

Editorial

Around 18 Reformed theologians from all over the world came together in Mangalore, India from 21 to 26 October 2011. It was the first gathering of what will become the "Network of Theologians" within WCRC. Why such a network? This network is a group of theologians who will:

- discern expressions of Reformed theologies around the globe in their particular contexts, exploring possibilities of linking with theological institutions within the Reformed community;
- engage in collective theological reflection for the enrichment of the WCRC community and beyond, responding also to requests for advice in specific situations.

There is a direct link between the Office of Theology of WCRC and this network. Let me, in order to make this clear, list the tasks of the Office of Theology:

- theological publication (*Reformed World*);
- theological education and mission empowerment (Global Institute of Theology);
- theological exchange (ecumenical dialogues);
- theological elaboration of the themes of the General Councils of WCRC;
- exploration and elaboration of theological challenges of member churches all over the world and theological input to deal with these challenges;
- ongoing contact with theological institutions within the Reformed community;
- exploration of the theological aspects relevant to WCRC's participation in God's mission.

The Executive Secretary of the Office of Theology carries out these tasks. Planning and priorities are approved by the Executive Committee. The Network of Theologians operates differently. It is not directly part of the governing body but advises the Executive Secretary.

The network has now started its work with the exploratory consultation in Mangalore. The aim of this consultation was to:

- explore what is theologically relevant in the various contexts of the different



participants;

- have an exploratory discussion of the theological themes that came out of the Uniting General Council in 2010, starting with an elaboration of the theme of communion;
- have a discussion about the theological task of WCRC and the role of the network in it.

In this edition of *Reformed World* you will find a selection of the papers presented at this consultation. They have all been reworked to serve as articles for our theological journal. In this way *Reformed World* makes it possible for a wider audience to know, right from the outset, what WCRC's Network of Theologians is dealing with. Publishing their papers may also help this network to find its place within the Reformed community.

We have in this edition also two book reviews. They have been written by Christopher Dorn. Since September 2011 he has been, as one of our interns, part of the WCRC staff team in Geneva. He also assists in editing and proofreading *Reformed World*.

Douwe Visser

WCRC Network of Theologians: Report of the First Consultation

Responding to the decision of the 2010 General Council (Grand Rapids), the first consultation of the WCRC's Global Network of Theologians took place at Karnataka Theological College in Mangalore, India, between 21 to 26 October 2011. Present were 15 people from 12 countries, plus two "observers" from India, plus two staff from WCRC.

We began by every member present bringing to the table what was "theologically relevant" in their own context, and with observing our local context in India, a context marked by a deep multifaith religiosity, great energy, and both abject poverty and affluence. Both of these activities reminded each of the participants of something of the breadth and diversity of the Reformed family. Some recurrent and emerging themes were the presence of the "other", issues of justice, equality, interfaith dialogue, Reformed identity, ecumenism, particularity and catholicity, signs of the times, the crisis of the church in various parts of the world, and hermeneutical challenges.

Some of the questions that materialized from these brief presentations were then explored more deeply via a number of discussion papers. These included:

- "The Aspect of Communion and Theology", by Anna Case-Winters
- "Contextuality and Universality", by Heleen Zorgdrager
- "Reformed Identity", by Michael Weinrich
- "Reformed Theology and Mission", by Jurgens Hendriks

The Executive Secretary for Theology, Douwe Visser, also presented a paper on the WCRC's theology work, in which he focused on, and then led a discussion around, the following questions:

- What ecumenical dialogues are relevant for WCRC's involvement?



- What (theological) role should WCRC have in the upcoming 2017 Jubilee?
- What is the role of our theological journal *Reformed World*?
- What should be the link between the Global Institute of Theology and this network?
- What should be the role of WCRC within the community of Reformed theological institutions?
- What should be the role of WCRC's affiliated members: IRTI and NetAct?

