

A Critical Evaluation of Unification in the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa (1997-2024): Exploring Progress, and Future Directions

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ABSTRACT

The Full Gospel Church is a Pentecostal denomination, founded in 1910 in South Africa. Apart from the shared etymological root of the respective terms ‘Pentecost’ and ‘Pentecostalism, the former refers to a day within a Jewish year, whilst the latter refers to a Christian religious movement which finds its doctrinal origin in Acts 2:1-13, and its modern historical origin in either the Azusa street revival of 1906, or the experiences which took place at the Topeka Bible College, Kansas 1901. The historical role of the church in South Africa with regard to the development of colonial racism and apartheid is well documented. Apartheid was ideologically underpinned by a Christian nationalist ideology, which, through a narrow and distorted reading of the Bible, attempted to justify racial separation in terms of the calling and mission of Afrikaner self-determination and self-preservation in an African context. During apartheid, Christianity used the Bible to defend apartheid, leading to hypocritical preaching that God and Christ supported the subjugation of Blacks. This compromised the integrity of the faith, leading to racially separated departments in the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa. This research critically examines the progress and challenges faced during the unification process.

Keywords: Apartheid, Full Gospel Church of God, Racism, Reconciliation, Pentecostalism, Post-unification, Unity

INTRODUCTION

A brief Socio – Historical Background of the Study

According to Hofmeyr (1994:191), what was to become the FGC of God in SA, in its early years, evolved around two Pentecostal preachers, A.H Cooper and George Bowie. Cooper visited the Cape as a sailor in 1901, and decided to stay. In the year 1909 George Bowie came to South Africa as a missionary sent from Bethel Pentecostal Assembly (Newark, New Jersey, USA). It was in the month of April 1910 that the Pentecostal Mission was started, and this was to become the Full Gospel Church of God in Southern Africa (Du Plessis 1979:15). On March 28th 1951, the Full Gospel Church amalgamated with the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee, USA), and lengthened its name to the Full Gospel Church of God in Southern Africa. In America the church continued as the Church of God (FGC Constitution 1997:11-14). The two groups were identical in many ways, but there was a severe divergence in a few instances of organization, for instance, the Church of God is stern in its centralized form of government, whereas the Full Gospel Church “Strongly favoured decentralisation” (Minutes of the Executive Council of the FGC, January 6, 1951). At this time, the Full Gospel Church (FGC) consisted of Black, Indian, Coloured and European (White) communities (Du Plessis 1979:5).

The non-white ministries viz., blacks, Indians and Coloured, were regarded as products of missionary work. According to Anderson (1992:8) the Full Gospel Church followed the pattern of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa by having separate White, Black, Indian and Coloured churches. The ‘non-white’ churches were dominated organisationally and financially by the ‘white church. The first open agitation for a United

Church began in 1975, initiated by the Black constituencies in the FGC. Negotiations commenced under what was called a ‘spiritual presbytery’, consisting of representatives of all four sections of the church (Anderson 1992:82). After many years of negotiations towards putting in place a comprehensive management structure, the Full Gospel Church finally unified. The structural unification formally took place at the inaugural Conference on Thursday the 9th October 1997 (Celebration Programme, 11-12 October 1997). This unification presented new and exciting challenges.

The Church of God

It is imperative to include the brief history of the Church of God in this study since it merged with the FGC in South Africa. According to Holstein (2006:1) the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) can be traced back to 1886. There was a meeting of Christians at Barney Creek Meeting House on the Tennessee and North Carolina border. These Christians were originally known as the Christian Union and were led by Richard G. Spurling. Elder Spurling was an ordained Baptist minister, who rejected some of the views (of the Baptist church?) that were, according to his views, not based accurately upon the New Testament. Richard Spurling and the seven other members from Holy Springs and Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Churches in Monroe County, Tennessee and Cherokee County, North Carolina, organised the Christian Union in August 1886. This newly-formed group agreed to eliminate all man-made creeds and concentrate on the teachings of the New Testament. The church eventually became known as the Church of God (Cleveland Tennessee) for identity reasons (Synan 2001:119). The reason for this is because of many churches with similar variation of the name Church of God, the Church of God (Cleveland Tennessee) added headquarters designations to distinguish them and avoid confusion with the Pentecostals who also boast of a denomination known as the Pentecostal Church of God (Synan 2001:114).

The Years of Division

Roberts (1991:3) recorded that “the extension of the church in South Africa carried unabated, despite South Africa’s political problems from 1948 onwards, as the separation of races became a government priority and was enforced by law. This caused the church to grow into separated departments which placed under white superintendents who were answerable to the Executive Council of the Church at her head office, which by April 1960 had become permanently located at Irene, near Pretoria in the then Transvaal Province. According to Chetty (2002:35) the 1948 Separation of Race Act became another dilemma in the history of the FGC. The separation of the races in this church became a contentious issue. Many Black, Indian, Coloured and a few White churches were outraged when the church opted to follow the status quo of the then racist government. Anderson (1992:82) further mentions that the first agitation for a united church began in 1975, initiated by the Black constituencies in the FGC. Negotiations commenced under what was called a ‘spiritual presbytery’ consisting of representatives of all four sections of the church. For many years, the White community had oversight of the whole Church and all departments were subject to the Executive Council in Irene.

