

# 'Ever old and ever new, keep me travelling along with you': 21st Century Notae Ecclesiae specifically necessary for churches in southern Africa

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## Dates:

Received: 06 May 2010

Accepted: 01 Sept. 2010

Published: 07 June 2011

## How to cite this article:

Duncan, G.A., 2011, "Ever old and ever new, keep me travelling along with you": 21st Century Notae Ecclesiae specifically necessary for churches in southern Africa', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67(1), Art. #851, 8 pages. DOI: 10.4102/hts.v67i1.851

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The ecumenical marks of the church – unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity – have served it well as defining characteristics since the 4th century CE. The Reformation required that they be redefined in a particular context in terms of the soundness of doctrine preached, celebration of the sacraments and the exercise of discipline. In the 21st century these ecumenical marks are still relevant not only within an ecclesiastical context but in society using Koffeman's quality markers of these marks – conciliarity, integrity, inclusivity and authenticity.

## Introduction

When I am asked to define the marks of the church in the southern African context from a Reforming perspective, I say that they are three in number and that they are the 'necessary and essential' (McMahon 1998–2009:1) characteristics (attributes, distinctives, definite signs by which it can be identified) which describe the church. I then ask how people outside the church would define what makes us what we are by observing us. My mischievous and cynical nature takes over here as I listen to how people often define the church by what they perceive to be its hypocrisy which they rarely elaborate on except in deeply personal terms of disappointment at the failure of the church to minister to their needs in times of crisis. By then I am ready with my own perception that the contemporary church is marked by the three marks of gossip, rumour and hearsay all of which are evident in our common life. Our problem is that it is far easier to see these things from outside whilst we appear to keep our Reformed marks of the church – the preaching of the Word, issuing forth in the celebration of the sacraments and the exercise of discipline – which mark out the true church from the false as arcane disciplines. However, these marks are poorly marketed from a missionary perspective. This may be attributed to the development of an inward focus which led to institutionalism as the result of historical circumstances. Further, their relevance is questioned in terms of contemporary issues:

In a situation where the majority of the population are atheistic or unchurched and where the Church has lost all its influence in society, our traditional ecclesiology based on the notae ecclesiae is showing serious shortcomings and is conducive to a weak missional consciousness and ability to reach out to the world.

(Dreyer 2010:2)

Perhaps we need to capitalise on the best aspects of my cynical marks if we are to promote Christ's cause in southern Africa today for one of the best ways to proclaim and promote the gospel is by the spread of gossip. Whilst gossip almost destroyed the church in its early days under persecution, it was also a prime missionary tool. Gossiping the gospel is still a valid means of extending Christ's kingdom.

There is a degree to which there is disagreement concerning what constitutes the marks of the church. A strictly Reforming perspective would rule the attributes of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity to be merely that. However, I adopt a broader perspective in order to promote a view of the church that may not be constituted by the possibility of a mechanical view of proclamation, celebration and guidance. It is also more ecumenically friendly. The Reforming marks of the church may all be subsumed under Leith's (1990) statement:

Faith in Jesus Christ constitutes the church. The decisive mark of the church, as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin knew, is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Everything else is secondary.

(Leith 1990:26)

This is so with regard to the sacraments and discipline as they are securely founded on and expressive of the word of God. Calvin never envisaged a separate church (Institutes IV.2); he believed in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church though he argued that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed from it (Institutes IV.1.x). In a sense, these marks may be described as relative

because the true church was constituted before they were defined at the Reformation and still existed as church. The four marks – unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity:

are the four conditions of the true church. They are, however, no longer merely characteristics (*proprietas*), but distinguishing characteristics, recognisable marks (*signa, criteria*, and from the time of Gregory of Valencia onwards, *notae*).

