift the suspension. But, when the accused pastor is found guilty, the classis has to dismiss him with the approval of the deputies of the General Synod. But meanwhile, what may happen if the erring pastor happens to repent? Can he be reinstated? In this regard, Vorster (1999:146) gives us the good example of King David who was reinstated after his repentance. Repentance is not automatically the only reason for reinstatement. Further questions to be answered are, for example, whether the sin(s) imply that he is not capable to proceed as a minister, and whether he has the gifts and trust of the church to serve with honour and dignity (Cf. The Church Order of Dordrecht 1618/19, art. 79 and 80).

4.3.2.2 Secret Sin

A secret sin is one which does not lead to a scandal, because a very limited number of persons are aware of it; or a sin which is not publicly known but perhaps only by one or two persons (Kwakkel, (1991:50-51) Example: If a Christian married man has sexual intercourse with a female prostitute it is a secret sin in the heart of the man, because as a Christian he has transgressed the law of God.

In the case of a secret sin, the procedure to be followed for the disciplinary action of office bearers is one our Lord Jesus Christ taught us in Matthew 18:15-17. When one of the office-bearers, or any church member, is aware of a secret sin of his pastor, the first thing he is to do is to keep quiet and not tell it to the other church members. He must personally confront the pastor in secret and lead him to repentance. When he behaves like that, he saves both the pastor and his ecclesiastical office. But, if the erring pastor does not repent his sin, the person who had observed him sinning has to go to him for the second time. And if this process does not bear fruit nor is there any change on the part of the erring pastor, the witness to the pastor's sin must take two or more other people with him to go and convince the pastor to repent and convert. These people chosen by the original witness are taken as co-witnesses plead with the sinner.

When the erring pastor refuses to listen to the exhortations of those people, the case must be brought to the office-bearers, and the Church Council have to formulate a signed complaint, where the process starts as indicated above.

In this regard, we are advised: "The consistory shall not deal with any report of sin unless it has first ascertained that both private admonitions and admonitions in the presence of one or two witnesses have remained fruitless, or the sin committed is of public character." The consistory has an important responsibility in exercising church discipline. But, it needs to be fixed in our minds that church

discipline is first and foremost the responsibility of the church members (Church Order of Dordrecht, art. 71).

4.3.3 Reformed Guidelines for article 66

In practice, the disciplinary action against a pastor in the Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo (R.C.C.C.) is to be executed by the classis with the approval of the deputies of the General Synod. The procedure is the following:

4.3.3.1 Step One: Submission of the Complaint

When a pastor, elder or deacon happens to commit a public and a gross sin, a complaint signed by two or three witnesses must be laid against him (Cf. I Tim. 5:19) and submitted to the Church Council. When there is no witness but the sin is known to the Church Council, this latter is to formulate the complaint and sign it. In our country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, people avoid to bear witness of other people's faults. They argue that it will damage their friendship and their tribal relationships. According to art 79 of the Dordrecht Church Order, the church council have to investigate and make a decision, after listening to both parties, and to suspend a person temporarily. Then the neighbouring churches join the church council, and together they must decide whether or not to suspend the person. Then if there is a possibility of dismissal, they refer the matter to the classis with deputies from the regional synod to decide on dismissal (deposition), which is permanent (look at the Dordrecht CO).

4.3.3.2 Step two: Hearing

Once the classis has been informed of the problem, it arranges a special meeting and invites the accused pastor and the deputies of the General Synod through its interim committee. The pastor has to defend his case lucidly in front of the classis and the deputies. In this regard, Vorster (1999:147) advises that

the pastor (office-bearer) may also make use of an advisor. Sometimes, you get a stubborn office-bearer who does not respond to the invitation. In such a case, the meeting for the case in trial can be postponed until all the parties are available to meet.

If the accused pastor refuses to attend the meeting, the classis, with the advice of the deputies of the General Synod, will make a decision in his absence. But, if the accused pastor does attend the meeting, he must be given ample opportunity to defend himself and he is free to ask witnesses to support his case. Likewise, the accusers must have the opportunity to give evidence and explain their charge. After the hearing, the accused and the accusers are excluded from attendance so that the classis and the deputies of the General Synod meet separately and apart from one another to consider the case and to prepare their respective conclusions and recommendations. Then the classis and the deputies reassemble to try and get consensus in determining the final verdict.

4.3.3.3 Last Step (Three): Deposition

When the pastor is found guilty according to the procedure described above, the classis has to make the decision to dismiss the pastor, in consultation with the deputies of the General Synod, and inform his Church Council of the outcome. This process did not work successfully in the past because of the numerous factors we shall discuss later.

We may also add that the congregation must also be informed of the process and the outcome of the hearing involving disciplinary action against an office-bearer. This will contribute to foster the congregation's trust in the handling of the matter and encourage them to pray for the offender.

