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THE SERVICE OF THE BELIEVERS: ARTICLE 55 OF THE 2015 CHURCH ORDER OF THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH IN PERSPECTIVE¹

ABSTRACT

The theme of article 55 of the 2015 Church Order of the Dutch Reformed Church was formulated for the first time in 1974 and amended in 2011. For this service, the term “the service of the believer” was used instead of the popular term “office of the believer”. Article 55 of the 2011 Church Order linked this service aimed at the church and the kingdom of God, without mentioning the congregation as the starting point thereof. The emphasis was on the principle that the service of the believers is, in essence, their service as “members” of the Dutch Reformed Church. As a rule, church members believe in God with the assurance by Scripture that they are saved people. This means that their service is being done out of gratitude for their salvation.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Article 55 of the 2015 Church Order of the Dutch Reformed Church (NGKO-2015) is about the service of the believers (NGKO-2015:16). This

1 The church order of the DRC has since been amended. See Church Order of the DRC in the Northern Cape which is presently used and includes the articles of the General Synod (NGK Noord-Kaapland 2016:34).

provision in NGKO-2015 takes a central position in this article, which is approached from the perspective² of a reformed church order: A perspective on NGKO-2015 article 55 on the service of the believers in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC).

Viewed from a reformed vantage point as well as from their member registers, the congregations of the DRC consist of the baptised and confessed members whose names have been included in the congregational registers. The General Synod, in the denominational context of the DRC or in its broadest context, is not the policymaking congress of the DRC as a typical association with individuals as members, but the broadest major common assembly of the congregations of the DRC (Strauss 2010:53-54).³ This assembly represents all the DRC congregations by delegation.⁴ A general synod, basically a meeting of the congregations in the DRC, was represented at this meeting by the delegates sent by ten synods on their behalf (NGK 2015:10-12).⁵ The General Synod of the DRC, therefore, represents this church, in its broadest sense, as a community of congregations, as complete churches (Strauss 2010:63-64). A community delegates members of their congregations, through the synods on which these congregations are represented, to the General Synod. NGKO-2015 article 38 stipulates that the General Synod consists of a maximum of 200 members (NGKO-2015:11).

2 This article does not deal with the service of the believers from a practical or diaconal point of view, but rather from a church order viewpoint.

3 It should be noted that, in a reformed denomination such as the DRC, the meetings that regulate the church or make the decisions in this regard, are not arranged hierarchically from low to high (in the DRC, the church council, circuit, synod, General Synod) (NGKO-2015:7). On the contrary, according to NGKO-2015 article 20, each of these meetings has an authority given by Christ to deal with matters assigned to them by church order and, therefore, by agreement between the congregations, and to refer back matters that should be dealt with by a previous or minor meeting. If a meeting cannot deal with a matter and needs to seek the wisdom of more believers, the matter can be referred to the next major assembly. "Minor" and "major" assemblies are not an indication of less or more authority, but rather of fewer or more congregations gathered, through their representatives, at this meeting (Strauss 2010:51-55).

4 For the stepwise means of delegation used by the reformed churches, see Strauss (1989:6) and Biesterveld & Kuyper (1905:57). Over 1,200 congregations find themselves part of the general synodal bond of the DRC (2016:30-46), so that the direct representation of each congregation ensures that the meeting is a mass meeting rather than a consultative or persuasive synod.

5 NGKO-2015 articles 36 and 37 determine that it consists of a collection of churches or synods which, at the outset of the general synodal relationship, was made up of five synods or churches, as popular terminology would have it. Since then, a subdivision has taken place in two of those five synods that has doubled the number of the original "churches". The term "churches" or the indication of the constituent synods does not oppose the reformed rule that church is in essence a community of congregations.