(Küng 1968:266)

However, they are only so as they conform to the gospel message of the New Testament. However, it is necessary to consider Boff's 'dissymmetrical' (1981:131) critique of the Roman Catholic view of the marks of the church where:

Oneness appears as monolithic uniformity: one and the same discourse, one and the same liturgy, one and the same ecclesiastical set of regulations and so on. Holiness is a characteristic of the church insofar as the faithful take part in the 'ethos of the historico-religious bloc under the hegemony of the hierarchy'. In this dissymmetrical mode of religious production, apostolicity is the property of only one class, the bishops, the successors of the apostles; catholicity is strictly tied to uniformity, and the quantitative aspect is stressed.

(Kärkkäinen 2002:181)

A different perspective emerges from the underside of the church viewed from the position of base ecclesial communities, as (Kärkkäinen 2002:181–182):

- a corrective to a hierarchical perspective, which envisions the oneness of the church as unity-in-diversity, comprised of several *ecclesiae*
- holiness in the sanctification of all the people of God
- apostolicity as the life of the whole church as characterised by the lifestyle of the apostles
- catholicity as the wholeness of the gospel and church life.

Our marks of the Reforming tradition of the church represent a contraction rather than a denial of the catholic or ecumenical marks designated in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as 'essential attributes of the Church's nature and mission' (WCC, NMC 2005:13, §52) and do not in any way compromise the marks of the church being 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic' (ELLC 2005:649; cf. WCC, NMC 2005:13, §52). Yet, they do not negate them; for example, the holiness of the church is demonstrated in all three Reforming marks of the church, which are also signs of its essential unity. Unity is of the essence of the church for God created only one church (Eph 4:5), that body which we have fragmented and disfigured through disobedience to God's wish that we 'be one' (Jn 17:21 cf. Küng 1968:286). Zwaanstra (1991:99) describes this as spiritual unity, which is the 'basis and motivation for the unity that still escapes the church'. In this context, the role of discipline, for example, is to 'preserve the health of the church' (Reed 1995:2). The same is true of its catholicity (cf. Ac 2:9–11). Hastings (1964:14) reminds us that in the Early Church 'the word *Catholica*, meaning strictly the universal fellowship, had become the Christian Church's most characteristic name' and this remained so during the Reformation as can be seen in the *Scots Confession* (Cochrane 1966:175) and Andrew Melville's *Second Book of Discipline* (in Bulloch 1960:227–228). This required that the church be bound together and held together by sound doctrine preached, the

sacraments celebrated and discipline exercised, the *notae ecclesiae* of Reformed churches.

Leo Koffeman (2009:6, 13), working from an ecumenical frame of reference, has offered a fresh perspective on the ecumenical marks (*proprietas*) of the church – unity, holiness, catholicity and authenticity, postulates the respective quality markers of conciliarity, integrity, inclusivity and authenticity.

## Unity – conciliarity

Oneness is the defining attribute of the body of Christ. We are united to Christ in baptism and joined to all who are 'in Christ' by the sacrament of holy communion (WCC 2005 NMC §31:9). This is held by many as evidence of Christ being saviour of the world. However, if this is so, it is not very compelling evidence (Koffeman 2009:6) in view of the disunity of the body; hence unity is both present and future, indicative and imperative, 'a gift and calling' (WCC NMC 2005), a source of hope and therefore a challenge to our faithfulness. A defining characteristic of the Reformation was a denial of the unity of the church manifested in one person, be it the Bishop of Rome or anywhere else. By contrast, a principle of Presbyterian polity is that it is representative, governed by courts or councils of the church on the principle that the mind of Christ determined by the group is more reliable than that of an individual (Gray & Tucker 1999: 5–6). In a sense, the Roman Catholic Church needed its doctrine of papal infallibility to bolster its waning authority in the face of 'liberalism, socialism and rationalistic positivism' (Küng 2001:174) as well as its own insecure future (in 1870 Italy). Küng (2003:365) also raises the pertinent question:

*'Did any of them ever reflect that the infallibility promised by Vatican I ... is repudiated both by the Orthodox Churches of the East and by the Churches of the Reformation?' [not to mention the Old Catholics?].*