The contents of article 79 of the Church order of Dordrecht in this regard are very helpful to us: "Where an office-bearer has fallen to grievous sin, the

consistory which appoints the brother to office also suspends him from office.” In article 79 one does not read of the congregation’s involvement as in some other articles. However, a consistory may not suspend an office-bearer on its own accord. The action of the consistory alone is temporarily. An office-bearer “shall be suspended from office by the judgement of his own consistory and of the consistory of a neighbouring congregation. In the case of a minister, this neighbouring congregation shall be appointed by the classis”. No consistory may act unilaterally; the judgement of a neighbouring church must be sought to safeguard against consistories getting rid of office-bearers for unlawful reasons, be they personality clashes or otherwise. Since a minister also plays a role within a bond of churches; a classis plays a larger role in his suspension and deposition than for elders and deacons. Suspension from office gives the office-bearer the opportunity to repent, but if there is no repentance or the nature of the sin warrants it, an office-bearer must be deposed simply because the congregation needs to be protected (Cf. Vorster, 1999:145).

4.4. THE APPLICATION OF ARTICLE 66 IN THE PAST AND THE RESULTS THEREOF

4.4.1 Case Study One: The Sin of Adultery

We observed public sins (adultery and simony) committed by two different local church leaders of the Reformed Confessing Church of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the years 2003 and 2005.

We shall first discuss the case of adultery that happened in one of the local churches.

The case was dragged out for six to seven years in the particular local church and nobody had the courage to mention, solve or bear witness to it. Yet all the church members muttered about the matter. Then a training seminar organised by an ordained pastor to discuss the government of a Reformed Church for the

classis of Kananga. The pastor had been trained at the University of Potchefstroom for Christian High Education, currently known as the North West University. During the workshop, the facilitating pastor described and clarified the procedure for disciplinary action against a teaching elder acting as a pastor.

Anyway, what exactly happened?

In the particular church, membership amounts to 73, including one teaching elder, three elders and one deacon. There were also three widows among the members who were the concubines of the teaching elder. He had visited them, accompanied by another elder who became the witness during the case that followed.

The teaching elder was alleged to have fathered two children by the youngest of the three widows. As time passed, the secret was disclosed and became known to all the church members.

The elder who witnessed the event reported it to the other elders so as to formulate a signed complaint against the teaching elder and to call the classis. Two elders backed up the erring and accused elder, and two others requested the classis to look into the matter.

From that moment, two opposing factions were formed and trouble ensued in the church. On the one side were the elders and their families who wanted the erring elder to be judged and, on another side, the camp of three elders and the majority of the members who belonged to the erring elder's tribe and who supported him.

The case was presented to the classis and a meeting was called to deal with it. Deputies from the Regional Synod and the neighbouring Regional Synod

attended the meeting, as the delegates from the General Synod had no transport to attend the hearing.

The President of the classis's Provisional Committee opened the session by prayer and an exhortation from the Epistle of Paul to Titus 1:5-11. He then welcomed all the deputies and declared the meeting open.

The defending elder was asked to face the meeting and hear the facts of the complaint against him. The case proceeded as follows:

Classis: how is your relationship with God these days?

Teaching Elder: My relationships with God are very good. I pray every morning and every evening. I lead the church service and pray for the church members.

Classis: How are your relationships with the church members?

Teaching Elder: They are very well.

Classis: A signed complaint against you was submitted to us. The following grieves are brought: You have committed adultery with three widows (sisters in Christ). One of them has borne two children from your relations. What do you know about it?

Teaching Elder: To err is human. Who has never committed mistakes? Who may testify to what you have said? Who is going to judge me, the Church Council or the Classis?

Classis: Yes, to err is human, but you are the one who was caught red-handed and must defend himself today. The witnesses of the case are here

(The president of the classis called one of the courageous witnesses to give testimony to the broad meeting).

Classis: Tell us clearly what goes on between the three widows and the teaching elder as set out in your complaint.

Witness: The teaching elder entertains adulterous relations with the three widows. The youngest of the three has even had two children with him.

On the spot, one of the deputies of the neighbouring regional synod who is the brother of the youngest widow agreed to be a third witness to testify in the case. He asked the erring teaching elder to humble himself and ask for forgiveness. The teaching elder refused. After the accounts of the defendant and the witnesses had been heard, they were dismissed from the proceedings. The deputies, with the support of the deputies of the Regional Synod and the neighbouring Regional Synod, decided to dismiss the erring elder. The erring elder was called back to face the meeting, and the decision of his dismissal was verbally communicated to him (Classis, Acts and Decisions, 2003:6).

The dismissed elder left the meeting, very angry with the deputies, especially his brother-in-law who was a deputy of the neighbouring Regional Synod, and the two elders from his own Church council who had accused him. As this meeting took place on a Saturday, the dismissed elder hurried away to lead the service before the classis's decision was communicated to the other Church members.

During the service, he criticized his dismissal, attributing the fault to the two elders who had accused him. These elders and their respective families did not feel comfortable with the other church members. At that very moment, the local church no longer existed. Some of the members who backed the erring elder said: "Nkala ya mu menu", which means, "Between a brother and a friend, the choice is clear". Certain members forsook their Reformed faith and others have become members of another Reformed church in the vicinity.

A few days after, the dismissed elder laid a complaint against the accusing elders with the tribunal. (See the attached convocation.) He accused them of blackening his reputation and his honour.