A number of recurring themes emerged in our conversations: *koinonia* and *kenosis*, the centrality of the Word of God (*sola scriptura*), the relationship between “text” and “context”, justification, sanctification, theology from the margins, the sovereignty of God, *missio dei*, election and covenant, church of the *laos*, ecumenical openness, the plurality and complexity of Reformed identity, and the ongoing relevance of the tradition, among other themes.

The participants also considered questions of the role of the network, its relationship within WCRC, and the shape that the network and its meetings might take in the future. We spoke of the network as operating as something like a ‘third space’ which would assist the WCRC in its various tasks, including doing some hard theological work on issues our communion, encouraging and supporting theological education (including the Global Institute of Theology), and bringing the local issues to the global table and taking the global issues back to the grass roots. There was also some discussion about a possible theme for our 2012 meeting, one suggestion being that of “Communion”. With a view to practicing a more “Reformed” methodology, and to fostering a deeper and more productive theological conversation, it was proposed that multi-authored papers might be prepared on various aspects of the agreed theme, and the papers disseminated prior to the meeting.

Each day began with worship, either in the college chapel, where we were led by one or more of our number, or, as it was on the Sunday morning, at Shanthi Cathedral (Church of South India) where we were warmly welcomed and where we were able to bring greetings on behalf of WCRC, and Liz Vuadi Vibila (a network member) preached the word of God. On Sunday afternoon, we visited a Hindu and a Jain Temple, a cultural resource centre of folklore, and witnessed a folk performance on Hindu mythology.

Throughout our gathering, we were the recipients of the very warm and generous hospitality of Dr. Rathnakara Sadananda and H.S Wilson, and the community of the Karnataka Theological College. We were also greeted by the principal of the college, Dr. Cabral, and the local bishop of the Karnataka Southern Diocese of the Church of South India, Rev. Dr. John Sadananda.

Participants

1. Anna Case-Winters, USA
2. Bast Plaisier, The Netherlands (Vice-President, WCRC)
3. Daphne Martin-Gnanadason, India (WCRC Staff)
4. Douwe Visser, The Netherlands (WCRC Staff)
5. Henry Wilson, India
6. Heleen Zorgdrager, The Netherlands
7. Jason Goroncy, New Zealand
8. Joas Adiprasetya, Indonesia
9. Jurgens Hendriks, South Africa
10. Kyung In Kim, Korea
11. Liz Vuadi Vibila, Congo
12. Ofelia Ortega, Cuba
13. Marina Ngursangzeli, India (Observer)
14. Matthias Zeindler, Switzerland
15. Michael Weinrich, Germany
16. Paul Haidostian, Lebanon
17. Rathnakara Sadananda, India
18. Royce Victor, India (Observer)
19. Yolanda Dreyer, South Africa



Reformation and the Unity of the Churches

Bas Plaisier

Scripture Readings:

John 16.29; 17.3, 20–26 and Ephesians 2.13–22

Reading Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17 on Reformation Day may seem an unusual choice for this occasion. Most people don't connect the Reformation with unity. On the contrary, the Reformation is seen as creating one of the biggest divisions in the church. The great schism in 1054 between the churches of the East and the West was already a tragic event. However, the Reformation in 1517 was an even bigger catastrophe for the unity of the church. How do we, on this very day, dare to speak about unity?

I understand such feelings. It is true: the Reformation not only shook the edifice of the church, but even devastated whole structures. And after 1517, the landscape of the church really changed dramatically. "Protestantism" has been synonymous with "division", "internal struggle", "mistrust", "battle for the truth", and "rejecting of the 'others'". It has been blamed for a total lack of belief in the value of the church and the unity of the church.

Look at a map of the church in the cities of the world: we see a variety of Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Baptist and other denominational and non-denominational churches in many shapes. Sometimes the churches are quarreling or competing aggressively with each other for members. And if we search for unity within the church families of our denominations, it is difficult to find. How many shades of Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, Pentecostalism, and Evangelicalism do we have? Often we are not able to live with each other in unity.

Is this the fruit of the Reformation? Yes and no.