This issue relates to identity. Does our identity depend on one person or is it otherwise defined? Is it defined in terms of fragmentation which has grievously dented our credibility (Trotter 1987:3) for 'the ecumenical task of the church arises from the fragmentation of the body of Christ' (ecumenical charter of the Christian Reformed Church [USA] in Zwaanstra 1991:101)? This fragmentation is attested in the World Council of Churches (WCC) (1991) *Canberra Statement*: 'The scandalous divisions damage the credibility of their witness to the world in worship and service' (1991:1). Perhaps the greatest condemnation is that the churches 'have remained satisfied to co-exist in division' (WCC 1991:2) in denial of Küng's (1968:273) assertion 'The Church is one and therefore *should* be one'. Mayson (2010) supports this view attributing the situation to the quest for power by Christian institutions:

linking themselves to the political and economic elites of their age, [which] has produced the disastrous confusion of conflicting churches ... The modern concern for ecumenism shows no sign of uniting denominationalism.

(Mayson 2010:73)

For Trotter (1987:4) this is an important question for he believes that 'the last great question of the unity of the church is the question of the integrity and unity of its ministry'.



Episcopal systems are often defended on the ground of their collegiality (WCC, *NMC*:26, §97). However, does this depend only on having an episcopal system? The Reforming tradition has survived and thrived on a collegial system based in the parity of the ministry of teaching and ruling elders within a system of courts. This is consistent with the teaching offered in *NMC* (WCC 2005:26–27, §99): conciliarity is an essential feature of the church, grounded in the common baptism of its members (cf. 1 Pt 2:9–10; Eph 4:11–16). Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the whole church, whether dispersed or gathered, is conciliar. Thus, conciliarity characterises all levels of the life of the church.

In terms of conciliarity, the system of councils has served the Reforming tradition well for over four centuries, perhaps with the notable exception of pastoral care of ministers leading to the perennial question *quis custodiet ipsos custodios* [who cares for the carers] (Kipling 1929:36)? It is unlikely that any significant demonstration of the unity of the church can be effective without a degree of conciliarity, despite the fact that, for example, the Methodists in South Africa have recently opted for an episcopal system, which has been superimposed on their conciliar system. It is simply not good enough to defend a hierarchical system on the grounds that the majority of Christians in the world subscribe to such a system or need identifiable leaders. It would not be the first time in history that the majority were wrong! Nor is it normative to believe that the majority possesses the fullness of truth on any matter. Working together is a better option than working under an individual. If it is true that authentic church unity takes place at the level of grass roots then this is certainly true. Even the Roman Catholic Church has paid lip service to conciliarity. Popes claim to work in concert with a college of bishops though recent history under John Paul II has demonstrated how this can be abused: Vatican II taught that just as Peter and the Apostles formed a sort of college, with Peter as the head, so in a somewhat similar way, the Pope and the Bishops also form a college (*Lumen Gentium* chapter 3 in Abbott & Gallagher [ed.] 1966:37–56). This relationship is called collegiality. However, Vatican II also taught that the Pope can even, if he so wishes, give a solemn definition of doctrine without consulting the Bishops and that He has immediate authority over everyone in the church, including each Bishop (Most 1990:1).

The WCC *Canberra Statement* (1991:2, §2.1) demonstrates that the mark of unity cannot be adequately discussed apart from the marks of holiness, catholicity and apostolicity: The unity of the church to which we are called is a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith, a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one Eucharistic fellowship. Further, it is a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognised and reconciled and it is expressed in a common mission witnessing to all people to the gospel of God's grace and serves the whole of creation. The goal of the search for full communion will be expressed on the local and universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action. In such communion churches are bound in all aspects of their life

together at all levels in confessing the one faith and engaging in worship and witness, deliberation and action.

De Gruchy (1974) gave somewhat idealistic expression to the link between the unity of humanity and the unity of the church as a future perspective:

The unity of mankind [*sic*] is given in creation, destroyed by man, and ultimately destroyed by God; the unity of the Church is that unity given in Jesus Christ, expressed in history by a community of men and women, bearing witness to mankind about God's reconciliation, and anticipating that final unity in which the Church having fulfilled its calling no longer has cause to exist.