The two elders were summoned to attend the tribunal for judgement; but as the classis had been informed of the matter, it sent a commission to go and retract the complaint and stop the case.

4.4.2 Case Study Two: The Sin of Simony

“Simony” is the action of bribing, of corrupting to acquire and receive a ministry (Bruijn, 1999:156). It is one of the sins most frequently mentioned as the reason for the dismissal of a minister. An example of simony is given in the book of Acts of the Apostles, 8:22, where the Apostle Peter exhorts Simon the Sorcerer to repent of his wickedness and pray to the Lord, because he had offered money to the apostles in exchange for the gift of God.

Thirteen years after its founding, the local church “Bon Berger”, which means the Good Shepherd, experienced a case of simony which was committed by the teaching elder leading the local church. This practice continued for a long time and was only discovered in the year 2005. The reasons for the late discovery are discussed below.

The teaching elder appointed the elders and deacons he wanted and preferred before asking the approval of the congregation. The chosen elders had to give him money or a present (A goat, rabbit).

The teaching elder went further and started to demand the same type of gift before he consented to pray for someone in the case of a disease or an accident.

One day, one of the elders of the church experienced trouble in his house and he needed the teaching elder to come to his house and pray for him. When the teaching elder arrived, he entered the living room where he noticed a Coleman lamp, the only valuable thing that the family possessed. Before praying for the

family, he demanded that the Coleman lamp and three pigeons be given to him. When the owner of the house refused to give what the teaching elder was asking, the latter got angry and merely pretended to pray for the family before he left.

The following day, the elder who had requested the presence of the teaching elder reported the latter's behaviour to the classis through the Provisional Committee's president who, as Advisor-Pastor, was visiting the local church where the accused teaching elder was in charge.

He called a meeting of the Church Council after the Sunday service and condemned the practice of simony. Some of the elders (office-bearers) confessed that that practice occurred in their local church. The Advisor-Pastor advised them to root out that practice because it is a sin before God. An office or ministry cannot be sold or bought. God our Father has not sold it to us, but gave it to us free of charge. All the church members were astonished to learn that simony was a sin.

Some months later, the teaching elder resumed the practice. However, since all the elders were already informed, two of them formulated a signed complaint against the erring elder and sent it to the Provisional Committee of the Classis.

The Classis met and the erring elder was questioned. In the end, he confessed that he was practising simony to make both the ends meet and feed his family as he had no other source of income.

The case was heard and a unanimous decision was taken. The teaching elder was dismissed from his ministry (See Classis, Actes et Décisions, 2005:7).

Two weeks after his dismissal, the teaching elder returned to resume his position in the local church as the piece of land where the chapel was built was

his property. It was for him a way of putting pressure on the church members to let him continue his ministry, and there were some members who backed him.

The outcome was that that church no longer exists. Some of its members joined neighbouring local churches.

4.4.2.1 Concluding Remarks on the Two Case Studies

The above-mentioned case-studies reflect the reality of the two church-leaders' immorality and also the neglect of church discipline in the two congregations of the Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In addition, this sad and permanent situation does not exist only in our church, the Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; but also in many churches throughout the world.

What should be done is that Church leaders and church members obey the Word of God and apply it in their everyday life.

Thus from the above two case-studies, we may deduce the following as the origin and causes of a threatening situation:

- a) The general lack of biblical knowledge by the office-bearers and church members.
- b) Ignorance about the biblical disciplinary procedure.
- c) The wrong conception and application of blood relationships in church matters.
- d) The exaggerated esteem of leadership.
- e) The material poverty of church ministers.

- f) Confusion about the relation between church leadership and traditional leadership.

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NEW PROCEDURE IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR CHURCH

4.5.1 Reformulation of article 66

In addition to the general discipline applied to church members, ministers of the word, elders and deacons are subject to a special discipline when their doctrine, preaching and behaviour no more concurs with the Word of God or when they contradict the Reformed confession of faith. The discipline leads to the dismissal of these ministers from their ecclesiastical office and duty.

The Church Council with the advice of neighbouring Church Council will decide on the temporary suspension of elders and deacons from the exercise of their duties during the examination of the case and the necessary exhortations and warnings. In the case of ministers, the Church Council, the classis, and the deputies from the Provincial Synod decide on their suspension.

When the office-bearers (elders, ministers and deacons) harden their hearts and refuse to repent, or if the sin committed is of a public nature, the Church Council and the classis with the advice of the deputies of the Provincial Synod will decide about their deposition. However, elders and deacons shall be deposed by the church council with the advice of the neighbouring church.