Since 1986, all communities had their own moderators and executive councils, as well as theological colleges. In 1986 an umbrella legislative body of ordained ministers called the ordained ministers’ council (OMC) was formed, purporting to be non-racial. However, these arrangements were seen as papering over cracks, which continued between groups that existed as separate bodies. Negotiations continued at the level of the OMC and GM (General Moderature), resulting in a statement of intent being drawn up in the same year (1996), where it was declared that the ultimate aim of the FGC was to have a single General Conference with one executive council acceptable to all four sections of the church. The pressure by the Black churches against White control increased until in February 1990. Then the OMC set a date in May 1990 to form one integrated church. The majority of White churches said that they were not ready for such a move and asked for an indefinite period of time to ‘prepare’ their members for it. In the meantime, during 1989, both the Coloured churches (then known as the Wynberg Community) and Indian section, commonly known called the Bethesda Church, had resolved to withdraw from the FGC altogether if unity was not achieved by October 1989. They were disturbed that a notice calling them to a united conference reached them too late to be constitutionally valid discussion

document. Dr. Lamer Vest, an emissary from the Church of God (Cleveland) in the USA, then entered the negotiations requesting to be allowed to promote reconciliation and healing in this divided church and persuaded these two sections not to force a church split.

As a result of this appeal, the churches agreed to go back to the OMC. In 1990 the three Black sections agreed with each other on the date of 18-19 May 1990 to form one integrated and united church. In May 1990, two separate associations were formed, namely: The United Assemblies and the Irene Association, each with its own ecclesiastical autonomous government, Anderson (1992:83-84). The three Black church organisations consisted of about 750 churches, with an estimated membership of about 250 000, with a sprinkling of eight (8) white churches and about 60 White ministers (mostly formerly associated with the mission's department of the church) united to form the United Assemblies Association of the FGC. Elected to the leadership of this predominantly Black church was a former (White) moderator of the FGC, Pastor van Kerken, who became its first General Overseer. Another White member, Dr. Alex Thomson, was elected the First Assistant General Overseer; Pastors Arthur Naidoo (from the Indian section) and L.E.S. Masekwameng (of the African section) were Second and Third Assistant General Overseers, respectively and Pastor Henry van der Vent (from the 'Coloured' section) was Secretary General (Anderson 1982:84).

Pastor van Kerken emphasised that there was to be absolutely no discrimination throughout the church down to its grassroots. This was not to be a forced integration, but any other ordained minister would be eligible for any office in the FGC. Most of the White churches (over two hundred churches consisting of some 60 000 members) formed a separate association, known as the Irene Association. Some 65 Black congregations, four (4) Coloured, and three (3) Indian congregations, were included in this association. Effectively, these two associations formed church bodies, but together, they legally constituted the FGC. The two Executive Councils met annually as a National Convention to 'negotiate', and the Black churches compromised by giving the White FGC an absolute maximum of four years from February 1990 to resolve the differences. The National Convention took the place of the disbanded General Moderation and Ordained Ministers Council.

Problem Motivating the Study

After providing some historical context, the problem motivating the research is presented here. That is, while the Full Gospel Church has made strides towards oneness, obstacles persist. Cultural divisions and power dynamics continue to impede unity. Theological opinions have also had an impact on the unification process, with some members fighting changes to conventional customs. In order to provide a truly unified atmosphere henceforth, the FGC will have to look at its membership composition, as well as its structural set up. The Church currently has a large following amongst Black South African. Unfortunately, there are still some structural divisions it experiences, according to race, colour and language in some regions (Chetty 2002:120 - 123; FGC General Conference Minutes 2009:113- 134). Since 1997 to date, there has never been a Black moderator, which might well be interpreted as portraying a lack of trust of Black leadership. From the researcher's observation, this is a problem as argued in this study, and may indeed pose an ongoing struggle, which could continue to challenge reconciliation and unity in the FGC. With view to the above-mentioned challenge, the following question can thus be formulated:

To what extent has the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa achieved unification and unity among its diverse membership since 1997, and what are the critical factors that have influenced this process?

Research Questions

To develop a strategy for addressing and solving the main problem the following underlying questions are identified:

- What historical factors contributed to the need for unification in the FGC in 1997?
- How has the church promoted cohesion and unity among its members since 1997?

- What progress has been achieved towards unification, and what hurdles have been encountered?
- What are the future directions and recommendations for improving unity and cohesion in the FGC?

Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to engage in a critical reflection on the unity process in the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa, as well as explore the progress made and the challenges encountered in achieving full reconciliation and healing in that regard. To consider these issues here, the study has the following objectives:

- To provide the historical factors that led to the need for unification in the FGC in 1997.
- To analyse, strategies and initiatives that have been employed by the church to promote unification and unity among its members since 1997
- To determine the progress made in achieving unification, and what challenges have been encountered.
- To develop, future directions and recommendations for enhancing unity and unification in the FGC.