(De Gruchy 1974:132)

Perhaps it needs to be remembered that the unity of the church was also 'destroyed by man' which necessitated human striving after reconciliation. Within South Africa, the issue of church unity is a blight on the horizon of our history. Although it is a source of deep shame, it is also an opportunity for repentance and reconciliation.

Ultimately, we are thrown back to the gospel itself and are forced to face the reality that:

if every church strives to realise its own signs in fundamental agreement with the one same new Testament message, it will in time come about that none can exclude the other as the untrue Church.

(Küng 1996:269)

## Holiness – integrity

This refers to our journey of faithfulness in response to God's call on our lives. It is related to the Reforming mark of discipline as growth in grace, which is a purifying process: 'The Church's holiness – ... like its unity, catholicity and apostolicity – occurs as part of this history of grace and confession' (Webster 2003:67). Noting again the difference between the indicative and the imperative, Luther (1999:210) could claim that 'There is no greater sinner than the Christian Church'. Jüngel (1999:276f. in Webster 2003:111) comments on this significantly that 'Luther found in the church's recognition of its own sinfulness a proof of its true holiness'. So the church cannot adopt a triumphalist approach to its witness for it 'is in repentance, rather than in the assumption of moral pre-eminence, that holiness is visible' (Webster 2003:73) for 'its sign is penance, not perfection' (Webster 2003:74). Hence, the quality marker of holiness is integrity and this can be related to the Reforming mark of the church of preaching for:

It is ... in the preaching of the Gospel that man [*sic*] is confronted with the real alternatives of faith or disbelief, a decision for God or a decision for the world, a return to God in love or a return to sin.

(Küng 1968:335)

The sinful nature of the sinful people who comprise the church explains why it is *ecclesia semper reformanda*.

It is perhaps as well that the Roman Catholic Church holds that the sins of members do not impact negatively on the holiness of the church, but 'embracing sinners in her bosom,

is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal' (LG §8, Abbott & Gallagher 1966:24), especially in the face of the ongoing paedophilia scandal. Integrity is a significant quality in terms of delimiting our scope of action, providing standards of behaviour. But what does integrity mean in the context of cover-up and ongoing abuse alongside pious pronouncements from Rome by the benignly looking gentlemen of the Roman Curia?

For Huldreich Zwingli, the church's:

holiness rests upon the redemptive work of Christ; when we firmly believe in this work ... we are marvellously transformed .... Church discipline is interwoven with the life of the Christian state.

(McNeill 1954:78)

That is, it embraces the whole of life. In his sermon, *The Pastor*, 'He urges faithful preaching of repentance, and not less the direct guidance of individuals and loving devotion to their upbuilding' (McNeill 1954:79). True Christian shepherds 'complete the good work with God which he has begun with them (cf. Phlp 1:6)' (Zwingli 1524):

... the shepherd must prove himself to be an educator .... He sees to it that they are trained into undefiled lives, friendly, harmless, seemly in all things, and fleeing all intemperance. ... if they practice those things which they teach from God, then that living example teaches more than a hundred thousand words. Thus the shepherd must represent a model ... of those things alone which God teaches and demands of us.

(Zwingli 1524:92)

This is a practical demonstration of integrity as saying what you mean and meaning what you say. Theology serves a useful purpose here 'by giving an account of the substance of the gospel as that to which all speech, thought and action in the Church must conform' (Webster 2003:26) for 'human reason, speech and action should be to the glory of God alone' (Webster 2003:90).

There is considerable disparity between church pronouncements and church witness, which leads to charges of hypocrisy and corruption:

... the church ... reflects human goodness and sinfulness in its individual members and in its corporate structures. ... members are called to ongoing conversion and as a community to constant reformation (*semper reformanda*). ... the church must also create and propose new possibilities in faith for its members, for its own reformation, and for its contribution to social transformation.