4.5.2 Principles to Consider

- The office-bearers are Christ's servants commissioned to take care of His flock (1 Peter 5:1-4), and to whom the mandate and task are given to bind and loosen in the name of Jesus Christ who has been given the keys of the kingdom on earth (Matthew 16:18-19; Revelation 3:5).
- The office-bearers as leaders and shepherds of God's people are people of social standing and regarded as blameless; their attitude must reflect that of Christ, the head of His church (Cf. Kagtla, 1989:151; Van der Walt, 2006:126).
- The elders and minister(s) of the Word as office-bearers constitute the council of the local church which is the governing body in its own right, selected by God Himself through the approval of the local church as the instrument of God (Berkhof, 1949:584; Belgic Confession of Faith, art. 30-31; Du Plooy, 2001:65; Westminster Confession of faith, art. 30) It is unnecessary for the whole church to be present while judgement is being passed about an erring pastor (office-bearer). It is not about democracy in the Church, but about Christocracy, and the church council as the ordained governing body has the task to exercise discipline according to the approved Church order, which is founded and based on Scripture and Reformed confessions. The church members must bear in mind that church judgement differs greatly from a modern court or traditional court of justice. Blood relationships and gossip have an important and considerable role in the African society and culture in general and the Congolese in particular. The deputies of the classis and Regional Synod must pay special attention to wrongdoers, wronged people, and witnesses when passing judgement (Cf. Turaki, 1997:51).
- The Congolese people are afraid of bearing oral or written witness about other persons' faults. Given the fact that most of the church members have a very low standard of education, the Church Council, the classis and the Regional Synod have to bear that in mind when passing judgement.

So, when an office-bearer has committed a gross and public sin, the Church Council has to consider both verbal and written accusations. Then after they have verified the facts and discovered that the accusations are not true, the accusers must be warned. But, if the facts are proved to be true, the disciplinary process must be as follows:

According to the Bible, it is the task of the elders to censor an office-bearer (minister, elder, deacon); This is what Paul says to Timothy: “do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Here Paul addresses Timothy as a leader in this context. Timothy as servant of God fulfilled an important task in the congregation, and he needed assistance. In our context the members of the Church and the Church Councils of the Reformed Church Confessing believe: “When our authority is seized, the local Church is excluded from the process of censorship.” However, we do not agree with such a principle since Christ has chosen office-bearers for preaching, teaching, managing and taking care of the Church (Cf. Du Plooy, 1993:108). The power of the keys was given to them. In fact, this was the responsibility of the apostles which was passed on to the Ministers and the elders of today (Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23). So, the Church Council together with the classis has the authority to suspend an office-bearer or to depose him in the presence of the deputy of the (Provincial) Regional Synod.

In this regard, it must be noted that the difference in procedure between ministers of the Word, elders and deacons in the formulation of article 79 of the Church Order of Dordrecht (1618/19) is only the additional regulation regarding the ministers, about whom the classis, with the advice of the deputies of the Synod, must judge whether they ought to be deposed. The reason for the special regulation is that the ministers were admitted to the Ministry of the Word after the examination where the Churches in fellowship and major assembly have approved the candidate. Ministers of the Word can also be called to any other local church within the fellowship of Churches.

However, in the case of ministers as well as elders and deacons, the judgement of the consistory and a neighbouring congregation, appointed by the classis, is required. This, again, is a sort of ecclesiastical “safety valve”, which is represented by the fellowship of Churches, and based on the unity in Christ; because in serious cases like these no mistakes must be made, no injustice done (Church Order of Dordrecht, article 79; see also Vorster, 1999:147).

It could be explained to the church members why the onus was on the classis who had the authority to suspend and depose an erring minister, elder or deacon. It should be obvious, therefore, that the formulation of article 66 was not clear enough. The question is now, what procedure should be used to discipline a minister in our context?

4.5.2.1. Disciplinary Procedure for a Pastor

First of all, the accusations must be brought to the Council of Elders. The secretary of the council acknowledges receipt of the complaint. A written complaint needs to bear the signature of two or three members (I Tim, 5:19).

In the case of a verbal complaint, two or three witnesses with knowledge of the office-bearer’s fault are required. The secretary of the Elders’ Council sends an invitation to the accused minister, to the ministers of the neighbouring congregation and to the members of the Regional Synod. The invitation needs to be signed by the above-mentioned secretary of the Elders’ Council and by two or three other elders to avoid one-sidedness. The first responsibility of the meeting is to determine whether there are prima facie convincing evidence to suspend the accused temporarily. This requires a thorough investigation and examination of the accusations and listening to the accused (*audi alteram partem*). This is the task of the church council, and is part of a process that must be followed up by a meeting of the church council with the deputies of the neighbouring council who are delegated to attend the meeting with the church

council. The decision to suspend temporarily must be announced to his local church.

The accused pastor must come to defend his case before the College of the elders, and the deputies of the neighbouring church. This meeting must decide whether to suspend or not. If the outcome is the suspension of the accused, the question remains whether the transgression is of such a nature that the accused must be dismissed from his office. If there exists such possibility according to the Church council and the neighbouring deputies, then they should call the Classis with the deputies of the Regional Synod to assemble and to deal with the question whether to dismiss or not.

In our opinion, the accused pastor's church council should propose the pastor's suspension to the other deputies who have to consider the case cautiously both together with the council and independently on their own before the final decision is taken to unanimously approve the proposed suspension.

The accused must be informed immediately of the final decision, and that the question of dismissal is referred to the Classis and the deputies of the Regional Synod.

If the suspended minister of the Word feels he has been wronged he has the right of appeal according to the procedures prescribed in the Church Order. And an appeal enjoys preference at the major assembly who has to deal with the appeal.