What is happening is also the result of an individualistic philosophy and a commitment to a managerial approach to being church. In many parts of the world Christians are convinced that we need competition in order to grow and be effective. Churches are modeled after shopping malls; they are seen as factories or companies involved in a battle with their competitors to improve their product and to produce more with better results.

Is this really in line with the basic thought of the Reformation?

Did the split in the church in the 16th century not touch Martin Luther and John Calvin? It did touch them—even shocked and frightened them. Both men suffered deeply due to the divisions generated by their doctrine and way of acting. Curiously, the split in the Church of Rome was also for them a kind of disaster. For both the unity and catholicity of the church belong to the basis of the confession to which they were committed.

But they were also convinced that they had no other choice. The Church of Rome did not accept their proposals for reform. The Roman Catholic Church persisted in forms of church governance, disciplines, and doctrines that deviated from the orthodoxy and orthopraxis of the old church, which also hurt the Reformers deeply. And ultimately the Catholic Church expelled and banned them. In the end Luther found himself outside the church which he loved so much.

However, even after that event they did not give up their ideal of the one church. Luther and Calvin continued to insist that splitting the church is a sinful act. For instance, in his church order Calvin denounced separatism as an evil comparable to heresy: it cannot be tolerated by a minister of the word of God. Luther wrestled until his death with what he called “temptations” concerning the serious question whether he was a separatist—a destroyer of the church. Was not in fact the result of his work the sin of division rather than the reformation of the church? Until the end of his life this terrible thought haunted him.

John Calvin wrote a remarkable answer to Cardinal Sadolet, who had sent a letter to the citizens of Geneva about the separatism caused by the Reformation. Calvin answered with a prayer:

You know, O Lord, that in the beginning I rejected the novelty of the Reformation. For one thing I remained far from the doctrine of reformation because of my respect for the church But afterwards I understood that my fear of offending the highness of the church was unfounded. Then I learned that there is a big difference between someone who separates himself from the church and someone who wants to restore and reform the church in all her faults.

And so both men insisted on the “highness” of the church.

Why? It is because the scriptures led them in that direction. That is what I will try to explain in what follows. I will show how their reforms connect with the situation in our churches.

Paul writes clearly about the church as the body of Christ. (See 1 Corinthians and Ephesians.) For him the church is of a qualitatively different sort than the companies and businesses of the world. The church is rooted in God; the church is from heaven and not from earth.



In using the metaphor of the body of Christ, Paul is continuing what Jesus tells his disciples in John 16 and 17. In his “High Priestly Prayer” Jesus urgently prays for the unity of his friends. Why? This unity and fellowship from the very beginning was far from reality. The disciples constantly have troubles with the unity of their fellowship! That is a sad conclusion, especially for Jesus himself. He suffers from it. That is why he prays so fervently that his friends will be one. We hear also his deep anxiety for the community and unity of his friends.

What is the reason that unity is so important for Jesus? Why did he not send them into the world to build a community, a church organization, according to their own ideas and contexts? That’s normal in our world, isn’t it? However, it is not for Jesus. Jesus regards discord, splits and divisions as undermining his work. The mission of Jesus to this world is at stake! In the unity of his disciples the mission of Jesus—which he receives from his Father—becomes visible! The disciples are a part of him—together they are working and living as a unity. And if they are working apart from each other and especially apart from Jesus, they actually tell different messages and not the one good message, the Gospel. That is a shocking idea for Jesus. He and his disciples are bound to one mission. They are in fellowship with God, with each other.

Precisely about this close connection and their unity, Jesus has his doubts.

Did you note that his serious prayer for unity directly follows his conversation with his friends about their faithfulness and support for his mission?

We read in John 16: “Do you now believe?” Jesus asks them this question after they spoke so boldly about their willingness to follow him. He doesn’t believe them. “The hour is coming, and indeed has already come, that you all will leave me alone— when you will be scattered—in going your own way” (Jn 16.32).