(Groome 1991:446)

Integrity therefore, is integral to the Christian life, not an optional extra or an add-on. In everything we do as Christians, it is important that we work from pure motives, that is, all we do should be done for the good of others and conform to God's purpose. We ought to place our own desires and ourselves last. Therefore, anyone who works in the church primarily to get something out of it does not contribute to the good of the church and world but is simply tending to his own interests. We are called to advance the growth of God's realm by attracting others to join us in this same mission until all the world believes.

But how can this happen when a letter appears in the South African press which seriously demonstrates how the church itself undermines its own integrity:

What has happened to the alliance of conservative churches with a direct line to the President? Rhema and the rest were so vocal about 'moral' issues such as gay marriage and abortion. But when it comes to polygamy, promiscuity and adultery in high places, all we get is a deafening silence.

(Seward 2010:24; cf. SAPA 2007, West 2010:115–116)

Moreover, before we become a little self righteous, what have our own churches said and done in this regard? But there is also a problem of lack of consistency in theological stance which is not allowed to stand in the way of the moral religion trajectory since liberation where a choice is made to 'downplay the national priority for decent work and focusing instead on narrower moral dilemmas such as abortion and same-sex marriage' (West 2010:116).

This issue has serious implications for the church because the State President was apparently offered and accepted office as a minister in a South African initiated church which office carries certain moral implications which are not necessarily related to the sexual domain which in its proper context was ordained by God as part of his creation and determined to be (Gn 1:28, 31). The integrity of the entire ministry of the church of God is seriously compromised when one high profile minister (of religion and of state) compromises himself:

Not once does he indicate that he feels any remorse for his actions, nor does he acknowledge that his extramarital affair is detrimental to the status and image of the president. ... We are left to assume that intrinsically and fundamentally he doesn't think there is anything wrong with his behaviour and, as a result doesn't understand why the nation is disenchanted with him.

(Bikitsha 2010:28)

This takes us into the secular realm where 'recurring revelations about massive corruption in the state departments', intensify the bitterness amongst the people:

... South Africa has 'inherited a culture of corruption' established by colonialism and that corruption continues to be a concern even within the ANC. 'Many in society ... openly and avowedly promote self-centred, political and economic policies which worship anti-human greed, promote their own profit, and sideline the needs of the poor and the survival of humanity.

(ANC 2007:2 quoted in West 2010:100)

'There is no longer any trust in public institutions of the apartheid regime' (Kistner 2008:150). Note that this was written in 1992 under a previous political dispensation, a dispensation peopled throughout with Christians. Kistner (2008) concluded that both:

Churches and politicians in South Africa face a common responsibility for safeguarding and promoting life, taking care of people's needs, and securing justice for all. In this regard, churches have a special responsibility when it comes to facing the legacy of the past and paving the way for a new beginning. To me these are the central issue of reconciliation and democratization.

(Kistner 2008:153)

Within a democratic South Africa, with seemingly similar levels of corruption (Basson & Sole 2010:6; Sole 2010:6) with

regard to the arms deal, a large proportion of politicians are also Christians, the possibility of the three marks of integrity – transparency, accountability and restitution provide some hope for the future. This is important because our Christian value system may become captive to secular values rather than take up Paul's challenge to adopt a distinctively different value system (Rm 12:1–2). Mutual accountability is of the essence of *koinonia* and this is one hope for a future marked by integrity.

Holiness must not, however, simply be construed in moralistic terms. It is closely linked to a 'covenant creating God' (Webster 2003:46) which gives it a soteriological character for 'God is the one who does not simply remain in separation but comes to his people and purifies them, making them into his own possession' (Webster 2003:47). The concept of separation transforms the members of the church into 'sent' apostles in the role of exiles and aliens who live chaste lives characterised by good works marked by honesty of thinking, feeling and expression (transparent integrity) refusing to adhere to the standards of this world:

Let your conduct among unbelievers be so good that, although they now malign you as wrongdoers, reflection on your good deeds will lead them to give glory to God on the day when he comes in judgment.

(1 Pt 2:12)

Without this integrity, there can be no progress in holiness.

