

## The First Domino

*Are the cracks beginning to show? Is the message of The FORUM hitting home? However, it is foolish and self-destructive to believe that the administration of the OAC is immune to the forces of societal change that are impacting its domain. The first domino always sets the trend.*

The first domino in the long overdue process of constitutional/administrative reform and transformation in the Old Apostolic Church (OAC) seems to have fallen and thereby setting the stage for more dramatic change, which is unstoppable. Therefore, the next one (or more) cannot be too far off. That is how this phenomenon manifests itself. One after the other they always follow.

### “The world”

Rumour has it that there is a move afoot within the Church to change the mindset of members (and officers) to stop referring to Christians (and other believers) outside of the OAC as the “world”. It has long been regarded as a **derogatory** term which not only tarnished the image of the OAC, but also largely accounts for the notion that the Church is in fact a sect/cult. It is a matter The FORUM had resolutely taken issue with since its inception more than three years ago.

Apparently, outsiders will in future be referred to as “Non Apostolics”. Quite frankly, it is not a solution because it risks **offending** the various other formations of Apostolic Churches. “Non-Old Apostolics” would be more appropriate, if labels are really so important to certain people.

Nevertheless, The FORUM welcomes it as a small victory. It signals **movement**. Looks like the “Jericho Walls” of Head Office are beginning to shake. Mere vindication of the timeless adage: “nothing can stand in the way of an idea whose time has come”. Just like the Old Testament Israelites, the OAC is **not invincible**. Poor leadership often resulted in humiliating defeat and exile for them (Israel).

The FORUM is further emboldened by the fact that **ultimately** it would be the leadership of the OAC that will have to capitulate to the forces of administrative change, and not the other way round.

### Decline

The steady decline/negative trend in numbers and statistics across the board in all sectors of life in the OAC, especially after 1972, unmistakably points to the inevitability of, and need for, fundamental change and reform in its administrative architecture. Apparent pervasive decay in the temporal domain, must obviously **impact** diabolically on the spiritual mission of the Church. It is impossible these days to ignore the concerns and plight of many “faithfuls” among the helpless/voteless masses regarding the future of their Church. There seems to be more questions than answers.

Unlike all other major churches - and the OAC happens to be one of the biggest barons of **church property** in the country - OAC members/congregations have no meaningful say over the affairs of their church. Not even in their own parish. Despite being the cash cow for Head Office and the royal salaries of the top echelon of leaders, they do not have the authority to even mandate the acquisition of the lowliest household items for use locally without the express approval of a distant senior manager. Nothing can be more **embarrassing** than being an officer or educated/enlightened

OAC member and have no clue about what is really transpiring in the administrative “jungle” of your Church.

The fact that the system has worked until now, seems to have created an **illusion** among the leadership that it is sustainable and therefore in the best interest of the Church. Nothing can be further from the truth. It is a mindset that is not only out of step with governance and management trends of our age, but also contains toxic strands of a World War II mentality. To the casual observer, the OAC may appear as a church that is being held hostage by a cabal of highly paid insular officers who are desperately trying to hang onto their **comfort zone** at the expense of justice, morality and the aspirations of its membership to see their Church/faith grow and prosper. Judging by their actions, senior management seem ill-equipped to be solely in charge of the administration of a church the size of the OAC. Top management (OAC) resembles an island of intractable autocratic rule isolated in a sea of dynamic democratic growth and development.

### **Dialogue**

The “obsession” of The FORUM with constitutional/administrative reform is primarily about the medium to long term **future** of the Church. And even if top management is currently (as is expected of them) seized with a few salient perspectives in this regard for the OAC, it has to be communicated forthwith to the Church (members/congregations/ officers) because a broad-based **debate/discussion** has to start soon. Ideally, the proposed reform process has to be an evolutionary one that ought to be **phased** in over a five to ten year period. Therefore, the sooner an enabling environment for dialogue is created, the better. Whereas the OAC presently enjoys relative peace and calm, it is no guarantee that Head Office will be able to indefinitely maintain the initiative to timeously operationalize the reform process. There are a few **ticking** time bombs in the basement which might just upset the apple cart precipitously.