The answer to the question as to who decided on the wording of article 55 of NGKO 2015, on the service of the believers, is the General Synod of 2011 (NGK 2011:82-83; see NGKO-2007; NGKO-2011:16). In its task, as outlined in NGKO-2011 and NGKO-2015, article 43, the General Synod is assigned to give expression to the religious identity of the DRC in “Woord, belydenis, kerkorde, roeping en beleid” [Word, confession, church order, calling and policy] (NGKO-2015). Therefore, although the service of the believers occurs primarily in and through the congregation,⁶ as the place where the church functions daily as the body of Christ (Du Plooy 2005:564),⁷ the General Synod is tasked with outlining the common stipulations regarding the service of the members or believers. The name “General Synod” is written in capital letters, because it is a specific synod and as such, a proper noun. This general synod’s decisions are binding upon all congregations in this synodical relationship (NGK 1964:8-10).⁸

The questions at issue are: How should NGKO-2015, article 55 be understood on the service of the believers from the point of view of a church order? What does this article of the church order mention about this service? What was the history that preceded NGKO-2015, article 55? How should the content of NGKO-2015, article 55 be viewed from a reformed church political point of view?

2. SERVICE OR OFFICE OF THE BELIEVERS?

NGKO-1962, the first Church Order of the DRC relating to general synodical matters determines, in article 55, that each assembly in the DRC – the four meetings of the NGKO-1962, article 18 referred to are the church council, the circuit, the synod and the General Synod – must deal with the material matters of the Church (NGK 1964:13). In NGKO-1962 articles 68 and 69, the religious service of the believer or church member is implied through a

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- 6 Heyns (1977:209) makes the pertinent comment that the Lord God’s actions are not only in and through the church, but are also visible “in die ganse kosmos en deur die hele geskiedenis heen” [in the entire cosmos and throughout all history].
- 7 In its 1994 report to the General Synod, the Church Ministry Commission (Kommissie vir Gemeentebediening) of the General Synod of the DRC calls the congregation part of the “liggaam van Christus” [body of Christ]. According to the Commission, the Lord builds up his church from the congregation. It is interesting to note that the Commission, in writing about its mission, agrees with and quotes NGKO-1990 article 55 as setting the right direction. All signs are there that, by the end of the 20th century, NGKO-1974 would have articulated a strong conviction or at least a reasonable consensus in the DRC.
- 8 The General Synod made use of linguistic advice in its decisions, such as for the name of the DRC (Dutch Reformed Church, without a geographical suffix) and for the use of the term “Algemene Sinode” [General Synod] (NGK 1962:225).

number of stipulations about participation of members in Christian-based associations. Such associations are supported by the DRC depending on their beliefs, objectives and the way in which they operate in society. Article 68 states that, in 1962, the DRC accepted youth, missionary, evangelistic and social work associations as fellow church workers. From the terminology, it appears that these associations were working with church matters in these fields and making claims on the service of DRC members. As a result, NGKO-1962 article 69 states that, as a consequence of this intrinsically contradictory point, the DRC also has the right to organise its own members (the DRC as an association? PS) for specific activities or to have them organised through services that receive a task from a church assembly (NGK 1964:15). Article 69 clearly implies that the DRC was in favour of associations under the control of church assemblies. Interestingly enough, at the General Synod of 1970, article 69 was given the significant heading: “Die kerk en sy georganiseerde dienswerk” [The church and its organised service]. The content of this article, however, deals with the involvement of members in independently operated religious associations and, therefore, service work outside the church itself (NGKO-1970:19).

The next General Synod took place in 1974. Two matters of significance could have had an influence on the revision of NGKO-1974 article 55. The first matter was the Youth-to-Youth Action of 1974, which emphasised the service and contributions of members to strengthen the practising of the calling of the DRC. This Action drew large crowds and riveted many DRC people. Secondly, in this climate of positivity towards the service of the believers, a decision was made for a Bybelkor course regarding the office of the believer.⁹ One of the ministers of the Youth-to-Youth Action, Malan Nel, was tasked with executing this. This instruction was ratified by the next General Synod in 1978 (NGK 1978:913; Klaasing 2020:2).

The General Synod of 1974 amended NGKO-1974 article 55 (NGK 1974:524-526, 639, 640).

9 Pont (1984:35), in typical style, notes that the “hervormde vaders normaalweg van die priesterskap van die gelowiges gepraat het” [reformed fathers generally spoke of the priesthood of the believers], but that in the 19th century, in response to the teachings of the Dutch Reformed Abraham Kuyper, it “gewoonte geword het om van die amp van die gelowiges to praat” [became usual to talk about the office of the believers]. Pont (1984:35) points to New Testament grounds from Hebrews 6:20 and 7:26-27, I Peter 2:9 and Revelations 5:10 for the priesthood of the believers. He binds this priesthood to the sacrifice and priesthood of Christ. Du Plooy (2005:564) points out the services (offices) that Christ gave to his church and that corresponded with his office as our highest Prophet, eternal King and only High Priest. These offices in the church take the form of the reformational three: teacher, elder and deacon. See also NG Kerk-Uitgewers (1982:47).