Practices where people who had been disciplined want to lay accusations against each other with the civil authorities must be avoided, because it remains an ecclesiastical matter and all office-bearers have committed themselves to keep their undertakings.

When the Classis with the Deputies of the Regional Synod have dealt with the matter to dismiss the accused from his office, and after the process of listening to all parties as well as to the witnesses have come to the decision (again separately and jointly), the decision must be communicated to the accused, his council and to the Church in general.

In the case of a severe sin where there are no witnesses and accusers willing to testify in the case because they are afraid to do so, the Church Council itself must formulate a written complaint against the erring pastor and proceed as stated above. If the accused pastor fails to turn up for any of the meetings which have to deal with the matter, and after he has been called a first and a second time, judgement by default will be passed the third time, and decisions will be made on the basis of the accusations. This case of accused pastors refusing to present themselves to meetings called for the examination of their cases in trial is commonplace in our country, the Republic Democratic of the Congo. That is the reason why we insist on the responsibility of the Church Council.

We shall now discuss how Leading Elders, Elders and Deacons should be disciplined.

4.5.2.2 Disciplinary Procedure for Leading Elders and Elders

In the case of a Leading Elder Leader who has committed gross and public sins, the procedure for pastors is to be used. But, in this case, it is only the Neighbouring Church Council or two groups of delegates of two neighbouring churches who are to be invited to take part in the judgement of the case. The accused leader or elder is to defend his case in front of the two Church Councils, and after the trial, the dismissal is to come from his own Church Council with the approval of the deputies of the neighbouring church. The dismissal must be officially communicated to his local church and a copy of the decision must immediately be sent to the classis. In the case of a leader, a copy

of the decision is also to be sent to the civil authorities. Not for their approval, but for their information.

A deacon who has committed gross and public sins should be judged according to the procedure used for elder leader or elder. But here the Church Council of each church dealing with the problem must be wise and circumspect, given that a deacon is someone who handles important and sensitive tasks (money, building, materials managing, and important documents). Furthermore, in most cases in our churches, a deacon is someone who incorrectly had been appointed by the church's pastor on the basis of friendship or blood relationship.. Therefore his dismissal requires the Church Council to look closely into the matter and examine the evidence carefully. The point we want to make here is that we have had experience of this as a pastor in our local churches.

From what precedes one can see that our disciplinary procedure for office-bearers is totally different from those of the Episcopalian and the Congregationalist churches; as Hayes says: "Every decision to a Congregationalist church is brought to the congregation for action" (Hayes, 1999:138).

In our system of church government, it is the Church Council (Leading body of the local church) with the help of the other neighbouring church deputies of the same confession which has to make the decisions and communicate them to the local church. For the "keys of the kingdom to bind and loose" were given to the apostles, today's Council of Elders (Matthew 16:18; 18:18), not to the whole congregation as such (Cf. Du Plooy, 2001:65).

4.5.2.3 The Readmission of a Dismissed Pastor, Elder or Deacon

There is nothing about the reintegration of a dismissed office-bearer in our church order, nor in many other Reformed Churches (see Church Order of

Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic republic Of the Congo; Church Order of the Reformed Churches Liberated in the Netherlands; Church Order of the Reformed Church in South Africa).

One can only wonder why there is no article about this matter when this proves to be a very important matter in the life of a church in general, and in the life of an erring minister, in particular.

In our opinion we believe that a dismissed pastor, deacon or elder may be elected and ordained again, depending on serious consideration. True repentance must serve as one of more important criteria. On this point, we agree with Professor Vorster (1999:146) who mentions the example of King David, who was reinstated after his repentance. We must repent our sins and errors. Without repentance, no one can lay claim to the salvation of God (see Williamson, 1964:97).

On the other hand, repentance is not the only condition for the readmission of a deposed minister; in our context, the problem of trust, dignity and suitability are also taken into account. Even though an office-bearer repents, discipline does not cease to exist because an investigation may be undertaken: does the office-bearer qualify to resume his ministry? Will the congregation continue to have respect for him and trust in his person? (see Visser, 1982:560-566).

Anyway, the reinstatement of a minister of the Word is a question of time. Time was needed to qualify him for his ministry. Likewise, his readmission also needs time.

Moreover, the example of King David tells us more about the time it takes to repent: "The road to repentance requires time and so one needs to be wary of excommunicating too hastily. Take David, How long did it take for him to admit to his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah? Even after he found out that Bathsheba was pregnant, he added to his sin by having Uriah

killed. It wasn't until after the widow Bathsheba had been taken into his house that, through Nathan's prompting, David confessed his sin ... In the brokenness of this life, repentance amongst God's elect does not necessarily happen overnight" (Church Order of Dordrecht commented, article 74). We have to devote serious attention, patience and time before we run risks. Anyway, it is God who operates through His Holy Spirit in a man and orders him to repent (Cf. Acts 17:30; Luke 13:5; II Corinthians 7:9-10). If a deposed minister repents of his sin, it has to be obvious his local church members. In this way, he can regain the confidence of his church.