The OAC’s dilemma is poor management, fuelled by a lethal cocktail of incompetence and a lack of transparency and accountability. And to further compound this peculiar set of problems, **difference** of opinion is as a matter of policy being frowned upon and hardly tolerated. Not to mention the amounts that are arbitrarily spent on legal fees to keep a system in place which excludes congregations (the Church) from being in charge of their own affairs.

### **The other Dominoes**

‘Adapt or die’, has to be the slogan on the banner under which the leadership of the OAC should be engaged in the quest to keep the Church structurally sound, as well as relevant in a rapidly changing society. The OAC is seriously at risk of losing its traditional foothold in the religious world of today, simply because it is fast being crowded out (overtaken) by other contenders. And primarily because of its own doing.

**Dominoes** that have yet to fall:

- **Balance of powers:** A realignment of the balance of powers between Head Office and congregations. A smaller, less power-drunk Head Office and more empowered congregations is the key to sustainable governance. Acceptance and implementation of the principle of **Own Affairs** (congregations) and **General Affairs** (Head Office). Currently, congregations (OAC cash cow) have no say or participation in the administration of the

Church. Well paid senior church officers/officials have an unassailable stranglehold on the administration of the Church, without the necessary checks and balances in place. A lack of the required degree of transparency and accountability adds to the trauma. And should any officer dare to ask “uncomfortable” questions, arbitrary removal from office seems to be the order of the day.

- **Management:** Until 1972, congregations were well underway to taking ownership of OWN Affairs. Reversal of this process since then for selfish short term gain by a coterie of myopic top leaders has resulted in the dilemma in which the OAC is currently trapped. In the world of 2013, effective management and survival of a church the size of the OAC dictates that congregations be entrusted with **ownership** of their own administration. A fit-one-fit-all approach, as currently implemented by Head Office, is not in the best interest of the Church. What works in Durbanville cannot be expected to succeed in Blikkiesdorp. If a chain is as strong as its **weakest link**, then the mighty Old Apostolic Church is actually as strong as its congregation situated in the most backward of socio-economically disadvantaged “non-white” townships in the country.

There is also no credible substitute for **direct representation** by congregations in the regional and national structures of a Church. Which in turn implies the introduction of the principle of routinely elected church/community councils in order to underpin such an architecture. Another evolutionary aspect of such a development would be the establishment of a **local** administration office for a congregation or a regional office in areas where a few congregations are in close proximity of each other. Existing buildings may be revamped to accommodate such **office space**. These offices could be staffed by volunteers sanctioned by the proposed local church councils. OAC congregations are fortunate these days to have an oversupply of suitably qualified members who are not formally employed. And before the alarm bells/red lights are activated at Head Office, it should be pointed out that this is the way many other churches successfully run their administrations.

**Asset management**, a core function, is an area that Head Office has until now kept off-limits to the church (congregations) at large. The current undemocratic administrative architecture allows the **property** portfolio and the **tender process** to be treated as holy cows and the perceived personal fiefdom of a privileged few paid officers/officials. Although the acquisition of assets may to a certain extent be condoned under the present system, it is the arbitrary **alienation** of property and the awarding of tenders that need to be revisited. With no explicit mandate from the side of a collective of the congregations (the Church) and conducted in the absence of the necessary transparency and accountability, the system (the OAC) is extremely vulnerable to the vagaries of crime and corruption. Members/congregations are always the last to hear about the sale of cherished church assets that took place at the discretion of paid officials who seem to act as a law unto themselves. Apparently no **checks and balances** to ensure that the church does not end up as the loser in possible dodgy deals. It is no less than criminal and morally reprehensible to exclude the inputs of congregations from this crucial process. It would, therefore, make perfect sense if a forensic **audit** of transactions in this regard since 1972 were to be instituted in order establish to what extent the OAC has either benefited or suffered

through this particular system of governance. Conflict of interest where senior (and junior) officers are officially doing business with the Church while apparently also involved in meetings where those same tenders and contracts are being sanctioned and awarded, is an “evil” that needs to be looked out. There is only one name for that kind of practice – corruption. We are reminded of the incident where Jesus chastised the merchants at the Temple: “My Temple will be called a house of prayer for the people of all nations. But you have turned it into a hideout for thieves” (Mark 11:17)