“You will go your own way and leave me alone. . . .” That is what he foresees. And we know it happened this way. At the moment that Jesus was captured and tortured, his disciples scattered. And in doing so, they left him alone! Jesus was left behind when they went their own way, splitting the fellowship.

The words of Jesus sound in my ears just as shrill as the words of the apostle Paul about the disunity and the divisions in the church of Corinth. Paul also cannot understand what the Christians are doing with their quarrels and divisions. Again the question: why is Paul so upset? Isn’t it normal that we have our quarrels? Isn’t it normal that we sometimes have to decide to leave each other alone for the sake of peace and the continuation of the mission?

However, Paul does not accept this as a normal phenomenon. He sees something terrible: a body—terribly wounded—like we sometimes see after a road accident.

Is Christ divided—is his body cut into pieces—is that what you want?

These are very dramatic words. In going our own ways, we divide the one body. We hurt Jesus.

Later the church father Augustine defines this unity by means of his concept *totus Christus* (“the whole Christ”). Christ and his church together form the *totus Christus*. According to Augustine, it is not that Christ would be incomplete without us, but that he did not wish to be complete without us or without the church (cf. Sermons 341.1.1 and 9.1). That means that if we speak of Christ alone, then we forget the whole Christ, for Christ is united to the church. On the other hand, if we speak of the church alone, then we also forget the whole Christ, for the church is united to Christ. This doctrine of Augustine explains what we read in the gospel of John and in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians about the body of Christ. In the division of the churches, the well-being of Jesus’ body is at stake!

The divisions of the church have two dramatic results: First, we are leaving him alone when we go our own way. And second, our divisions are devastating the mission of the church (and his mission).

At the moment that people split the church and draw apart from Jesus and each other, they make people around them question the mission of Jesus. And we know that this really happens. How often do we hear people asking: “In whom do we have to believe? In your Jesus or the Jesus of another church? Is Jesus really in your church or in the other one?”

Therefore Jesus prays: “Father, I pray that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17.21). In other words, divisions in the church give the wrong message to the people. The people are questioning the source, Jesus, the head of the church. They get the impression that there are different founders of the church, different gospels, different “Jesuses”. And so they touch on the important question whether Jesus really was from God or on his own doing his own work.

For us this question becomes: Is God in Christ working in our churches, or are we about our own business? Is Christianity, is the church, merely a result of human initiative, a nice hobby, a place to discuss deep issues with each other? Is the church only a kind of society for fun and activities? Is it only a place where we are comforted or helped, or is it actually a place where God lives, where Jesus is really present? Is the church a place where people are active, or is it a place where Christ is acting?

From the Bible the answer is clear. The continuing refrain in the New Testament is that the church—the people who are following Jesus—is the body of Christ. They are part of him and he is the actor, the steering Spirit, the present Lord. We are his body, which means he is acting and speaking through us. We are one body. Thus the body of Christ is the metaphor of the acting and proclaiming community. If this body gives

contradictory expressions and speaks with different voices, it is a psychiatric patient.



Thus are we what we are claiming to be: followers of Christ?

If we say we belong to Christ, then it is our calling to live as his body and to maintain this body. Or to be more specific: do we seek each other, work together in the bond of the Spirit, and commit ourselves to unity for the sake of his mission?

If our answer is a heartfelt “YES”, then we are called to accept each other, to accept the people of other churches as belonging to his body as well. Practically it means that we should never exclude each other, look down on each other or neglect each other, whether we are Lutherans, Pentecostals, Baptists, Presbyterians, Evangelicals, Anglicans, Protestants or Catholics.

That is what we learned in the ecumenical movement with churches in the Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican communions. But in the ecumenical movement we are experiencing many problems and setbacks. The ecumenical journey seems to be in a period of stagnation. Probably we need to investigate whether we are too busy with ourselves, with our institutional agendas, and with our will to survive. Probably we more and more have forgotten that there are other sheep in this flock which we have neglected or have not wanted to see. It is an important step forward that besides our own World Communion of Reformed Churches, we are also participating in the new network of the Global Christian Forum. Here Roman Catholics, Pentecostals in a variety of denominations, Evangelicals, and mainline Protestants in all their differences and problems are coming together and trying to go a new way.