But, in our opinion, it is very difficult for the church members to regain their confidence and trust in him, because people think and believe that leaders should not be disobedient.

Considering this, the Church Council must be flexible; this means that it must take enough time to observe whether the erring and dismissed pastor, elder or deacon has sincerely repented. And when the Church Council sees that the dismissed pastor has really repented, it has to submit the case to the classis and to the deputies of the Regional Synod for approval after a close and deep scrutiny to determine whether the dismissed minister can be examined again according to the Church Order with the purpose of his admission to the ministry. Clear and positive testimonies of his Church council and of the classis who was involved with his dismissal are necessary.

Note that forgiveness plays a fundamental role. The minister's local church is to forgive him on the basis of clear repentance. God, our heavenly Father has forgiven us in Christ, His only son and, in turn, we have to forgive each other (see Isaiah 55:6-7; Confession de Foi des Eglises Reformées en France, art. 18; Kellems, 1926:49).

4.6. COOPERATION OF NEIGHBOURING CONGREGATIONS IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION AGAINST OFFICE-BEARERS

4.6.1 Meaning of the Term “Cooperation” in the Church Context and its necessity

The term “cooperation” means the act of doing something together or working together towards a shared aim (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2006:323). We have used it in this paper to express a fellowship of neighbouring churches which are called to work together for the building up of the church through mutual assistance. True Reformed Churches of Calvinist tradition which respect the Reformed doctrine and teaching are called to cooperate, to spiritually and materially assist each other. This assistance helps to develop the local church and, in the process, the whole nation. As Du Plooy (2001:69) says: “In the process of fulfilling this function (of administering the keys of the Kingdom in the name of Christ), the local churches should assist one another; they should help and support one another A community or fellowship of churches does not constitute a church (*ecclesia instituta*). Churches (in a local sense) which assist one another are doing so in obedience to Christ and their community and co-operation rest on the basis of love and faith. We draw good examples of that in the New Testament in the book of 2 Corinthians 9; Acts 15.”

Hayes’s (1999:123) view on the matter is that local church’s meetings in various localities developed certain cohesiveness. And in the same vein, Nicole supports our system saying that it is a system that favours responsibility of local churches in interdependency that bind them to one another (Nicole, 1990: 251). In fact, we live in a system which Du Plooy (2001:69) considers a system (*presbyterial-synodical*) of government which binds local churches together (*mutuo-consensu*) on the basis of the confession, in order to support one another effectively, without constituting a separate entity next to the local churches. Therefore, we reject the view of those churches that emphasize out of balance the completeness of the local church, as if local churches live totally

independently and not in fellowship with the other local churches. The Bible is clear on the issue of churches being interdependent of one another (see Du Plooy, 1982). A system in which local churches do not mutually assist each other, implies that they do not accept the resolutions and advice from the major assemblies which offer support to the churches (Kwakkel, 1990:24).

In the case of a minister who has seriously sinned, the delegates who represent the neighbouring churches in the meeting with the Church council must discuss the issue in such a thorough way in order to get to the point where the decision to dismiss is unanimously approved by both the Church council and the delegates. This is proof of the cooperation between local churches of the same fellowship. People may ask why we insist that the Church Council has the prime responsibility about a pastor's dismissal. The most important reasons are that the local church is a complete church; and the minister is ordained in that church (congregation) where the church council has the supervision and right to discipline. The execution of such responsibility is of such a nature that the church council seeks the assistance and consent of the churches in fellowship. It should also be taken into account that the Church Council of a local church is the only assembly that meets regularly and where office-bearers know each other very well. There is, thus, ample opportunity to follow up allegations.

4.7 SUMMARY

By its nature, the Church is a holy Assembly of God. Its holiness originates in the Holy God, the creator and founder of the Church. God calls us to His light and urges us to be holy and to live a holy life. As He is holy, God hates sin but loves people in spite of their sins. God's hatred of sin is demonstrated through the ages through the punishment and calling to order of his people. His aim with punishing His people is to bring them to the realisation of their sins, so that they can return to their initial ideal vocation and nature, namely "holiness".

When God punishes the sinners, He does not consider their position in the hierarchy of the church, nor does He differentiate between leaders and ordinary people. He metes out the same punishment to all of them. He punishes those He loves. The people of both the Old and the New Testament complied with the commandments and example set by God, namely to punish or discipline wrongdoers.

The church in our time has received the same commandment to exercise the authority of God and apply proper discipline with the aim to guard and protect its holiness. In our tradition, which is a Calvinist tradition, the church leaders and office-bearers are also subject to discipline when their conduct, preaching and doctrine no longer conform to the Gospel or when they contradict the Reformed Confessions of Faith (Cf. Art. 66 of the Church Order of the Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo).

If an office-bearer is guilty of a public gross sin, he becomes liable to discipline. His gross sin must not be hidden or even defended on the basis of blood or friendly relationships. In fact, in the Church of Christ, there is no boundary, no nations, no tribes or ethnics. All of us are one in Jesus Christ (Cf. Galatians 3:28).