- **Training:** If the OAC has managed until now to survive without the facility and benefits of formal training for its officers and other office-bearers, then common sense informs us that it cannot be allowed to be regarded as the wave of the future. The Church seems to be increasingly held to ransom by the irresponsible and incompetent actions of ill-equipped office-bearers. An apology, though, to those who do not deserve to be tainted with this tar brush.

And if there is no, or not enough, in-house tutorial capacity available, then we should look outside, just as the biblical kings David and Solomon did when expertise within Israel was lacking for their various construction programmes, or the military.

**Anointed officers:** Ordained officers should be required to complete formal training in church administration, protocol/etiquette and bible literacy. If facilities for adequate in-house tuition are lacking, then outsourcing should be considered.

**Support staff:** local officials, as well the proposed church councillors, need to be duly orientated in the administration of Own Affairs and their liaison with Head Office.

**Youth:** Youth to be allowed and assisted to manage their own affairs and **structures** as part of their training for adulthood. The establishment of regional and national structures governed by the youth themselves is indispensable. Anointed officers should keep a healthy distance, but not neglect their supervisory role. It is incumbent upon the OAC leadership to **recognize** and accept that the OAC Youth is part of the **global youth** community and therefore subject (and susceptible) to the daunting challenges confronting the youth of our age. They are **not immune** to the impact of juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, alcoholism, teenage pregnancy, early school drop-out, etc. Nothing short of bold and dynamic leadership is required. There is a national (government) agenda in place and the OAC cannot continue shirking its **responsibility** in this regard.

**Sunday School:** In the absence of religious instruction in the formal school programme, it is incumbent upon the Sunday School to assume that responsibility. Sunday School **curricula** should therefore emulate what formal schooling used to do as far as bible literacy and human development are concerned. It is imperative that the OAC child should know the bible and have a solid grasp of the faith by the time he/she graduates to confirmation. **Cultural** (song, speech, drama and music) development should also be maximized during this stage. OAC kids should be singers, orators, actors/actresses and musicians **par excellence**.

**Adult:** There should be programmes for adults who wish to upgrade their skills or acquire new ones. Optimum bible literacy levels would be an asset for those who frequent the field of testimony on Monday and Thursday evenings. **Adult programmes** are also beneficial for the fostering of functional households, which in turn enhances the efforts of the community Priest. Exemplary/functional households make for productive congregations, which must ultimately enable the OAC to succeed in its mission to become that “shining city on the hill”.

**Aged and the infirm:** Formal structures run primarily by members/congregations, should be in place to take care of the Aged and the sick. The OAC should **take care of its own**. The OAC is a respected financial empire and should, therefore, not be offended when it is being criticized for leaving it to other churches to fend for its members. Again, officers should step back and maintain a supervisory role in this regard.

**Women:** The issue of the role of women in the administration and spiritual life of the OAC will continue to surface in the future until it has been dealt with. It is no secret that many members **best qualified** for leadership positions in the OAC often happen to be women. Women hold leading positions in most of the other churches these days. The OAC, therefore, is confronted by the unenviable challenge of having to defend itself against allegations of **discrimination** against women. On this issue it is not only out of step with the norms of this century, but also with the life and times of Jesus and his apostles. In fact, the OAC leadership seems to be in the same league as the Pharisees in their crusade against the apostles on the issue of **Jews vs Gentiles**. Jesus regarded women as indispensable in his mission on earth. Women were invariably among his closest allies. They were closest to him when he gave his last breath on the cross and they were also the first to meet him when he rose from the grave. It was a woman he mandated to inform his disciples about his resurrection and how they should prepare for their first meeting. So, on what grounds do the leadership of the OAC in the year 2013 justify its disposition regarding the role of women in the Church? In view of some of the fundamental shifts in the doctrine of the OAC, that have taken place since 1972, it is almost impossible for the leadership to justify the retention of the status quo (discrimination) as far as the role of women is concerned. This is all about the future, regarding which discussion/debate and wide consultation have to start soon.