Significance of the Study

There is very little documentation on the theological problem raised and addressed by this study. The literature available is comparatively small and limited mainly to Du Plessis (1979), who wrote the history of the Full Gospel Church in South Africa from 1910 -1983, Anderson (1992), whose main focus was on African Pentecostals in South Africa, and Chetty (2002), who asserted that very limited effort has been made towards dealing with this issue. No empirical study has also been undertaken to identify critical success factors for unification in the FGC. Therefore according to the researcher, this research area deserves attention, since a high percentage of Blacks are abandoning membership of the FGC (General Conference Minutes: 2001, 2005 & 2009). This study will contribute to the theoretical enhancement of current level of knowledge as well as provide new insights and a valuable resource for scholars, church leaders, and members seeking to understand and navigate the complexities of unity, diversity and unification in Christian communities.

Central Theoretical Argument

This study holds that critical factors can be identified and integrated to offer a comprehensive evaluation of the Full Gospel Church's efforts to achieve unity among its diverse membership, to achieve full reconciliation and healing in South Africa.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Empirical and the Literature Survey

This study used a mixed – methods technique, combining an empirical examination with a literature survey method. This means that qualitative interviews were launched amongst four (4) groups of five (5) members in selected groups of current and former pastors. The main methods of data collection in qualitative researchers are observation, and interviews (Dreyer 1999:216). Qualitative researchers aims to acquire an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, along with the reasons that govern human behaviour (Dhaerah 2008:13). Mason (2002:1) stresses that, “qualitative methodologies are particularly good at celebrating richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity. One of the major strength of qualitative research is that it gives us insight into contextual issues. Qualitative methodologies are well suited to the exploration of multicultural concerns.”

A literature study, where both primary and secondary sources as well published information on aspects concerning the research topic has been utilised (including the study of the FGC constitution). This is because this study will be analytical and historical in approach. Further to this, before dealing with the development of organisational theory, it is necessary to understand the suppositions of structural functionalism, and the way in which they impact on denominational management. According to Ammerman (1998: 210 -213) written or

recorded data may be extremely valuable for all aspects of congregational life. For example, various types of literature (from educational to theological), minutes of board meetings, worship audio and video tapes, written transcripts of sermons, all informative literature, recording of events and all reports from synods and other bodies, provide valuable insight.

The Year 1997 as a Watershed

The FGC became one of the most racially stratified churches in our country, by embracing policies, which disadvantaged so many and caused grief and pain to greater majority of South Africans, Blacks in particular. Demarest & Matthews (2010:316) define race as a way that people categorise each other based primarily on the physical attributes, such as skin colour and facial features. Racism is the intentional or unconscious use of power and domination by one race to withhold equal privileges and discriminate against individuals and communities of another race.

The political repercussion of the rapidly changing South Africa in the 1990's was felt throughout Pentecostal churches, manifesting in agitation for united structures and equality of leadership opportunities. This resulted in increasing pressure for change on White Pentecostal leaders and gradual emergence of Black Pentecostals in church leadership and in the political arena (Anderson 2012:10). This rapidly changing political situation forced many White members in the FGC to rethink their position. After years of negotiation, The FGC finally united. Chetty (2002:114), sees this unity as having been sparked by selfish reasons, rather than by reasons of authentic forgiveness and Godly unity. He asserts that the White church feared that they might lose the connection with the Church of God (Cleveland –Tennessee), because of its conservative stance on the question of unity. So, for the FGC to lose their connection with the Church of God (USA), would also mean that they will lose the monthly financial subsidy which they had been enjoying for over 50 years. Hence there was impending need to unite (Chetty 2002:115).

With regard to the above paragraph it is important to see within our own context how seriously the FGC dealt with the issue of apartheid, both effectively and drastically. This takes us to what happened in 1997. After negotiations were aborted, the Church of God (USA) sent a fact-finding committee in June of 1995. Thereafter, negotiations resumed. 1996 saw the birth of 20 principles on which the then “proposed” merger of the bodies would be based. According to the minutes of the Inaugural General Council meeting on the 9th and 10th October 1997, the secretaries of the former associations read the declaration of unification of the church in terms of the Transitional Clauses of the Constitution approved by the respective associations.

Declaration of Unity

The declaration of unification reads as follows:

Article 1-Unification

- 1.1 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF “THE FULL GOSPEL CHURCH OF GOD IN SOUTHERN AFRICA”
 - 1.1.1 Having functioned as a single denomination in two distinct associations as the Irene Assemblies and the United Assemblies;
 - 1.1.2 Having had through the history of the Church a shared historical background based on the Holy Bible and the shared objective of proclaiming the Word of God;
 - 1.1.3 Having accepted this constitution at the meeting of the General Conference of the Irene Assemblies and the United Assemblies on 7 October 1997, representing all the members of local churches thereof;
 - 1.1.4 Having gathered as a united assembly in Pretoria on the 10th October 1997 with some desire to function as The Full Gospel Church of God;
 - 1.1.5 Hereby declare that this constitution, having been adopted at the last-mentioned meeting, forms the basis of the functioning of the Church in Southern Africa.

1.1.6 Shall organize [sic] and arrange its affairs and activities in accordance with this Constitution, subject to the transitional provisions set out in this chapter.

The structural unification formerly took place on Thursday the 9th October 1997. During unification, the two General Overseers of the two separate associations made their statements of reconciliation after the Table of the Lord (Holy Communion). After the statements read by overseers of the former church associations then elections took place (Minutes of the Inaugural General Council Meeting of the FGC 1997:2-5).