Public and gross sins must not to be ignored by the church members. The Church Council of every local Reformed Confessing Church and its church members ought to have the courage to deal with the transgressions. They must not be afraid to testify in a trial, even if that is not customary among our people. If they ignore the problem or refuse to deal with it, they are in fact implicated the transgression in God's sight. Moreover, when the other local churches hear of it, they might copy that bad example.

A church which does not discipline a wrongdoer does not display one of the three marks of a true church. It does not obey God's commandment, and it is a church that is on its way to destruction. In this regard Calvin (1985:187) writes:

“Thus, all the people who want to suppress discipline or hinder its application in the church, conscientiously or unconscientiously work and prepare its destruction. Where will the church end if each of its members behaves as he wants? Discipline plays a key role for the correction and recalling to order of the rebel church members who do not want to obey the biblical teachings.”

With regard to the future, my suggestion is as follows: when an office-bearer is accused of a public gross sin, the disciplinary procedure to deal with him in our context is the following:

Step One: Submission of a complaint

The Church Council must compose an official complaint for the attention by the rest of the elders against the accused office-bearer, if they are convinced that the accusation is based on the truth, is publicly known, and needs to be investigated thoroughly. The type of sin attributed to the office-bearer as well as the time and day of the alleged transgression must be mentioned in the complaint. This procedure is followed when people are afraid to testify in the case which is being judged.

Another possibility is that the courageous church members or elders can bring the written complaint, according to the principle prescribed by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:19.

The elder acting as the secretary to the Church Council acknowledges receipt of the complaint(s). He prepares an invitation stating the hour, date, place and reason for the meeting.

The church council must determine whether the accused should be immediately temporarily suspended, so that the church council could call the neighbouring church council or deputies of two neighbouring church councils to assist the

local church council in the consideration of the case. In the case of the accused being an elder or deacon, this joint meeting must decide on the suspension or dismissal of the accused elder or deacon. In the case of a minister of the Word, this meeting must only decide on suspension, and if the possibility of dismissal of such minister of the Word exists the matter should then be referred to Classis with the deputies of the Regional Synod.

Step Two: Hearing

In each and every meeting where the charges against accused office-bearer's are dealt with, good order and fine discipline should prevail. This entails inter alia that the character of such meeting, being ecclesiastical, should be honoured. And the principles of listen to the other party, and one cannot be the judge in his/her own case, are of vital importance in any hearing.

This entails also that the case must be presented in a proper way where after the accused office-bearer is given the opportunity to defend his case before the meeting. After his defence and the testimony of his witnesses and that of the witnesses against him, the assembly president asks to the accused office-bearer to leave the meeting and allow the assembly to come to a decision.

Step Three: Dismissal

The decision to dismiss an elder or deacon rests on the shoulders of the church council and the neighbouring church or the deputies of two neighbouring churches. They have to get consensus on the matter.

The decision for the dismissal of a pastor as the minister of the Word is the responsibility of the Classis with the deputies of the Regional Synod. This meeting works with the documents which served on the table of the church

council and the neighbouring church council or the deputies of two neighbouring churches, and the decision which led to the suspension of the pastor. They apply the same rules of justice which are relevant for determining the question whether to dismiss or not. The final decision, after the Classis and the deputies of the Regional synod had the opportunity to meet separately and jointly, must be taken with consensus. The accused is immediately called back into the room where the meeting is held and the decision is communicated to him. Without delay, the meeting prepares a letter of dismissal stating the transgression of the person as well as the time, date and venue of his dismissal.

Step Four: Announcement

This dismissal has to be announced to the church during the service, and the administrative authorities must be informed in writing. The delegates represent their respective churches in the meeting, and the dismissal takes place in a public session. The church members were therefore represented by the office-bearers of the church.

The dismissal must be conducted honourably, with dignity and in a pastoral-sensitive way. One of the organs of the body of Christ is ill. Kwakkel writes: "The suspension and the dismissal of a minister are not measures that some of the church members may use to get rid of the ministers they do not love. The reason for suspending and dismissing must and be for the well being of the church" (Kwakkel,1991:57).

Let us end with a word of an unknown author: "The more the Church of Christ projects Christ's likeness and grows in holiness, the more moral and spiritual benefits will accrue to our society"

The Church must discipline the wrongdoers so as to safeguard and protect its holiness. In this regard, the PCUSA's Confession of Faith (1963:134-135) reads: "The Lord Jesus, as king and head of his church had therein appointed a

government in the hand of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate. To these officers, the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins, to shut that kingdom against impenitent, both by the word and censures; and to open it into penitent sinners by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures as occasions shall require. Church censures are necessary for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for deterring of other from like offences; for purging out of that leaven which might affect the whole lump, for vindicating the honour of Christ and the holy profession of the gospel, and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer his covenant and the seals thereof, to profane by notorious and obstinate offenders.”

CHAPTER FIVE: GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 GENERAL CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let us say first of all that the contents so far are the result of our pastoral experience and research of more than twenty years of the existence of the Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a very young Church in need of leadership and means. This pastoral experience and study of the matter over a long time has urged us to elaborate on this work which we consider necessary at this time to assist the aforementioned Church concerning the way of government, specifically the procedure to apply discipline/censorship to various members.