- **Social development:** The priceless soul of man/woman the church is so concerned about, cannot be engaged without the consent/co-operation of the human body. Therefore, the well-being of the natural body (temple of God) is pivotal in the mission of the Church to fulfill God’s work. It is no secret that a **sizable majority** of the membership of the OAC belongs to the segment of society that may be categorized as socio-economically challenged, which implies that the Church has a social responsibility to have credible systems/structures/processes/strategies/programmes in place to play its part as one of the leading corporate citizens in the country. In the absence of any such structures currently in the OAC, it is disturbing (if not humiliating) to note how **other churches** (so-called world) often have to accommodate OAC members in their programmes, while the OAC is perceived as a powerful **financial empire**.

The voice of the congregations can no longer be ignored because they know best. Head Office knows “nothing”, because senior management seems ensconced in cosy circumstances and far removed from the eye of the storm.

**Welfare structure:** OAC officers and members often glibly refer to the Welfare System the OAC has in place. But at closer inspection, no trace of a working system with tangible **structures** seem to exist. At best it looks like the mere existence of a welfare fund that is operated under an official welfare number, which suggests that a formal structure has to be in place. Without deriding this obviously immature and defective welfare operation in the Church, it needs to be emphasized that it is imperative for congregations to impress upon Head Office the urgency of being more **transparent** and accountable about the administration of the funds that are supposed to reach the areas of destitution and despair within the OAC. Although under the auspices of Head Office, the Welfare Fund should have a federal character, reflecting **direct representation** by congregations and be allowed to function autonomously. Annual General Meetings and the regular election of officials/representatives should be permanent features on the annual calendar of the Welfare Fund. After all, annual reports need to be submitted to the responsible government Department. The OAC can ill afford to attract any negative public attention to its handling of this kind of **public money**.

**Burial Fund:** Since contributions from the congregations sustain the Burial Fund, this organ should be open to more **meaningful participation** by congregations. The structures, therefore, need to be revisited with a view to establishing the principle of general and annual general meetings, as well as the routine election of office-bearers. It is interesting to note how many senior (and junior) OAC officers are undertaking at funerals funded by the OAC Burial Fund. It again raises the question of **conflict of interest**, but if credible structures exist, where congregations are adequately represented, this anomaly may be ameliorated. The required checks and balances need to be in place, because this is hard-nosed secular business with no celestial attachment.

**Cultural development:** The OAC is not only a multiracial entity, but also a **multicultural** sleeping giant. At present, despite the socio-political revolution of 1994 in South Africa, the OAC pretty much still operates within the finite “three-worlds-in-one” cocoon it has retained from the former apartheid era. Although the legal impediments have disappeared and a number of “non-white” members have since moved into former “white” neighbourhoods and joined local OAC congregations, apartheid and **racism** still seem to be alive and well in the Church. Racial discrimination is a cardinal sin. This interpretation is advanced because the current top leadership (a conservative white minority) has yet to publicly address the apartheid legacy of Head Office and the “white” apostles of the day. All other churches in the land, even the godfathers of apartheid, have atoned for their part in aiding and abetting this criminal and inhuman system. A formal public **apology** by the OAC leadership to its “Non White” constituency is, therefore, still **outstanding**. If the most conservative of the leading Afrikaner churches could do it, then the OAC and its apostles – who claim sole custody of the legacy of Jesus and his disciples/apostles - have **no excuse**. It is important for the OAC record to be corrected and sanitized, otherwise this issue will linger on as

**unfinished business** long after the perpetrators have passed on. It gets worse, because they could still be named and shamed post-humously, to the detriment of their next-of-kin. What a shame, what an embarrassment!!!