On the crest of the wave caused by the Youth-to-Youth Action, the new article 55 was an attempt to do away with the mentioned contradiction regarding non-church associations doing church work, and to promote the service of members of the congregation within the broad church. The four sections of the NGKO-1974 article 55 stipulate that members of the DRC congregations must be activated to build up the church as the body of Christ and to expand the kingdom of God. “Hierdie dienswerk van die gelowiges” [This service of the believers] (NGKO-1974:12) may be done spontaneously and in an unorganised manner; it should rather be organised by the church for the sake of greater control and efficiency. Such an organisation would be accountable to the relevant church meeting. Church meetings do have the right to organise their own members for specific activities or to have them organised by commissions. Organised service related to the church should be organised and controlled in an ecclesiastical way, and members should preferably join these organisations to carry out their service. The church cannot exist without the service of the believers and the typical ecclesiastical service of the believer must take place in and through his/her congregation or church (Kleynhans 1988:127-129).

Three points are important, in this instance. First, according to NGKO-1974 article 21, the four church assemblies should deal with “alleen kerklike sake ... op 'n kerklike wyse” [only ecclesiastical matters ... in an ecclesiastical way]. This classical reformed principle from the 1570s is carried through to the service of the believers (Strauss 2010:58). Stated differently, the service of the believers, in their participation in the religious body of Christ, should do their religious work under the guidance of the organised church. Church membership of a DRC congregation is not a theoretical, invisible “pie in the sky”; it is an association with, and an active participation in the church as the believers or the body of Christ on earth. Just as all church work should be done under the guidance of church offices and assemblies, the service of the believers should flow from a living faith and their sharing in this body (Kleynhans 1988:129).¹⁰ The power of belonging and the core of their being in the church that revolve around the signs of the true church, namely the pure Bible ministry of the Word, the sacraments and church discipline, lie in the congregations. After all, these signs of the true church are a biblical truth without a Bible text and are confessed as a belief by reformed church members (NG Kerk-Uitgewers 1982:29; Bavinck 1967:356; Bouwman 1985:100-101).

The second point is that the General Synod is once again confronted by the centuries-old attitude of Protestant-Christians who believe in a second experience or blessing by the Holy Spirit. Simply stated, their attitude is as

10 Kleynhans (1988:127) identifies himself with the chairperson of the General Synod of 1974 who, from the “stoel” [chair], called the new NGKO-1974 article 55 a “groot” [great] decision.

follows: If you repent for the first time, you receive the Spirit, but in a second experience and blessing, you are filled with the Spirit. The church consists of the believers among the spiritually fulfilled believers, those who dedicate themselves truthfully to the Lord. These true believers in an association, apart from the formal church, are voluntarily driven towards the ultimate aim of that association; an association of true believers who form a church within a church, as it were (De Jong 1987:245-246).

The third point is that the General Synod does not make use of the popular title “amp van die gelowige” [office of the believer] for the service of the believers. The motivation for this is probably that the Scriptures do not mention such an office, but that, over time, it obtained the name of an office, and thereby greater sentiment or emotional significance among reformed members who emphasised the service of all members (Klaasing 2020:1). The reformer Martin Luther advocated the priesthood of all believers since 1520.¹¹ According to Luther, all believers (and all those who were baptised) are equal in the eyes of the church. That which the member receives at baptism makes of him a priest (De Jong 1987:161), a bishop or a pope. All Christians are equal in the spiritual state and certainly not laymen. All are office bearers. Luther developed an anti-hierarchy of offices in opposition to the hierarchy of offices of the Roman Catholic Church. For him, there are no differences in a spiritual state in the church – as there are among the Roman Catholic clergy or office bearers and laymen (Van Wyk 1989:7).