## Catholicity – inclusivity

Holiness is linked to the truthfulness of the universal faith of the church (Tomolson 2009:2). Matthew 28:18–20 testifies to this universality, which is God's gift to 'all nations'. It also testifies to catholicity manifested in inclusivity. The issue is can we implement mechanisms of exclusion on social, cultural, ethnic or economic grounds? We are capable of transcending our historical contexts through mission and service. Historically, we have compromised our missionary efforts by compromising those to whom we have gone in faith. Koffeman (2009:13) suggests that catholicity has often manifested itself as exclusivity by not integrating those who suffer in society with the institution as a fellowship of 'compassionate vulnerability', those who suffer for the name of Christ. Here we would demonstrate mutual accountability. Further, when we refer to the value of *koinonia*, we need to remain aware that this operates at different levels – within a church, between churches and beyond the church. *Koinonia* is about community and communication and this is the basis for mutuality and hospitality. This has serious implications for us in democratic South Africa where all faiths now co-exist in parity.

A further point is that when we ourselves are not yet what we are meant and called to be, it may be presumptuous for us to determine who is and is not a true or false church when we ourselves fall far short of conforming to the marks of the church! This was true from the third century when after confrontations with a number of heretical groups, the term catholic took on the meaning of 'orthodox' referring to those

who were 'united in the whole church' (Küng 1968:298) as opposed to heretical and schismatic communities. Küng (1968:300) draws the distinction between the church being 'an entire church' and 'the entire church' or 'total church'. This was the Catholic Church. Küng (1968:302) relates this to identity inasmuch as 'identity is the *basis* of catholicity' and those who depart from the church catholic renounce their catholicity and the church loses its inclusivity for:

If the Church, according to its very origins, according to the mission which sustains it and the message which it preaches, is universal, then it is quite clearly summoned, not to deny or to ignore differences between people and cultures, races and classes, historical periods and their individual spirits, but to transcend them.

(Küng 1968:304)

This involves an attitudinal shift from exclusiveness to 'an open community of people dedicated to serve and work for the salvation of all, of the whole of mankind [*sic*]' (Küng 1968:319). There is nothing more inclusive than such a vision.

At the time of the Reformation the purpose of the marks of the church was to discern from the word what constituted 'the true church, since all sects which are in the world would assume to themselves the name of the Church' (Belgic Confession, Art. XXIX in Cochrane 1966:210). Whilst today we would use the term sect more advisedly 'the problem is exacerbated by a myriad of religious assemblies all claiming the title of Christ's church' (Reed 1995:1). The situation has not changed in reality. We too easily make judgements in our context in this regard by rejecting fellow Christians because they do not believe, worship or organise themselves in the same manner as ourselves. For instance, we denigrate Christian churches in Africa which venerate ancestors, being somewhat polite by not referring to it as ancestor worship any more, whilst we ourselves observe common practices in this regard by visiting and tending graves and even speaking to our late loved ones about our problems (and even hoping or expecting for advice and counsel from them!). Yet, in other regards, they are constituted by the same marks of the church as us from which they also fall short. The same is true of the way in which we treat contextual theologies as sub-standard when even the Western-based theology we promote had similar localised origins.

We note a substantial reaction in terms of African Theology, not to mention Black Theology, where 'mediating' European theologies have been jettisoned in favour of:

the development of authentic paradigms ... with immediacy as formative element of its basic set up. It is argued that due to this paradigmatic frame of reference, African theologies preserve the vibrant pulsation of African Christianity in the sphere of academic discourses. Thereby, African theologies have become relevant theologies – relevant both to the viability of African Christian communities by providing a place to feel at home, and to the development of academic theology in ecumenical and global perspectives.

(Hock 2005:125)

Perhaps it is also necessary to consider the quality marker of inclusivity in terms of the church's relationship towards

other faiths particularly in a nation where it is no longer the case that one particular faith is privileged over others. Two sub-quality markers here that are vital are dialogue and hospitality as means of engaging with our brothers and sisters of other faiths. Here the state is presenting the opportunity for the Christian church to be drawn out of itself towards the Other. However, President Zuma, rather surprisingly aligns himself with 'the politically conservative, historically right wing "fundamentalist", stance of the Rhema Bible Church ... [yet] is overt about the prophetic liberation tradition in which the ANC stands' (West 2010:115).