An important aspect of the proposed cultural reforms, should be the development of the required **policy framework** and the establishment of the **attendant structures** at local, regional and national levels. In 2013, a “white” cultural hegemony still defines the character and public image of the OAC. This is **unacceptable** and a gross misrepresentation of the true face/nature of the Church. It should be recognized as one of the **chickens** of present day “White” minority rule in the OAC. Rumour has it that the display of traditional cultural acts (dancing) by “black groups” in the OAC in the Western Cape, are often frowned upon by some insensitive senior “white” leaders of the Church, who also happen to be the responsible officers for some of those communities. Leaders who appear to be unable to adapt, should either be **retired** or redeployed to a zone where they would cause the least damage.

**Rainbow realm:** One of the best attributes of the OAC community, is its **multicultural** treasure trove which still has to be exploited. Apartheid, of course, saw to it that the races were deliberately kept apart and in so doing prevented this cultural force from allowing the Church to develop to its **full potential**. Prior to the “changing of the guard” in 1972, “Coloured” and “Black” communities in the Western and Eastern Cape under the leadership of the late Apostle Lombard were on the verge of closing the cultural gap between the two groups in the Church. Since then, this process has tragically been sabotaged and the two communities ushered back into their respective apartheid boxes. Of course, tied to this issue is the apparent resistance to the presence of a **“Black” apostle** in the Western Cape. To add insult to injury, the OAC continues to have “White” and “Coloured” apostles (without the facility of the required vernacular acumen) minister to the “Black” communities in the province with total reliance on the assistance of informal interpreters. It is, therefore, not inappropriate to assume that if the leadership of the OAC had been of a socially liberal disposition, this matter would have been addressed already in a civilized manner. It is important to point out that it is not so much about the **skin colour** of the incumbent, but rather the **value-adding** aspect of it as far as the promotion and development of multiculturalism in the province is concerned. Anyway, the Western Cape can certainly do with **exposure** to the talents and persona of a “Black” apostle. All the other provinces in the country are being served by “Black” apostles. The Western Cape has never had one in the entire history of the Church. So, is it again the old Western Cape black bogeyman (“swart gevaar” scarecrow) that still rules the roost at the Head Office of the OAC? Perhaps scared “they” might lose control over “them” (Blacks)? However, this **time bomb** is ticking.

**Song, speech, drama and music:** A priority should be the establishment of permanent structures at local, regional and national levels to manage the proposed **cultural revolution** and the subsequent promotion and development of the cultural wealth of the Church. This is a constituency that should be the preserve of members/congregations, while officers take a back seat and exercise their traditional supervisory role. If handled expertly, the cultural arm of the Church could be the most **potent** aspect of its apostolic mission. The

sky is the limit – own cultural institutions, eisteddfods, gala concerts and related exhibitions, etc.

**Venues:** In order to give practical expression to the abovementioned cultural endeavours, it is obvious that the design and construction of church buildings should be **functional**. Until now, the architecture of OAC venues invariably fell far short of this ideal. Simply, because it inevitably is always the result of a decision by a committee of disinterested individuals behind closed doors, miles away from the relevant community. It is important to realize and accept that congregations have **uniquely different** characters/needs and that the contemplated building ought to last for at least a hundred years. Therefore, the local or regional communities are the best advisors when it comes to the design and utilization of church complexes. Gone should also be the days when OAC buildings are only fit for divine services. It is a waste of hard-earned church funds and a myopic approach to asset management. The future dictates that church complexes should ideally be target-oriented, **multi-purpose** centres. And again, the necessary checks and balances are imperative.

### **Stunted growth**

Growth and development in the OAC have been stunted. And there is no prospect of any improvement as long as the current system of administration prevails. The OAC top management seems trapped in the quick sand of procrastination due to a lack of the necessary will to provide bold and dynamic leadership. **Dwindling numbers** in all spheres of activity in the Church is the key indicator. The “Goliath” that has the OAC paralysed is an archaic system of administration, from which there can be no comeback/rescue without a deliberate process of fundamental reform and transformation. And all The FORUM is trying to do is to contribute to a dialogue that inevitably has to take place.