Klaasing’s complaint does not hold water that the DRC, by its exclusion of the term “office of the believer”, shifts its concern for the responsibility of the member towards the body of Christ to that of a shadowy background figure. The possible difference in emphasis does not lie in the exclusion of the term, but rather in the emphasis of the service. In the Dutch Reformed tradition, as embodied in the Three Forms of Unity as the confessions of faith and the Church Order of Dort of 1619, the offices are called services (or service work?) without undermining the priesthood of all believers as a reformational truth.

Be that as it may, the service of the believer in the church was given a place in NGKO-1974 article 55 (NGKO-1974:12).

11 In its 1994 report to the General Synod, the Church Ministry Commission of the General Synod of the DRC laments that a confusing distinction is made between the office of the believer and the priesthood of the believer. The implication is that these concepts are conflated (NGK 1994:276). It is also noteworthy that this Commission, contrary to NGKO-1974, generally talks about the office of the believer.

3. ORGANISATIONS AND FREE ASSOCIATIONS

One of the key hermeneutical factors for the layout of a church order is the structural approach. A church order should be compared with the church order itself, in instances where the understanding or impact of an article or a stipulation is important. The framework of principles, within which this may be understood, is similar to the issue of comparing Scripture with Scripture in the layout of the Bible. The assumption underlying this is that the compilers of a church order will not/may not, for ethical and logical reasons, contradict themselves. Articles follow and complement one another in ordered chapters, because each article makes another arrangement, and repetition is senseless. Further, if you said A, you must also say B. Or if you wish to include A and B in your church order, you must pay the price if they contradict each other or are repetitious (Van de Beek 1992:63). In a reformed church, a church order is usually the product of a church meeting, in which the members check each other to ensure that these underlying and implicit hermeneutical principles are not violated – implicit, because these principles are generally taken for granted in the church and not debated (NGK 1964:9).

The systematic principle concentrates on the teleological tradition behind some church practices with consequences for the church order. For example, the dogmatic and church-political issues that may be behind a specific article. The linguistic principle examines the meaning of the wording of articles within their religious context. The historical principle deals with the meaning of the article in the past, and why it must be understood, for historically based reasons, as such in the present. The teleological principle is aimed at the religious purpose of the article in the church order and takes note of the *Umwelt* or context in which the article functions. This *Umwelt* is also perceptible in other issues (Du Toit 1991:46-55).

In light of the structural issue, NGKO-1974 article 55 must also be explained in more detail in terms of NGKO-1974 article 69 (NGKO-1974:17). According to the latter, the DRC wishes to encourage the formation of associations based on a positive Christian ethos. The DRC's support given to an association corresponds with its foundation and objectives, as well as the observation of these in practice.

Article 69 encourages the idea that the “vrye vereniging” [free association] of article 69 differs from the ecclesiastical organisations of article 55. In the former, it is about free associations that function apart from the DRC, and in the latter, about actions organised from within the church and under the supervision of church assemblies. This means that the service of the believers, referred to by article 55, is service work under the guidance of and by the DRC and real church-related service: service that is organised by the DRC

in terms of its own objectives and for which the church accepts ownership of the outcomes.¹²

Amidst the positive Youth-to-Youth Action of 1974 – seen from the point of view of NGKO-1974 article 55 – the General Synod of that year decided on NGKO-1974 articles 55 and 69, with the unsavoury history of the attitude of Beyers Naudé’s Christian Institute (CI) of the 1960s in mind. In February 1966, Willie Jonker disputed the right of the CI to exist, because Naudé wanted to use it to alienate ecumenical work of the DRC and thus also church work, out of distrust of the DRC. According to Jonker, this was inaccurate, because associations outside the church cannot do the work of the church (Van Wyk 1989:80). On the same issue, the General Synod of 1966 rejected the CI, because it was an organisation outside the church, acting in competition with the DRC and pretending to do the work of the church better than the church itself could do (NGK 1966:459; Potgieter 1994:189).

The new NGKO-1974 article 55 took the same direction in relation to relevant, typical church-order terminology.