We are one body. We like to say and sing that. However, do we understand what we are singing? Do we understand the consequences of participating in Jesus’ mission? I remember a story about a group of Christian Tutsi and Hutus in Rwanda just before the massacre started. Many Christians were involved in that bloodshed. But in a city was a group of Christian Hutu and Tutsi students who resisted the ideology of “black-making” the other. They wanted to make a difference in staying together. And they did by praying, singing and acting. They really were a sign of peace and reconciliation in a time of separation and hatred. But when the massacre began, this Christian group was the first target of the violence: they were all killed on the first day! This unity in peace and fellowship was too threatening for the people on both sides.

Being one is not the easy way. On the contrary, it is the way of Christ in struggle, exclusion, death and life amidst hatred. We are one body in mission, in peace and reconciliation. We are all together in him and together with him in his mission. That is only possible through the Spirit of Christ who is promised to us when we go his way. The Spirit will give us faith, hope, love. The Spirit will ensure that we never give up!

Thinking about it in the past, I am convinced that the Reformation at that particular

moment in history was necessary. Besides sad and bad things, the Reformation brought forth many fruits of peace, reconciliation and truth. The world would have had another face if the Reformation had not happened.

But in these days we have to move ahead. Times have changed; churches and their doctrines have changed. New churches and denominations have appeared. Churches have opened their doors to fellow Christians from other churches. Should it not be a moment to take seriously what Christ prayed for us?

We are learning to respect, accept and love each other in our diversity. But more is necessary for taking the steps towards unity. I see the longing of many young people, who are telling us that change—reformation—is necessary. And we have to do what we are saying and praying. The German poet and philosopher Goethe said it very powerfully: “It is not enough to know—we also must apply it; it is not enough to want, we also must act.”

Are we able to look ahead and to take brave and faithful steps towards understanding what God is asking from us and what his calling means for us in our time? In our union at the Lord’s Supper we actually are taking the first steps towards realizing the object of Jesus’ prayer. And in so doing, we are on the way towards the unity of his body. Is it possible to do what he is praying for? To accept and respect each other also and especially when we differ and feel emotionally conflicted in our being church together? If the communion with Christ in his Supper is uniting us, we have no other choice than to make it visible. This is what we say, pray and sing. Reformation? The answer is ours!

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Reformed Identity: Some Approaches

Michael Weinrich

The perceived instability of Reformed identity stems from the Reformed conviction that the church has ever to be ready to bear witness to the Gospel in response to the unique challenges of particular times and places. In this regard, it is appropriate to understand the identity of the Reformed church to consist in its being a confessing church.

Looking back at a history of more than a century of the World Communion of Reformed Churches we will notice that the question about Reformed identity emerges again and again. And to be honest, the question has never really been resolved. Actually I think this is quite appropriate for our tradition. It rather would be the end of the Reformed tradition if we would be able to say definitely: this or that is Reformed and thus has to stay as it is.

At the 12th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches held at Cardiff in 1925, Karl Barth gave the keynote address in which he posed the question: "Is a Common Statement of Faith (Creed or Confession) Desirable or Practicable for the Reformed Churches of the World?"¹ Barth answered in the negative and explained that confessions are not a matter of speaking generally but to a specific situation: "*We, here and now, confess this.*"² Nothing is more boring than common statements. They have rather to be concrete, formulated in a specific situation, and necessary: "There are things that you may and can do only when you must. To this category belong Christian confessions of faith. . . . Every other 'Credo' is lazy incantation (*fauler Zauber*), and of the devil, even if it be the Apostles' Creed, word by word."³ The church lives with the

1 J.R. Fleming (ed.), *Proceedings of the Twelfth General Council of the Alliance of Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System held at Cardiff 1925*, (Edinburgh: Office of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches 1926), pp.128-143.