Elections

The house then, by secret ballot, elected the leadership of the. Finally, the following leaders were elected to the hierarchical structure of the Church:

- i. Pastor G, A Honey was voted Moderator/General Overseer, with 410 votes.
- ii. Pastor T. Bowers was voted First Deputy Moderator, with 233 votes.
- iii. Pastor A.S van Deventer received 267 votes as the Second deputy Moderator.
- iv. The conference then voted on the nominations submitted by the former two General Conferences being Pastor L.L Rowlands (White) and Pastor H. van der Vent (Coloured). The results of this lection determined the position of Secretary General, whereby the alternative nomination served as Deputy. Pastor L.L Rowlands received 274 votes, which automatically made him the official Secretary General. Pastor van der Vent became his deputy after having received 222 vote.

The entire aim of this study is to critically evaluate the progress made and the challenges encountered in the unification process. Thus, this section deals with the empirical research findings and their interpretation. Research is a scientific enquiry into a relevant problem that provides an answer contributing to an increase in the body of generalizable knowledge about the particular profession (De Vos 1998:20). Mouton and Marais (1988:7) call research “a collaborative human activity in which social reality is studied objectively with the aim of understanding it”. Research then, is the activity one undertakes when trying to solve a problem accurately and systematically (Dreyer 1991:211). This study, and in particular this section aims to acquire an in-depth understanding of the FGC unification by making use qualitative research. An important advantage of qualitative research according to Dreyer (2004:17) is that it builds on skills that theologians generally possess, such as interpersonal skills, interviewing, and text analysis skills.

The researcher chose the qualitative approach and interviews were done for this matter. The focus was on ministers of the FGC in the Gauteng province as one of the biggest as far as membership is concerned and because it has four regions. Twenty pastors have been interviewed individually. Eight questions were asked to each individual. For fairness, the interviewees differed in years in ministry, age in years, highest level of theological training, church composition (pastors in the FGC play different roles – some are in management, some are full – time in congregational work, some chaplains and some teaching at seminary), gender, as well as racial group. The following table gives the structural summary of the interviews made:

Table 1:

AGE IN YEARS	RACIAL GROUP	GENDER
6 out of 20 are between 31 – 40 Years	15 out of 20 = African	15 out of 20 = Males
7 out of 20 are between 41 – 50 Years	3 out of 20 = White	5 out of 20 = Female
7 out of 20 are 50 Years and over	1 out of 20 = Coloured & 1 out of 20 = Indian	

Despite the different categories just mentioned it is also important to consider that there are common elements that the above population shares (elements such as distinctive, constitution, identity, feeling of loneliness in ministry, as well as ministry context. Smith (2008:242) declares that to present data in a succinct, accurate and honest manner it is necessary to code, organise and discuss/analyse them.

Empirical study data analysis

The term 'data' refers to the information obtained by means of scientific study, whereas data analysis may be regarded as the process by which the researcher tries to make sense of the mass of data (Dreyer 1993:204). Dhaerah (2008:13) points out that qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gaining information: participation in the setting; direct observation; in-depth interviews; and analysis of documents. The following are the questions which have been categorized and analysed in the following manner: how many responded positively; how many responded negatively; and how many were neutral.

Question 1, of the research questionnaire asked: "describe your relationship with members of other racial groups in the FGC? This question sought to ascertain whether members had solid relationships with members of other racial groups since unification.

Question 2, asked how you would reach beyond your normal social circles to meet people of other race or culture whom you ordinarily would never meet?

Question 3, asked how a member saw unity and unification in the FGC?

The follow up question asked members what they perceived as the greatest single barrier to unity in the FGC.

The fourth question: asked members what the FGC can do in addressing division.

The fifth question asked: what can you personally do to make the FGC a more accepting pace for others races?

The 6th question asked: what leadership abilities are required in our leaders in order to foster a cross-cultural ministry.

The 7th question asked: what do you think are the greatest prices the FGC will have to pay to become multicultural?

The 8th and final question asked: what do you think would be the greatest benefits of becoming a multiracial church?

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa's unification project has made substantial progress since 1997, with the merger of several factions and the development of a unified leadership structure. Looking at the above questions though, it is interesting to note that it is those who are between the ages of 31-40 who provided the most radical responses. In my opinion, this is a group that could be considered future Church leaders. As a result, however, the research discovered that there are still underlying tensions and power struggles within the church, which threaten to undermine the unification process. The study discovered that the church's leadership has made efforts to address these challenges, but more remains to be done to encourage unity and cohesion among members. The research also identified a lack of effective communication, inadequate training, and insufficient resources as major barriers to the unification process.

This is likely to damage our cohesiveness, and ultimately, relationships amongst members. Despite these problems, the study discovered that the unification process has promoted cooperation and collaboration among members in some regions, as well as improved the church's reputation and influence in South Africa.

Racism

The FGC as we know it today is at a crossroad where, after years of separation, we are undergoing the process of healing as well as finding our new identity. In my observation, we still struggle to understand one another.