The **sad story** of the OAC in the year 2013 is: rapidly declining numbers for the intake/sealing of new members (due to failing testimony endeavours), rising number of church leavers (especially our youth), plummeting attendance figures, low levels of aspiration among suitably qualified men to join the ranks of officers, etc. The sum total and impact of these **dismal statistics** are that the OAC is fast losing out on its traditional prophetic and evangelical prowess, because its spiritual leaders appear to have been sucked into a vicious cycle where the **secular** (church funds, bricks and mortar, lawyers, pay cheques, the good life, status, etc) takes up the bulk of their limited time. However, this is nothing new – it happened to biblical Israel so many times, invariably ending in humiliating defeat for many a great leader.

The golden principle the OAC leadership either refuse to accept, or have no clue about, is the inherent **conflict of interests** that exists between a Head Office and branches (congregations). Therefore, the need for recognition and acceptance of the existence of OWN Affairs (congregations) and GENERAL Affairs (Head Office), in order to bridge the divide and to make the system work optimally. That is why **anointed officers** cannot truly represent the wishes and interests of congregations because they are primarily beholden to Head Office. Under the current system, they are serving **two masters** who have conflicting interests. That is also why officers are **loath** to support any controversial issue their congregations might have with senior management, because

they have taken an oath to defend Head Office. The answer is: routinely elected local community/church councils in which a nominated member(s) of the clergy serves ex officio.

### Reformed Admin

A reformed/transformed administrative architecture holds out the following rewarding prospects for the OAC:

- Empowered, rejuvenated and administratively astute congregations, officers and members that will bring about the kind of **revival** the OAC requires in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The more members /congregations are acquainted with the affairs of their own church, the more enthusiastic they would be to develop, promote and defend their “city”.
- Autonomous administrations at local level will inevitably lead to a smaller and more effective Head Office, also resulting in considerable cost cutting in current overhead financial commitments. Vibrant local church councils provide the kind of sturdy **backbone** any church the size and architecture of the OAC requires.
- A more **accessible** and member-friendly Head Office, as opposed to the current Pentagon-style environment members/congregations have to put up with. A functional Head Office resplendent with facilities such as state-of-the-art boardrooms, libraries, archives, auditorium, etc. A Head Office, the Church (members/congregations) truly and confidently may regard as belonging to them. It is unacceptable to have a Head Office, like now, where even officers fear to tread. Currently, it seems like a **fortress** from where the top leaders (paid officers) pursue their strained relations with members/congregations (their paymasters).
- Fewer senior (executive) anointed officers because they would no longer have to micro manage, the way they have enslaved themselves until now. They would be free to concentrate on their **spiritual calling**. Fewer apostles and executive senior officials would also mean fewer top executive remuneration portfolios. Fewer incumbents may even look forward to bigger pay cheques – simple economics. **Apostles**, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds and Elders in the OAC are supposed to be seen **emulating** the works and miracles of **Jesus Christ**, and not micro-managing the warehouse.
- The establishment of new regional and national structures where congregations are directly represented, should be the catalyst for (virtually) bringing together **under one roof** the congregations of the OAC as they are currently spread around Southern Africa and abroad. It is an aberration to have a church where only apostles and certain executive senior officers have their annual royal indabas, while there is no prospect whatsoever for congregations in the provinces and regions to have any **liaison** of their own among themselves. It ought to be labeled as a form of apartheid – OAC apartheid, probably holding out the option of a kind of OAC Spring. There should be real content/substance to the concept of “an apostolic family conducting **an apostolic way of life**”.
- The introduction of local, regional and national structures for the promotion of the **arts** and **culture** – which include Sunday School, Youth and Adult – in the OAC is the key to developing the Church to its full potential, an ideal that has never been achieved ever since the **founding of the Church** in 1927 by the Apostle Klibbe. Other members of the Apostolic

Family (New Apostolic Church and the Apostolic Faith Mission) have made great strides in this regard, simply because they have struck the right balance between the status of their Head Offices and the congregations. The OAC has a lot of catching up to do, and unfortunately there are no shortcuts or alternatives.