The neo-Calvinist notes in other articles of the NGKO-1974 and in the document of the General Synod of 1974 regarding separate development or apartheid in South Africa promoted the reformed ecclesiastical path of NGKO-1974: “Ras, volk en nasie en volkereverhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif” [Race relations in light of the Scriptures] (RVN, NGK 1975). NGKO-1974 shows the influence of Dooyeweerd and Stoker as neo-Calvinist scholars, especially in its Chapter 6, where article 67 speaks of

selfstandigheid in eie bevoegdheid van alle samelewingsverbande (bv kerk, gesin, skool), gemeenskapstrukture (bv vereniginge, partye ens) en voorts ... vrye maatskaplike verhoudinge, so eie aan die moderne gedifferensieerde samelewing [an independent and own competence in all community relationships (e.g. church, family, school), community structures (e.g. associations, parties, etc.) and furthermore ... free social relationships so much part of the modern differentiated society].

The key terminology of NGKO-1974 article 67 is not typical church-order terminology, but rather neo-Calvinist sociological terminology (NGKO-1976:17). In turn, RVN articulated (with the support of Abraham Kuyper) a Kuyperian creation-based pluriformity theory that would be given momentum by the events surrounding the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 (NGK 1975:10; Strauss 1983:396). NGKO-1974 was born during a time when this neo-Calvinist

12 Kleynhans (1988:129) endorsed this distinction.

flourishing in the DRC of the 1960s (Strauss 1994:206) was beginning to wane, though it lived on in NGKO-1974 (Strauss 2014:139, 143).¹³

4. A NEW NGKO ARTICLE 55 UNDER NEW CIRCUMSTANCES

In 1994, the changes from the old apartheid system in South Africa to a new democratic South Africa and the regime takeover by the African National Congress (ANC) meant that the DRC and its General Synod were confronted with a whole new way of life. This context, with new ways of thinking, would not initially be obvious in synod decisions, but would still exert its influence on specific viewpoints and reports in the DRC (Strauss 2013:81).

The General Synod of 1994 would give a hearing to Mandela as the leader of the ANC and persevere along its reformed path with Word, confession and church order. There was, however, a slumbering expectation in this Synod that the departure from apartheid by the new democratic state would lead to a state, in which the rule of law was uppermost (Constitutional Assembly 1997:17), a state in which the DRC, on the basis of its constitutional freedom of religion, would continue to function as an independent reformed church. The General Synod of 1998 would become known as the Synod of the perpetuation of the position of the DRC in its confession and religious independence under new circumstances (Strauss 2013:32).

This General Synod declared that its reformed confessions are scriptural in their formulation of the Christian faith,¹⁴ although not all wording or phrasing is necessarily scriptural *per se*. By accepting the clearly formulated condemnation of apartheid by the World Communion of Reformed Churches, this General Synod also restored its relationship with this ecumenical body. Furthermore, the General Synod of 1998 gained an ecclesiastically responsible direction with regard to children's communion and its prophetic voice in the new land. It was still the direction of the DRC as a reformed church in a liberal democracy, in which the Constitution did not acknowledge the triune God (Strauss 2013:32-58).

13 It is accepted from the Christian neo-Calvinist sociological viewpoint that the church as a community has a normative-unique nature and task that must be distinguished from the nature of other communities and that the church should not become watered down by compromises with confession-free institutions outside the church (Strauss 2014:138).

14 In his *Bevrydende waarheid*, Jonker (1994:18-19) points out the catholic character of the reformed confession, that is, that the Three Formulas of (faith) Unity join with the "dogmata" of the holy, generally Christian or "ou kerk" [old church]. With this, the 16th-century Reformation wanted to show that it was referring back to the early church and not working in a divisive, sectarian way (Bouwman 1985:568).

The same General Synod of 1998 would give the go-ahead for a study of homosexuality, a debate that would increase in intensity in reformed churches towards the end of the 20th century (NGK 2002:246). This debate would cause the General Synod headaches after 2011, because the internal differences on the matter were great, and the DRC had to accept a court decision that set aside decisions of the General Synod. In its turn, the General Synod of 2002 made decisions on the renewal of the church service, while still retaining its Bible-based character: God speaks and his congregation responds (NGK 2002:538).