2 K. Barth, "The Idea of a Reformed Confession of Faith," Trans. W.R. Forrester, in *The Quarterly Register* VIII (1925), pp.100-103, 125-128, here, p.103. Barth gives the following concise definition: "A Reformed Confession of Faith is a descriptive statement, spontaneously and publicly formulated by a local restricted Christian community. It must be a standard, valid until revised, which differentiates this body from other bodies, and, as regards the community's own doctrine and practice, indicating a trend of thought also capable of being changed. It is a description of the insight hitherto bestowed upon the universal Christian Church into the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, according to the sole testimony of the Holy Scriptures" (p.100).

temptation of affirming its confessions without really confessing anything. It can fail to address the need to confess even when taking its own confessions seriously. It is a mistake to spend our theological efforts in preserving our confessional heritage if it is at the cost of a Reformed witness to the gospel.⁴

An example of a confession in the Barthian sense is the Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934.⁵ “We, here and now, confess *this*.” In this specific situation it would not have been enough to repeat a common confession like the Apostles’ Creed, because no one would have realized why and in what way it applied to the unique challenges of that particular time and place. A confession has to be concrete and necessary. But this is only one aspect of a confession; the other is that it is universal. If it is a proper confession, it keeps the whole church in view, looking always in the direction of the church’s catholicity. So the church has to speak in the concrete but at the same time as the one catholic church. If things are balanced here, contextuality and catholicity are not in opposition but complementary to one another.

We remain for another moment with Karl Barth and his view on Reformed identity. Very provocatively, Barth could say that quoting a confession or a text from the tradition risks the possibility of committing heresy.⁶ This can be heresy in the sense that we do not dare confess on our own as we are summoned to do.

In this connection, we may bring to mind John Calvin, who was accused by Petrus Caroli in 1537 of Arianism. Calvin was asked to sign the Athanasian Creed publicly as proof of his faithfulness to the right teaching of the tradition. But Calvin rejected the demand with the explanation that it is too easy merely to sign an authoritative document. If you are unable to explain the necessity of the doctrine of the Trinity in the contemporary situation, you will be an unreliable theologian. A signature under a document does not convey whether the theologian is right or wrong until he or she gives his or her own explanation of the point that has to be clarified. If it is about the living God, referring merely to a formula will never be enough.

Barth states that theology is hearing and answering. We have to answer for ourselves; we are not allowed to delegate our response to a confession or a text from the tradition. Confessions and authoritative texts may support our search for an adequate answer, but they cannot serve as substitutes for what we are asked to confess today. We are always in danger of the temptation to imagine that we have already come to terms with

3 K. Barth, *Proceedings*, p.137.

4 Cf. M. Weinrich, “*Confessio and Traditio: A Reformed Approach in Dialogue with the Lutheran Tradition*,” Jerald D. Gort, Henry Jansen, and Wessel Stoker (eds.), *Crossroad Discourses between Christianity and Culture. Festschrift in honor of Hendrik M. Vroom*, Currents of Encounter 38, (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi 2010), pp.545-562.

5 Cf. M. Weinrich, “God’s Free Grace and the Freedom of the Church: Theological Aspects of the Barmen Declaration,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12 (2010), pp.404-419.

6 Cf. K. Barth, *Einführung in die Evangelische Theologie*, (Zürich: TVZ, 1963), p.54; K. Elmer, “*Das Wesen der Häresie. Untersuchungen zum Häresieverständnis Karl Barths im Zusammenhang mit seiner theologischen Erkenntnislehre*,” Diss. Halle 1981.



doctrine and right teaching. But nothing threatens theology more than its inclination to traditionalism. The only theological method acceptable to Barth is to remain open to new insights by listening and investigating the biblical witness anew.⁷ For this task the confessions and the tradition offer broad support, but in the end we have to say in our own words and on our own responsibility what we are summoned to confess on the testimony of the holy scriptures. To be Reformed is not to have specific confessions but to have a Reformed attitude towards these confessions. Being Reformed is not enough—you have always to be reformed and Reformed. That is the provocative meaning of “semper reformanda.”