Aruna Gnanadason (2010) talking of hospitality as *philoxenia*, the direct contradiction of xenophobia, in terms which challenge the church's general attitude of 'protectionism and exclusion' comments:

*Philoxenia* allows for each one to find their own identity and distinctive lifestyle within a community of compassion where God's love can be practised without motives of spreading one single universal value system or understanding of salvation. It provides the safe space for us together to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly before our God. The practice of hospitality is not therefore as innocent as it appears at first. Christians and churches may have to pay a price for being hospitable. Michael Kinnamon, ... reminds us that 'Hospitality of the Christian community is always derivative and penultimate. It is offered as part of our participation in God's justice and love for the world ... service of community is service of God.

(Gnanadason 2010:18–19)

A serious threat to inclusivity is posed by 'the fastest growing religion in the world including Africa today ... right wing fundamentalism' (ANC 2007:4). In the South African context, it militates against transformation (ANC 2007:4) as it promotes:

superstition instead of faith, the narrowing of theology to proof texts, the salvation of the individual, the pursuit of health and wealth, a focus on life after death, and the desire for a sectarian end to the world.

(ANC 2007:4 in West 2010:105)

This implies a denial of the value of the spirit of *ubuntu* and its extremist tendency is divisive in a society struggling to overcome its historical memory of enforced separation. Louw (2010:127) rightly reminds us that '*ubuntu* takes plurality seriously'.

But we must take care in the use of the concept *ubuntu* for the extent to which it operates in society is no longer clear. This quality, which served a rural based community for so long, is in danger of becoming an anachronism in democratic South Africa. Louw (2010:129) put it this way: 'The challenge of *ubuntu* ethics is in many respects the challenge of applying an ancient of pre-modern wisdom in a (post-)modern society'. A question is also raised concerning the extent to which it exists as 'a lived reality' (Louw 2010:123). Moreover, is it always a positive value in terms of being a symbol of liberation from traditional conservative society that values diversity in unity? (Louw 2010:125). Solidarity, which is integral to *ubuntu* (and to the Christian concept of *agape*), thrives on consensus with

its capacity to allow '*agreements to disagree*' (Louw 2010:126) as the essence of community (*koinonia*).

The quality of authenticity in these contexts leads on to a discussion of apostolicity as a mark of the church.

## Apostolicity – authenticity

As Christ's mission encompassed the preaching of the Word of God and the commitment to care for those suffering and in need, so the apostolic church in its mission from the beginning combined preaching of the Word, the call to repentance, faith, baptism and *diakonia*. This the church understands as an essential dimension of its identity (WCC NMC 2005:10, §38).

This provides continuity with the faith and teaching of the apostles and constitutes the 'Apostolic Succession' of the Reforming tradition. This is also in line with Küng's (1968:357) view of apostolic succession as 'following the faith and confession of the apostles'. The church is a missionary church striving to live 'in direct fidelity to its source in the life of God as seen most definitively in the life of Jesus Christ' (Tomolson 2009:2). 'Mission ... belongs to the very being of the Church' (WCC, NMC 2005:10, §35) thus affirming the apostolicity of the church which is bound up with the attributes of unity, holiness and catholicity (Küng 1968:359) and is demonstrated in compassion, sympathy, concern and solidarity. The preaching the Word is a key means of exercising this mission (WCC, NMC 2005:10, §37–38; cf. Küng 1968:357): 'In the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is called to proclaim faithfully the whole teaching of Christ and to share the good news of the kingdom' (WCC, NMC 2005:11, §41). Yet, 'The Church is called to return continuously to the apostolic truth and to be renewed in its worship and mission stemming from its apostolic origin (Ac 2:42–47)' (WCC, NMC 2005 §56:13–14). This is linked directly to the ministry of the ordained who:

assemble and build up the Body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating baptism and the Eucharist and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and service.