In regard to the documents, namely Scripture and confession, on which its faith is based, the first real cracks appeared in 2004 in a single report of the General Synod, although not yet in its decisions. Klaasing's impression of the office of the believer as a shadowy figure blurring into the background in roughly 2002 does not fit with the General Synod's attitude on Scripture and confession and the formulation of NGKO-2002 article 55 by the General Synod of 2002. On the contrary, the concept of "dienswerk" [service] in NGKO-2002 article 55 was a valued 28 years old in this year – a situation that would continue until 2011 (NGKO-2002:22). In addition, the new NGKO-2011 article 55 would continue with the concept of service (NGKO-2011:16).

Although the term "office of the believer" did not originally appear in NGKO-1962 (NGKO 1964:2-4) under the heading *Offices of the church*, it was certainly part thereof (NGKO-1970:1) by 1970 and remained so until 1990 (NGKO-1990:1-2). The new NGKO-1974 article 55, on the service of the believer, does not mean that the office of the believer in NGKO-1974 article 3 was scrapped. In light of the comparison of church order with church order regarding the structural principle in the layout of a church order, 1974's service in NGKO-1974 article 55 does not cancel out 1974's office of the believer in NGKO-1974 article 3 (NGKO-1974: 1, 12-13). At the General Synod of 1974, a choice for service was not a choice against the office of the believer; rather, the office of the believer implies service work. The office of the believer as an office of the church order in NGKO-1986, article 3 (NGKO-1986:1) was, however, scrapped in 1990 (NGKO-1990:1). The climate surrounding this exchange in church-order terminology was in all probability limited to the council chamber of the General Synod, with hardly any influence on practices in congregations.

It is true that the General Synod – and the DRC as a whole – was exhibiting a diversity of radical thinking by 2004. This diversity did not, however, offer a consensus on an alternative framework of thought for a broad idea on what it means to be reformed in the DRC (NGK 2007:105-106), leading to a situation in which each matter had to be judged on its own merits. Such diversity – released from the views on Scripture and confession – was nothing

new in the DRC. In fact, the DRC and its General Synod had accommodated healthy differences of opinion since 1962, in the midst of a broad consensus on Scripture and confession, which did lead to reformation in some instances (Strauss 2013:82-84).

Against this background, the 2011 General Synod would review NGKO-2011.

5. THE 2011 GENERAL SYNOD AMENDS NGKO ARTICLE 55

The heading of article 55, dating from 1974, “*Dienswerk van die gelowiges*” [Service of the believers] was kept throughout the meetings. In this way, the 2011 General Synod made it clear that this concept had become a durable and sustainable term for the church order. If the convictions behind NGKO were acceptable to the broad majority of the DRC, then, after 37 years, the term “service of the believers” should have moved much closer to the – not properly weighed – emotional weight behind the office of the believers (NGKO-2011:16). This possibility underlines the fact that a decline in the value of this service, if this were to be true, should not be coupled to its terminology.

NGKO-2011 article 55 would not become part of NGKO in the normal manner. First, the heading *Dienswerk van die gelowiges* in both the agenda and the actions of the 2011 General Synod was replaced with *Lidmaatsmagtiging* [Member empowerment] (NGKa 2011:282; NGKh 2011:82). In the eventual publication of NGKO-2011, the heading remained *Dienswerk van die gelowiges* (NGKO-2011:16). The temporary amendment of the heading of NGKO-2011 article 55 indicates that some of the General Synod members opined, either purposefully or unthinkingly, that members could be empowered for their service simply by the correct article in the church order. The church order is a factor in official church work, but from the systematic deliberation of a church order article, it seems that, on this point, the church order is rather a norm of obedience than the spiritual establishment and practical exercising of a truth in the church. In its report on the revision of NGKO-2007 with NGKO-2011 in mind, the permanent General Task Team for Legal Matters claims that it and the permanent General Task Team for Congregation Development had to examine NGKO article 55, on the initiative of the latter. Congregation Development, however, did not make contact. Consequently, the 2011 General Synod assigned the revision of NGKO article 55 to the Temporary Commissions for Legal Matters and Congregation Development (NGKO-2011:82). As with a permanent task team, the proposal for the amendment of NGKO-2011 article 55 would, therefore, not mature over a period of months, but would rather be formulated over a few days of a busy synod – such a short

time would not be the best solution for the matter and it would be more difficult to include the mentioned factors for the layout of a church order. In fact, this is reference not only about the service of the believers, but also about the formulation of an activating stipulation in this regard.