In his important contribution to Reformed identity, Eberhard Busch⁸ points out that questions about identity only emerge in a situation where identity is not given or at least not felt sufficiently as the way it should be.⁹ If identity is given, like in the Roman Catholic Church or the Lutheran churches, there will be no debates about it. But if identity is insecure or at least not fixed, the question about identity emerges. Indeed, as we know from our Reformed global body, it recurs again and again. One may complain about this fact or see it as a distinct advantage, as Busch does. He proposes the thesis “that freedom belongs indispensably to Reformed Christianity, also in relation to its own form of Christianity.”¹⁰ He continues by insisting that this freedom is a reason for pride rather than despair over the quandary in which the question about identity may leave Reformed Christianity. “That freedom is rather a well-considered form of an ecclesial denomination, and the members of Reformed churches may be a little proud of it as a hopeful light amidst the other denominations.”¹¹ The other churches would lead us to believe that the unresolved question about identity should be seen as a deficit in the Reformed churches. But it is exactly strong identities that keep the churches at an insurmountable distance from one another. Later Busch gives three fundamental corollaries of the freedom presented in his thesis. He refers both to the old and contemporary Reformed confessions to illustrate them. “First, [there is] the unconditional subordination of tradition and doctrine to the Holy Scripture.”¹² For example, we read in the so-called “Synod of Berne” of 1532: “If a pastor or someone else would propose something to us which leads us nearer to Christ, or which according to the Word of God is more conducive to general friendship and Christian love than the opinion written here, then we would like to accept it, not wanting to stop the movement of the Holy Spirit.”¹³ The second corollary is “the assignment of the [Reformed]

7 *Church Dogmatics* I/2, p.867: “Essentially dogmatic method consists in this openness to receive new truth, and only in this. It consists in unceasing and ready vigilance to see that the object is able to speak for itself, and that its effect on human thinking and speaking is not disturbed.”

8 E. Busch, “Reformed Identity” *Reformed World* vol.58 no.4 (December 2008), pp.207-218.

9 It is almost always the same with the question about the meaning of life. It only emerges when it is obscured.

10 Busch, p.209.

11 Busch, p.209.

12 Busch, p.210.

13 *Der Berner Synodus von 1532*, Vol. 1, edited by G.W. Locher, (Neukirchen-Vluy 1984), p. 26. Cited

denomination to the one, ecumenical church."¹⁴ We do not confess our special denominational form but Jesus Christ as the head of the whole worldwide church. We have the freedom "to agree that other churches may also belong to the church of Jesus Christ."¹⁵ In this connection, Busch refers to a North Indian Church Order, which declares: "The Church of North India is a part of the body of Christ, which is the one, holy, general, and apostolic church, and is built by Him out of all human generations and races."¹⁶ The last corollary is the "arrangement of the [Reformed] denomination in the travel of God's people."¹⁷ This concerns the pilgrimage of the church. In the last analysis, all three underline "that the Reformed are not so much interested in the possession of a confession, but more in the determination to confess."¹⁸ One may say: *Reformed identity consists in being a confessing church.*

Busch also develops three guidelines to indicate how the Reformed churches can sustain their Reformed identity on the basis of the freedom described above. The first is the "continuing importance of the first commandment."¹⁹ "You *cannot* serve God *and* mammon" (Mt 6.24). According to the Heidelberg Catechism, we should "trust in God alone, humbly and patiently expect all good from God alone, and love, fear, and honor God with the whole heart" (Question 95). The second guideline is the "powerful claim of God to our whole life."²⁰ This finds expression in the second thesis of the Barmen Theological Declaration. The final guideline is the "common character of Christian life under the one Head", Jesus Christ.²¹ This refers to common life within the church and also in the public sphere. To conclude, I wish to sketch in broad outline aspects that in my understanding belong to Reformed identity. Each of the following points could be developed more extensively, but for the moment I can only indicate the direction in which I would like to see the Reformed churches looking.