For us to fully enjoy the benefits of unification, we need to deal with the issue of race relations honestly. I agree with Venter (2004:124) that although post-apartheid South Africa has seen racial categories overtly replaced by class categories and consciousness, we still need to face the challenge of racism. Venter (2004: 124) mentions four categories of racists and believes that all – Whites, Blacks, Indians and Coloureds, fall into one of these four categories:

1. **Confirmed racists:** are those who are still prejudiced and are open about it. They resent or even hate people of other races. Some believe more than ever that blacks and whites should be apart. For some whites, blacks are still inferior. They say, “Things were better under apartheid.” For some blacks, whites are still imperialistic settlers – they should “go back to Europe”. Confirmed racists are more upfront and “honest” in their racism, often verbally dumping their offensive opinion and actions on those close at hand. The attitudes of this group are hardening.
2. **Suppressed racists:** are those who are still prejudiced, but have suppressed it in the name of political correctness, keeping the peace, fear of reprisal or self-deception, and psychological denial. Many South Africans would protest, “I am not racist, and never have been. Or if I was, I certainly am not now.” It just takes a certain event, issue or person to bring out the prejudice, the racist comments and attitudes. Sometimes it is blatant; at other times they are blind spots. We can only suppress things for so long, then they pop out – what is in the heart comes out sooner or later (Matthew 12:33-37; 15:18-20). This phenomenon can be called “modern racism” that pays lip service to principles of equality, while opposing its implementation with all kinds of rationalization [sic] and maintains negative stereotypes via selective perception, choosing what one wants to see in various groups.
3. **Recovering racists:** are those who have acknowledged and faced their racial conditioning – racism is inbred if you were raised in SA – and are taking responsibility for it by consciously working on their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and actions. They have dealt with their guilt and are free. But freedom is relative; like people recovering from addiction, they are “in recovery” from racism. They are working at inner and outer transformation of their lives (and society).
4. **Preracists or Innocents:** are those who are in the pre-judge stage – our children. They are the racially innocent people, unless their parents or others have already infected them with their prejudice. The post-apartheid generation now growing up has a wonderful opportunity to be free from racism in a way other South Africans could never be. When and how they will lose their innocence will depend on our guidance and modeling, or lack thereof.

I want to evidently conclude this section on racism by emphasising the words of Evans (2011: 212), which I find to be true:

Superficial racial relationships patterned on paternalism will dissolve before any lasting connection can be made. Only through repentance and forgiveness done through first and foremost on a personal level will we be free to forge relationships that allow us to embrace dignity and diversity. We must be mindful that it takes time together in order to learn how to build trust, relate across cultural differences, and learn from each other. Unless our personal motivation is pure during the initial ups and downs of that time, we will become easily offended or wearied and fail to last in the ongoing effort that is required to learn how to embrace true oneness.

All of scripture involves relationships, both with God and with fellow human beings. Through relationships we develop, grow and learn and from them we obtain self-esteem, identity and significance. This should be the fruit of unity in the FGC.

Reconciliation

Elwell (1991:420) defines reconciliation as change of attitude or relationship. I think this is a shallow and problematic definition because it does not unpack the relationship or describe those attitudes those reconciling must change from. Wessels (2007:44) argues that reconciliation does not mean:

- a grey sameness;

- that there never will be a difference of opinion;
- a false acceptance of other standpoints, and
- an insincere, patronising attitude.

Wessels sees reconciliation as an undertaking to: accept one another's good faith; resolve differences through discussion; develop understanding for the other side of the argument; put communalities first and to build upon those; never launch little petty-minded fight, and not get stuck in the past, but forge forward, together. Venter (2004:93) correctly indicates that reconciliation is the act and/or process of putting things right between two alienated parties in order to restore relationship, justice and harmony. Venter further adds that this is done by removing the "enmity" or causes of division, and by restoring a "togetherness" of forgiveness, trust and mutual respect. According to Venter (2004:138), reconciliation is both an event and a process, having the following aspects: to turn or change (repentance); to remove enmity, wrath and sin (confession); to pay the price in the justice of the cross (trusting Jesus in the cost of reconciliation); to give forgiveness and receive it if necessary (actual reconciling); to establish peace (shalom) restoring fellowship and making restitution if necessary (living out reconciliation by restoring justice)

According Demarest and Matthews (2010:318-319) reconciliation is the healing in relationship of those who previously harboured hostility toward one another. To Demarest and Matthews, reconciliation involves the following three aspects:

- Reconciliation occurs in an existing relationship marked by animosity, hostility, disregard, or enmity between two parties. One or both parties hold something against the other, and as a result, a breach of relationship exists between them.
- Intervention to address the cause of the enmity is introduced, providing the means to remove the hostility and breach of relationship.
- The removal of enmity isn't just a form of amnesty, truce, or lack of conflict; reconciliation is a positive renewal of relationship marked by peace and acceptance. Both parties now experience true delight and fellowship with one another.

If we can understand and embrace reconciliation as discussed above, then we will be able to demonstrate reconciliation to the point where we will live out the gospel, such that others can clearly see the power of the cross as a Pentecostal denomination in South Africa. However, if we deny reconciliation in the true sense, we will only keep talking about unity, while remaining separate in our comfort zones. It was Evans (2009: 242) who said of race relations that God is not asking blacks to be whites or whites to be blacks. He is asking both to be biblical. This ties beautifully with the words of Van der Ven (2002:151) that indeed "reconciliation cannot be contrived, imposed, or guaranteed. It can, rather, only be given or received." Reconciliation is best demonstrated rather than announced (Lovett: 1996:125).