### **Enabling environment**

Just as in the case of the Israelites, fresh out of Egypt, the OAC (with its debilitating administrative architecture) now also finds itself on the shores of the **Red Sea**, with the forces of the King of Egypt fast approaching. And just as in the case of the Israelites, there is only one solution.

The biggest **drawback** for the OAC is the absence of the necessary facility/forum where leadership and members/congregations may coalesce in order to pursue the kind of dialogue that is required to address the issue of constitutional/administrative reform. It is incumbent upon top management (and they get paid for it out of church coffers) to create an **enabling** environment for the various role players to meet and discuss what should rank as one of the most important developments in the history of the OAC – the moment we had to cross our Red Sea.

Bearing in mind how long the Israelites were stuck in Egypt, or how long Noah laboured, The FORUM has no illusions of **imminent** success in this regard. But, what is certain though is that matters are destined to get progressively worse for the leadership of the OAC until that glorious morning when an ‘Apostle Paul’ appears on the scene to **inspire** the Church to putting its own house in order. Given the nature of societal change, and especially at this juncture in the history of the post-1972 OAC, chances are that the chosen one may be embedded already in the ranks of the current senior serving officers.

### **The FORUM**

Again, before The FORUM is singled out for special treatment, it needs to be reiterated that it is merely capturing and **articulating** what is whispered and regurgitated at all levels in the Church. The statements/comment contained in the papers of The FORUM are the **aggregate** of what would have emerged in various forms, had there been a prevalent culture of healthy dialogue and a tolerance for critical thought in the OAC. It (FORUM) is the echo of a voice that is all too often deliberately ignored or suppressed throughout the Church. The only difference may be that The FORUM is perhaps stating it more effectively and comprehensively. It is tragic to see how officers (husbands/fathers/grandfathers/uncles/brothers/professional experts) who are held in high esteem among their people (households/congregations) are **reduced** to the status of pitiful jellyfish out of fear of being trapped on the wrong side of Head Office for having rightfully taken a bold stand on issues. What is even worse, is the fact that an ordinary member may air a controversial opinion without fear of retribution. Now, what **self-respecting** individual still wants to serve in such an odious environment? **Jesus** allowed Thomas and other disciples to adopt all kinds of postures in this regard. So, which **authority** are officers of the OAC really serving?

### **Schisms**

In the year 2013, it may be comfortably assumed that the OAC leadership of today will not be as fortunate as their predecessors, who escaped the pressures of organized opposition from within the Church, because since its inception in 1927 the so-called rebellious factions invariably ended up

breaking away to start new churches – the last being the schism of 1972, which gave rise to the formation of the Reformed Old Apostolic Church (ROAC). What is **different** now? First, the apartheid political landscape (which favoured and was supported by the OAC leadership of the time) has dramatically changed to a democracy. Second, the once seemingly untouchable top leadership can now be engaged **without fear**. Third, there is an **in-house capacity** among members/congregations to conduct an independently funded probe/empirical research into the real history of governance and finance of the OAC of the Post World War II era. That is why more break-aways/schisms seem highly **unlikely** or distantly remote. The current leadership can also expect more members, holding opposing views in the name of **justice and integrity**, to stand pat and fight back. The shoe is on the other foot now; the constitution of the land and the political order of the day are against the archaic kind of rule the current OAC top leadership wish to perpetuate and ruthlessly visit upon a **disfranchised** church community.

However, The FORUM is not the **enemy**. In fact, it could also be regarded as the **conscience** of the OAC, trying to be of service - almost like the ass that tried to get the attention of the Prophet Bileam/Balaam.

### **A way out**

And if top management do not know how to get the process of reform underway, The FORUM gladly proffers the following age-old, tried and tested political/management tool : ever heard of setting up a **Commission** of Inquiry or a just a Special Commission that will secure them the necessary **time and space** and also provide a face-saving mechanism? That is what all the other “apartheid” aligned churches have done. No rocket science required, just plain old common sense.

Wesley Johanneson (also Secretary of The FORUM)

Bellville

18 July 2013