(WCC, NMC 2005:23, §88)

Taking account of different understandings of the concept of 'apostolic succession' we can agree with NMC (WCC 2005:24, §89) that 'the ministry of the ordained is to serve in a specific way the apostolic community of the Church as a whole'. However, NMC (WCC 2005:26, §96) also makes it clear that 'all the baptised share a responsibility for the apostolic faith and witness of the whole Church' (cf. Küng 1968:355–356), thus preserving a vital component of Reforming understanding as a priesthood of all believers: 'The whole Church ... is the follower of the apostles. We do, after all, confess an apostolic Church' (Küng 1968:355–356). Authenticity derives from adhering to the apostolic witness, which is encapsulated in the New Testament writings as they were validated by the early church. It is maintained in preaching, faith and action. Küng (1968) realises the direct links with the Reforming

marks:

There is the preaching of and testifying to the Gospel, there is the activity of baptising ... and the Lord's Supper, there is the building up of communities, the maintenance of fellowship and unity (discipline).

(Küng 1968:358)

In order to effect its role and protect its sources in Holy Scripture and tradition, the church needed to develop appropriate structures and procedures. Historically, the church has always considered itself and its mission too narrowly, from a place of power in contradistinction to its Lord who exercised his mission from 'outside the gate' (Heb 13:12) as a place of salvation (Costas 1993:188–191). Costas (1993:192–193) emphasises the apostolic nature of mission as 'going', 'sojourning' and a ministry of 'justice and 'solidarity'.

Pope (2010:1) has proposed an additional two marks of the church, which are related to apostolicity and authenticity. The first is that it is hated by the world (Jh 15:18–20; Mt 10:22–24; Lk 6:26). This is fair because suffering is integral to the apostolicity and mission of the church (cf. WCC, NMC :10, §39–40): 'Because *koinonia* is a participation in Christ crucified and risen, it is also part of the mission of the Church to share in the sufferings and hopes of humankind' (WCC, NMC:9, §31), 'there is a link to suffering as a discipline as a consequence of free will':

God wishes to use all human events to educate us, to introduce us to ourselves as finitely free, responsible, fallible moral agents. Thus, whatever occurs as a consequence of freedom can become part of our moral education, potentially teaching us to trust in the One who is beyond all human goods.

(Oden 1983:234)

Here Pope is referring to his own Roman Catholic Church. We can agree that there is sufficient evidence in its activities recently that warrants hatred: 'Our history is not without some pretty questionable moments, in terms of the human elements of the Church' (Pope 2010:3), for example, the paedophilia scandal. Yet, whilst the church does endure persecution there is far more evidence of indifference than hatred. The world is largely indifferent to the church and that is a more insidious problem. (WCC NMC 2005:9, §31). The second is perduring, that we can agree with despite its extremely shady history at times. The fact that the church endures is evidence of the operation of the Holy Spirit and not any human goodness or activity.

## Conclusion

NMC (WCC 2005:20, §73) makes a significant statement regarding the ecumenical attributes of the church: 'When Christians confess the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, they commit themselves to manifest and promote the realisation of these attributes'. This, therefore, is not just a verbal affirmation, mere vain repetition, but also an action manifesto. Linked to the benediction in worship it should impel us back into the world committed to work for justice, peace and the integrity of the church as well as the entire creation.

If at all, we are to include a new mark of the church, surely *koinonia* as an expression of *shalom* and *ubuntu* (a much overused and often inappropriately used term) would be the most serious contender in the sense of a quality which embraces 'the best of each and every religious and secular-ethical tradition' (West 2010:106). However, *koinonia* is already integral to Koffeman's quality markers in all four ecumenical marks of the church – conciliarity, integrity, inclusivity and authenticity. This supports my thesis that there is no purpose to be served in considering new marks of the church for the southern African context. What has sustained the church down through the centuries is still relevant and appropriate for our participation in the reconciling work of God in which we are called to participate.

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