In clarifying the above argument, Evans (2011: 213) has noted:

Reconciliation cannot be achieved by one group imposing its ideas, preferences, context, and programs [sic] on another. Nor can it be achieved by simply inviting the other group to participate in a program [sic], an idea, or a ministry after the agenda and procedures has been established. This limits the contribution and intermingling of unique qualities needed in order to produce a stronger, more complete whole. Both groups must be brought to the table on the front end of the discussion and planning so that there is full participation, recognition, appreciation, and use of the strengths of both groups. Both groups will also have to give up something, to yield in some areas, in order to fully implement the strengths of the other group. True reconciliation occurs through a merging of strengths toward the pursuit of a shared purpose under Christ.

The psalmist speaks warmly of believers living in unity (Psalm 133:1-3). The key to healing relationships is forgiveness (Ephesians 4:31, 32; Colossians 3:12-15), and forgiveness needs to be based on a truthful view of the offenses neither exaggerating nor minimizing them.

Unity

Tenney (1980:248) made some notable points on the concept of unity. He says the concept can be understood by analysing what unity is, alongside what it is not. From the above quotation the following are outlined:

- Unity is not *unanimity*. Unanimity means “absolute concord of opinion within a group of people.” Nowhere in the Bible does the Lord say that everyone must think alike or even agree on every topic. There is plenty of room for different perspectives. These differences complement each other. Like the mosaic or stained glass window, they help to complete the picture with various hues.
- Unity is not *uniformity*, that is, “oneness or sameness of organization or ritual.” Again, scripture does not mandate things like the order of worship or the exact way we worship. Rather, it conveys the atmosphere, which should permeate our services and leaves room for diversity of individual operations.
- Unity is not *union*, which “implies political affiliation without necessarily including individual agreement.” Belonging to something without personal commitment is not what unity is about either.

Scheidler (1980:28) speaks of the church as “a complex organism that has a tremendous unity in the midst of diversity. Unity does not mean uniformity. Uniformity implies a loss of identity and individuality.” The fact that we are a unified church in the FGC means we can still maintain our individuality, personality, unique expression and yet come into a corporate identification where we forfeit our rights to act independently of the rest of the members. Scheider (*ibid.*) gives several New Testament pictures, which portray the relationship and the unity of the Church: the church is one body with many members; the church is one temple with many stones; the church is one flock with many sheep; the church is one nation with many citizens; the church is one vine with many branches; the church is one family with many brothers and sisters; and the church is one army with many soldiers. According to (Skaggs 1999: 175), unity involves something different than total agreement, sameness of practice or ritual or political affiliation.

The key to Jesus’s concept of unity can be found in the very nature of the Trinity itself as “the oneness of the inner heart and essential purpose through the possession of a common interest or common life”; while maintaining the uniqueness of each individual’s gifts and functions. The problem is that creating the conditions and climate for the emergence of a coherent, racially diverse national identity and common culture requires the courage to confront the excesses and collective sins of the past and the will to institute correctives for the future (Felder 1998:29).

APARADIGM FOR THE FUTURE

This paper gave a general introduction of the study, whereby clarity was given to the scope of the research through the following elements: the problem motivating the study, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the study methodology and also provided an overview of the FGC’s historical background as well as an in-depth analysis on the years of division was undertaken. The empirical evaluation of the study for the purpose of research conclusions was presented. In the framework of the FGC unification, a conclusion could be made that, what was once a predominantly divided denomination, has now become a large multi-racial/ethnic/cultural organisation. In support of the central theoretical argument, which holds that holds that critical factors can be identified and integrated to offer a comprehensive evaluation of the Full Gospel Church’s efforts to achieve unity among its diverse membership to achieve full reconciliation and healing in South Africa, it is in this changing context that the FGC must reflecting honestly on history. History is absolutely crucial for a comprehension of identity and culture of a denomination or church. In the history and culture of a people lies the genetic code of their identity and mission. Honest historical observation is required to evaluate the current state of affairs. Denominational diversity should be seen as a blessing in disguise where lack of unity when we claim to be unified is deplorable. The meaning of the future and the unity of the human story which encompasses the whole “journey” is a discovery which offers wonderful possibilities.

Any person who has read Genesis, Exodus and the Gospel’s accounts about Jesus Christ’s life and work, will

understand that history is absolutely crucial for a comprehension of the identity and culture of a denomination or congregation (Hendriks 2004:125). Dockery (2009:25) has observed that “addressing the future of any movement is an inherently dangerous affair. But it is even more dangerous not to envision the future.” Mansfield (2000:259) pithily wrote, “history is more than dates and dead people.” Greer (2003:261) asked the question, why did God include so many history lessons (accounts of reflections about the past) as well as basic history (accounts of what happened) in His inerrant word? His answer to the above question is indeed worthy of record, because it gives us some validity to the honest reflection of history, particularly in the FGC. Greer (ibid.) has asserted:

Biblical history helped reinforce the special history of God’s people, but more importantly, it reminded them of His faithfulness. He had worked with a mighty arm in the past. That would reassure them that, despite occasional chastening, He would keep His covenants and fulfill His promises for the present and future. Believers today are blessed by reading this history too. Of course, God did not retire from involvement in the unfolding of history after biblical times. He did not cease acting in human history after closing the canon.