The new NGKO-2011 article 55 (NGKO-2011:16) captures the reformed vision well in principle, but often renders it in terms that are unfriendly to members and not church order-like. Church order-like language loses out on these points.

Article 55 commences by stating that the calling of the church in its “gestuurdeheid” [mission] to the world or in its *missio Dei* implies the dedicated service of every believer. Through the Spirit of God, every believer receives the opportunities, gifts and power to give shape to God’s love for the world in their daily lives. The DRC must motivate, equip and support the believer for this service. The church must create opportunities to include believers in the building up of the church and the expansion of the kingdom of God. To promote the kingdom, believers can form actions, networks and partnerships. These must be undertaken in the service of the *missio Dei*, and the DRC will grant them its cooperation and blessing with sound judgement.

Article 55 contains mainly three plus points. First, the service of the believers must be a religious or ecclesiastical service for the triune God. NGKO-2011 article 55 vaguely and without stipulation states that church service must give shape to the love of God for the world. NGKO-2011 article 55 recognises that God’s kingdom here on earth is wider than the church and it, therefore, mentions the blessing of the DRC on non-church actions that are working from a realisation of their God-given mission.¹⁵ NGKO-2011 is concerned with church actions for the expansion of the kingdom; however, it neither implies nor shows a distinction between the work of the DRC and that of non-religious institutions. Secondly, “lidmaatsbemaagtiging” [member empowerment], or in relation to this non-church order-like term, “lidmaatstoerusting” [equipping of members], is a matter of the Holy Spirit through the Word (Pont 1984:41, 45), especially when it concerns the DRC’s indication of God’s love for the world. Unfortunately, NGKO-2011 article 55 gives no clue as to the role the congregation as complete church should play in this process. This matter, as a confessional truth, should have been brought home via Congregation Development, so that its approach could have strengthened the congregation as complete church. Thirdly, the NGKO-2011 realises that the kingdom of God

15 Theron (1989:75) points out that Jonker connects the church “ten nouste” [very closely] to the kingdom of God and even mentions it as the “kerk van die koninkryk” [church of the kingdom]. The church is the *gestalt*, the fruit, sign and instrument of the kingdom, a model and advocacy of God’s plan with the world.

is more widespread than the church and that the being of members in the church cannot be the sum total of their service to God; that God uses the believer in both church and kingdom, and that the Catholic concept, which still has its supporters, is evident; the concept of the church as the institute of grace and the rest of society as part of nature (De Jong 1987:132-133).

From a more critical viewpoint, NGKO-2011 article 55 mentions the believers as if they are members of the church as a large structural unity or broad association in God's kingdom. For NGKO-2011, it was about the calling, equipping and cooperation of the church (DRC) through the service of properly equipped members. From a reformed understanding of the church, however, the service of the believers never takes place separately from the congregation as the religious-emotional point of departure or basis of the service – a situation that is non-negotiable for a reformed church order. The conception of the church as a large association ignores the ecclesiastical constant that the believer is a member of the congregation as his/her lasting spiritual home. A church order that takes into account the systematic deliberations from Scripture and confession cannot sidestep such a stipulation in the service of the believers. NGKO-2011's references to actions, networks and partnerships that would be sent by God are more or less the free associations of article 68. The structural consideration in the drafting and understanding of a church order cannot, therefore, accept the new NGKO-2011 article 55 without at least first explaining its repetition of concepts by NGKO-2011 article 68. Moreover, the actions, networks and partnerships of NGKO article 55 sound more limiting and isolated than the free associations of NGKO article 69. Read together with the *missio Dei*, these concepts for the mission of the DRC are, from a linguistic point of view, technical terms used in theology; they ignore the fact that NGKO-2011 article 55 is meant for the use of ordinary DRC members. From a historical viewpoint, the concepts of actions, networks and partnerships are known to groups of members in DRC congregations and are not generally used in the DRC at large. Together with *missio Dei*, nomenclature such as networks and partnerships in NGKO-2011 article 55 creates the impression that the temporary commission on NGKO-2011 article 55 of the 2011 General Synod allowed themselves to be led by a pressure group of experts, who lacked an overview on church order matters and, therefore, NGKO-2011. The vaguely described content of concepts, the question of strange language such as *missio Dei* and the non-existence of the creation of opportunities through sound judgement decrease the value of NGKO-2011 for church life. NGKO-2011 declares too much and determines – as an order for church action – too little.