It is essential to preserve the Reformed doctrine, safeguard the holiness of the Church of God and, in addition, avoid the perpetual conflict between church members and the unrest created by the hierarchical element mentioned in article 66; modification of the latter is required.

This modification needs profound reflection on the authority which was given to the elders of the local Church by Christ in the application of discipline against erring members, including elders, ministers, elders and deacons, and to the need of consulting the classis, provincial synod and the congregation. The proper modification of article 66 would give flexibility to the assemblies involved in the censuring procedure to avoid the influence of hierarchy which we deplore in the synodical and Episcopal systems. The normative organization of the Church in the process of building up and growth must be based on biblical principles with consideration of the reality of the local Church.

We see that the modification of article 66 of the church order of the Reformed Confessing Church is a necessity to help the assemblies of the Church to discipline erring church members and ministers who usurped power, as

sometimes happened in the past, which resulted in the abandonment of the biblical truth by other people.

People's fears and their negligence to discipline the office-bearers of the Church for reasons which are not in agreement with God's Word, or the application of discipline outside the context of God's Word for such reasons as getting rid of someone whom we do not like, are examples of disobedience, and an abuse of the order given by Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme Leader of the Church.

Therefore, discipline in the Church must be exercised according to God's Word, since discipline depends on it. As it can be noted, however, the Reformed Confessing Church in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a young Church, which needs leadership and means. That is why its functioning is to be strengthened by means of the biblical teachings which were not formerly presented in an adequate way. It is the responsibility of the General Synod to see what it is necessary to do in this regard.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.2.1 Article 66

Article 66 of our Church Order creates the impression of hierarchy when it refers to the responsibility of the Classis as if the Church council does not have to play a pivotal role in the discipline of office-bearers, and as if the Classis can dismiss an pastor independently from the view and wish of the Church council. This needs to be corrected and reformulated in such a way that the essence of the original article 79 of the Church Order of Dordrecht is maintained. We have already indicated and accommodated this view in the preceding arguments above.

5.2.2 The preaching of the Word

While the pure and sound proclamation of the Word of God is another (first) mark of the true Church, it follows that a particular effort and effective mechanisms through the Classes and advise of deputies of the General Synod, according to our Church should be put in place to ensure good discipline and restoration ad reformation within the local churches where necessary.

5.2.3 The administering of the Sacraments

In connection with the marks of a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ we recommend that the General Synod agree on regulations for the good use of the sacraments, in view of the reformational approach.

5.2.4 The Second Sunday Service

Considering the importance of the Biblical and doctrinal teaching we receive from the Heidelberg Catechism and in the spirit of building up the church, according to article 68 of the Church Order of Dordrecht 1618/19 we emphasize the importance of a second Sunday service compulsory in our all local churches where the doctrinal issues such as also the marks of a true church could be explained.

5.2.5 Establishment of New Local Churches

By its very nature, the church is a missionary institution. Therefore, every local church is required to evangelize people to gain new members and also to set up new local churches. But it should be noted that this calling of the church to obey the great commission according to Matthew 28 includes also the quality and integrity of making disciples of the nations, so that the Word in its fullness and

truthfulness should be preached to all nations. Thus, from the start new members should be made aware of the marks of a true church.

5.2.6 Dismissed Ministers

Nowadays, most of the ministers who had been disciplined do not respect or show humbleness to the churches that had disciplined them; in other words, they do not repent their sin. This is very common in African churches. They go to other churches and even dare to lay a complaint against the witnesses who had testified against them with the court of justice. In the light of this unacceptable behaviour which has become a widespread phenomenon like gangrene throughout the church, we are convinced that our churches should investigate and attend to this conduct. It may require that the Church Order and/or decisions be revised or adopted by the General Synod to combat disorder among our churches.

5.2.7 The Congregation

The congregation should only be informed about the suspension or dismissal of its minister by its leading body, which is the Church Council, in a frank and open session, and according to the Reformed principles pertaining to this matter. That is why we recommend that the General Synod increase the number of training workshops dealing with discipline, and to instruct the local church members that the judgement rendered at church when a gross or public sin occurs is not the same as the judgment rendered at the civil Court of Appeal or tribunal or by a traditional chief in a village when there is a crime or an offense.

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Albert KULAMBI	M	48	Relative
Benjamin BADIBANGA	M	34	School Teacher
KABAMBA KANYUKA	M	69	Traditional Chief
MUKADI LUABA	M	65	University Professor
Moïse BADIBANGA	M	67	Committee leader
Paul MBUYAMBA	M	49	School Teacher

ANNEXURE

BRIGADE DE POLICE JUDICIAIRE DES PARQUETS
PRES LE PARQUET GENERAL A KANANGA

DPJ N° *1767/01-1*

CONVOCAATION

Prière à Monsieur, Madame, Mlle. : *Roger Nkashama Kasenga*
Résident à (au) *Kananga*
De bien vouloir se présenter en notre cabinet le *08/03/2003* à *9* Heures
Pour le motif le concernant muni de la présente convocation.

Vu pour réception

OK



Kananga, le *06/03/2003*
L'Inspecteur Judiciaire