The honest historical observation will help us to evaluate the current state of affairs, as well as go forward in our attempt to achieve unity. We need the perspective that only a good knowledge of our history can give us. Therefore, we will understand the present and prepare for the future of this denomination. I agree with Greer (2003:256) that “God created time and space. A supreme, transcendent, self-sufficient, self-existent, personal God stepped out of eternity to inaugurate history.” Schaff (1995:273) asks the following question relevant to the assertion above:

How shall we labour with any effect to build up the Church, if we have no thorough knowledge of her history, or fail to apprehend it from the proper point of observation? History is, and must ever continue to be, next to God’s word, the richest fountain of wisdom, and the surest guide to all successful practical activity.

The crucifixion of Christ (John 19:16-27) is the bedrock of Christian unity, and it is absurd to contemplate establishing a unity on any other basis. Our exploration of the state of the FGC in the post-unification era demands that we take several steps towards renewal. We cannot build a ‘new’ future on the old foundation. Robertson (2007:10) points to something that I believe to be crucial in the context of transition is that “all human activity involving more than one person requires some kind of organisation”. Organisations are the result of structural relationships (Engstrom & Ceder 2006:142). The FGC will fail or succeed on the strength of these relationships. The meaning of the future and the unity of the human story which encompasses the whole “journey” is a discovery which offers wonderful possibilities for better understanding human living (Muller 1999:3). Traumatic experiences in the past; group interest in a cultural context; interactionary patterns within family associations; faith and philosophical presuppositions; all play an important role in religious formation (Louw 2000:309).

This study argues strongly that history is important, and that to some extent, the FGC is forward focused to the detriment of history. I firmly believe that to become a fully biblically-unified denomination, the FGC will be required to discover its historical foundations, as well as to endeavour to think afresh and be as inclusive as possible in our history. As indicated by Keddie (2000:9) “history is far more than a bare record of the ‘facts’. Inevitably it is an interpretive process, in which the significance of events is assessed and evaluated.” This is supported by Crabtree (1993:1) when he writes that “our ignorance of the past is not the result of a lack of information, but of indifference, and our disbelief that history does not matter.” Contrary to this, I therefore take a stand, upon which I elaborate further throughout this study, that in the post-unification era of the FGC, a more comprehensive history is of great consequence.

CONCLUSION

Without a question, the church’s top leadership structure is currently portraying a united front, but the FGC as we know it today is at a crossroad because unity has long been achieved, and there has never been a Black

moderator from 1997 to 2024. Since we vote on leadership every four years in the FGC, the necessary question is whether comprehensive equality been achieved and realized? My recommendation is that the time for a Black moderator in the FGC is long overdue. The question is, how long will the FGC be able to redress or correct the past leadership imbalances? As Habib & Bentley (2008:18) describe:

Redress is an explicit political mandate identified in the South African Constitution. Section 9(2) of the constitution explicitly states that “to promote the achievement of equality legislative and other measures designed to protect or advanced persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.

Unlike most institutions, the church cannot confine its attention to certain groups of people (Gibbs & Coffey 2001). In the apartheid era in South Africa, whites where in the minority, yet they were the ones who held the reins of power. That must not be the case in the FGC, especially in the post-unification era. Our unity must be strong to the point where leadership reflects this likewise. When the black leader finally takes the leadership as General Overseer of the church, my plea is that all those who have been leading us all along must stay and be led. No one is really ready to lead if he/she is not ready to be a follower. As a denomination it is necessary therefore to deal with the past honestly and with love; to listen to each other’ stories and deal with the issues of inclusivity, being sensitive to one another; to deal with the issues that divide and separate us; to deal with the psychological, emotional, and economic problems of the past.

Pastoral guidelines for blacks in the FGC

In unity we are all brothers and sisters in the Lord. So it is important that we deal with the legacy of apartheid and address the dependency syndrome of some blacks in our church. Every time a white pastor is encountered, there is the tendency to beg for stuff, even unnecessarily so. We received church buildings, missionaries and education for free. Now it is the time for us to give back. Blacks must know that they are going to be treated the way they treat themselves. Another problem lies in the fact that genuine adult relationships can only develop where both sides give and receive. Blacks need to realise that they have the potential to make it in the ministry, without depending on other people. Yes, they (blacks) have depended on donations to run their affairs in the past, but the time for that is over. Blacks will never emerge to be credible leaders if expecting handouts on a regular basis. This has paralysed some of the black led denomination, who depended on foreign support, without establishing their own supportive base. Steef van Slot (2000:136), when dealing with this issue says:

Many mission established churches have become dependent on foreign funding, and often their leaders feel they cannot function well without the subsidies they have received. Sometimes, for over a century, they feel that without these subsidies they are unable to reproduce themselves by executing their own evangelistic and mission outreaches. Often they have others build their church building for them. It often distorts reality and leads people to feel like they have nothing or little to give back to God.