6. NGKO-2011 IN A BROADER CONTEXT

The concern of article 55 of both NGKO-1974 and NGKO-2011 with the service of the believer from the congregation, under supervision of the church council and other church meetings, is supported in the literature of reformed churches. A few examples that give glimpses of the same problematics may illustrate this point.

Article 72 of the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCO) encourages congregations to establish associations or actions to do Bible study as well as organisations for church youth. The CRCO believes that church councils should support such actions as much as possible in their congregations. Such actions are above all of a religious nature and must fall under the supervision of the church council (Van Dellen & Monsma 1967:277; Engelhard & Hofman 2001:395). On the same matter, Engelhard and Hofman (2001:396) point to a broad Christian discipleship as service to God and man, and also to testimony and service aimed at the expansion of the church and the kingdom of God, in every aspect of life. The United Presbyterian Church in the USA views "church membership as ministry". "All church members are called to the ministry". According to this church, "ministry" is when a Christian believer reaches out to another person anywhere (Gray & Tucker 1999:14-15).

From this, it is obvious that, in general, reformed churches struggle with the same problems as those of the DRC and that they place the same emphasis on the church council and congregation as do the NGKO-1974 and NGKO-2011: service in the church is fundamentally religious and must be carried out under the supervision of church assemblies.

In conjunction with this and from the DRC, Heyns concludes that church and kingdom are connected extremely closely ("allernouste verband staan"). According to this dogmatist and chairperson of the General Synod of 1986 (Van der Watt 1988:7),

God se koninklike handelinge ... [lê] ... nie net in en deur die kerk nie maar in die ganse kosmos en deur die hele geskiedenis heen [God's kingly actions ... [lie] ...not only in and through the church but in the entire cosmos and throughout the whole of history] (Heyns 1977:209).

Zeeman (1975:108), an advocate in the DRC of the consistent, all-encompassing kingdom of God, calls it "besielend" [inspiring] that the believer can, wholeheartedly and in all facets of life, be in the service of God and his everlasting kingdom. Like other reformed members, Heyns and Zeeman recognise a connection between church and kingdom. This connection plays into the discipleship of the service of the believer, to use a DRC term.

In an article on church preaching as the proclamation of the Word of the kingdom of God, De Klerk (1977:53-56) draws the conclusion that the message of the Scriptures “[die] heelal omvat en aanspreek” [includes and addresses the universe]. In his view, the preaching of the kingdom goes against the destruction and devastation that, because of the fall of man, “die mens en die wêreld tot in sy wortels en elke vesel van sy bestaan aangetas het” [affected man and the world to their very core and in every fibre of their being]. This preaching announces the reconciliation of the Lord God with man and the universe by the “amptelike en borgtogtelike lyding en sterwe van Christus” [official and bonded suffering and death of Christ] and obliged man to the sanctification of life – and service – “in die mees omvattende sin van die woord” [in the most comprehensive sense of the word].

Measured by these glimpses from its context, NGKO-2011 falls on receptive ground.

7. CONCLUSION

Linked to the image of the church as the powerhouse of the kingdom of God, the service of the believers, as members of the congregation or foot soldiers of Christ, plays a central role. From the Scriptures and confession on core aspects of Christian life such as the church and the kingdom, it is unthinkable that a church order will not be about the service of the believers, and will not emphasise and strengthen the place of the congregation in this service by means of stipulations.

NGKO-2011 article 55 maintains the religious character of this service as the latest article on the service of the believers or members of the church in the history of the church order in the DRC. It fails, however, to pay attention or give core stipulations to the place of the congregation as the lasting spiritual home of the believers. This gap causes doubt about whether article 55 was properly considered, and whether its approach is thoroughly based on the church order. On the other hand, it is a plus point that NGKO-2011 article 55 includes the kingdom by name as an option or space for the service of the believer. NGKO-2011, with its religious service of the believers, establishes an important principle in the life of the DRC.

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