Stearns (1991:116-117) distinguishes two kinds of fatalism, namely *African Fatalism*, which expects that ‘we cannot because we have not. We will probably never have anything’. “*Western Fatalism*” on the other hand says: ‘let’s help them because they have nothing and will never have anything. We’ll probably have to help them for another 100 years.’ Both kinds of fatalism are corrosive, because: they create dependency and stunt the act of giving; they reinforce feelings of insecurity, they create a mercenary spirit; both self-image and community image are diminished. To assume that any native church perpetually requires constant supervision is an unintended insult to their capacity to manage their own affairs (Hodges 1999:23). Indeed, Blacks have the capacity to manage their affairs and bring their part to add to the flavour of broader Church unity. But, if they are not careful, their dependency culture will cause them not to be trusted. Blacks need to know that dependence raises a false sense of unity.

The other issue is that blacks voted for leadership whether on the regional or national level, must be leaders indeed, because the Church requires functional leaders, who know what they are doing. When that opportunity

arises, such a leader will need to sharpen his skills, and be informative, so that he may contribute to the church decisively. We need leaders who will increase their value and continually improve their performance. The post-unification era demands a black leader who has knowledge, skill, and experience, rather than leaders who just serve their personal interest. This has never worked in the government of the day, and it will never work in the Church. Any black leader rising to the top in leadership is there because he was voted in to make a difference, and nothing else. The days of leaders who provoke the church councils to encourage enviable ministers to allow them to give communion for personal profit, ought to be over. Once a black pastor is voted as an overseer, he must serve with diligence and excellence. When he leaves the position, he must leave a great legacy for other blacks to build on. Church positions are not for personal gain (or for fulfilling personal interest), but for serving. Therefore black ethical/servant leaders are mandatory to the purposes of national unity. As Dales and Barna (2009:200) have noted, “we need to care more about God’s kingdom than our own reputations, dying to ourselves, to our own ambitions and any craving for the limelight.” blacks must know that they have a responsibility to challenge injustice anywhere they see it manifest in the framework of their sphere of influence.

Pastoral guidelines for whites in the FGC

White Pentecostals in South Africa need once more to return to a respect for black leadership if they are going to be meaningful in the new South Africa (Anderson 1993:76). Whites must stop prescribing what must be done (Skosana 2006:54), and must know that the problem of racism in the FGC cannot be solved by blacks alone. It is impractical for blacks to be united to themselves. Because “reconciliation is the act and/or process of putting things right between two alienated parties in order to restore relationship, justice and harmony” Venter (2004:93). Amos (1996:132), when dealing with the issues of race, gender, and justice, observed that:

Our efforts for reconciliation must extend beyond formulation of token groups and periodical meetings that give the appearance of harmony. It is fruitless to meet together to fellowship and pray if we are not willing to man the trenches to pursue reconciliation. Policies and practices must be put on the scale of God’s justice, and be weighed. Devotion to God mandates our Christian involvement in the total liberation of all humanity. All persons must be held accountable for their attitudes and actions. The Holy Spirit that we emphatically say gives us power over devils and demons of the world should empower us to oppose the evils that lurk within our own ranks. We must struggle to eliminate the ills that threaten our Christian witness.

If whites in the FGC will not heed to the above, then what happened to the Baptist Church will happen to the FGC also. Rae (2006:6) when speaking about reconciliation between Baptists in South Africa said the following: “our reconciliation process got nowhere through discussions that tried to justify and defend our own positions as we dealt with the issues that divide us.”

Though the unification process in the FGC has made significant progress since 1997, but there are still challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the long-term success of the process. This research highlights the need for effective leadership, communication, training, and resources to promote unity and cohesion among members. The study also emphasizes the importance of addressing underlying tensions and power struggles within the church. As members and leaders of the FGC, we need to understand and define ourselves as people. Reconciliation, race relations and unity are not going to come cheap. There is a price to pay. We will have to talk and deliberate more in order to move forward, so that we may leave a wealth of unity to the coming generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Without undermining the journey we have travelled so far, I want to conclude in the words of Deymaz (2010:171), that true unity will be more than just a slogan or a mission statement; it will visibly reflect aspects of union, identity, harmony, and integrity. After gathering information which helped me to discern patterns and dynamics of the FGC as a church as one of its members, it is against this background that I now wish to

make proposed recommendations in that regard:

- The church's leadership should prioritise effective communication and transparency to foster unity and trust among members.
- Invest in training and capacity- building programs to equip members with the skills and information to foster unity and cohesiveness.
- The church should use constructive discourse mediation to overcome tensions and power struggles.
- Clear regulations and procedures should be established to guide the unification process and ensure accountability.
- To improve its reputation and impact in South Africa, the church should continue to encourage members to cooperate and collaborate.

Unity does not require us in the FGC to see eye to eye on everything. In our engagements we need to agree on matters of fundamental importance while having the liberty on differing viewpoints. Being different does not prevent us to work together. We must remember in the words of (Hughes 1990:120-121) that, pride and self-promoting arrogance sow disunity, but a humble, gentle man or woman is like a caressing breeze. Finally, the FGC definitely needs to deal with the past honestly and with love as well as listening to each other's stories. Dealing with issues that divide members rather than assuming unity will indeed make us a fully unified denomination in South Africa.

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