Being Reformed means:

To live in the light and presence of the risen and living Christ. The church lives not only before the Christ who will come again at the end of the ages but also in the presence of the living Christ who sits now at the right of God. The church lives not only in expectation of Christ until he comes again but also witnesses to the present life and activity of the resurrected Christ.

- To be related to the whole range of the biblical testimony and not only to a

in Busch, p.210.

14 Busch, p.211.

15 Busch, p.211.

16 *Reformiertes Zeugnis heute. Eine Sammlung neuer Bekenntnistexte aus der reformierten Tradition*, edited by Lukas Vischer, (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1988), p.252. Cited in Busch, p.211.

17 Busch, p.212.

18 Busch, p.213.

19 Busch, p.214.

20 Busch, p.216.

21 Busch, p.217.

Christological principle like the Lutheran tradition.



- To be centered on the gospel of God's free and freeing grace. Justification and sanctification belong indissolubly together; sanctification is the goal and justification its presupposition.
- To be called to a free life in the horizon of the fulfilled covenant. The concept of covenant is a central thread running through the Old and New Testaments starting with Noah, Abraham, and Moses, extending through the whole history of Israel, until the Last Supper of Jesus. It is also of crucial significance to the mission of the church. (See the Letter to the Hebrews.) It is about confidence and commitment. God's Name in the context of the covenant is "Immanuel" which means "God with us". God wants to be the God of his people, and the people to be God's people. It is not the distance between God and people that is at issue but the close relationship and how it is to be maintained. Covenant is an inclusive concept comprehending men and women. It is especially the covenant that reveals God's graceful election in history.²²
- To answer concretely the summons of the gospel in contemporary circumstances. (For Christian existence Karl Barth underlined again and again the interconnectedness of the Bible and the newspaper.)
- To affirm the catholicity of the church. The church is catholic or it is not the church. This implies an indissoluble ecumenical commitment on the part of the churches, because no church can be a church in the full sense without being actually linked to all the other churches. A church lacking communion with the other churches remains a deficient church. Ecumenism is no superfluous luxury but belongs to the essence of the church, which in its historicity always has a deficit. Ecumenicity belongs fundamentally to the being of the church. We learn this already from John Calvin.²³

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22 Cf. M. Weinrich, "Justified for Covenant Fellowship: A Key Biblical Theme for the Whole of Theology," M. Weinrich and J. Burgess (eds.), *What is Justification about? Reformed Contributions to an Ecumenical Theme*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2009), pp.8-34.

23 Cf. M. Weinrich, "Calvin und die andere Ökumene," *Evangelische Theologie* 71 (2011), pp.133-152.

In Search of a Shared Theology: Reformed Theology between the Contextual and the Universal

Heleen Zorgdrager

This essay presents a response to a recommendation proposed by the Section on Reformed Identity, Theology and Communion at the Uniting General Council of WCRC in Grand Rapids in 2010. That recommendation called for the formation of a network of theologians for the purpose of advancing a shared theology from around the globe. But the contexts in which Reformed churches are located vary widely. The challenge lies in developing a theology that fully accounts for their differences while maintaining the universal claims of theology. The essay explores ways of relating the contextual and the universal, the local and the global, with the help of three models as developed by ecumenical theologians Robert J. Shreiter, Letty M. Russell, and Ulrich H.J. Körtner. It concludes by indicating ways Reformed theology might effectively meet this challenge. One is to question whether covenantal theology is adequate as a common basis or organizing principle. Further development of a theology of participation or communion and of the eucharist would contribute towards the realization of an ecumenically oriented and shared Reformed theology.

Introduction

In my work I am happy to move between different contexts.¹ Nine months a year I am active in a Protestant academic environment in the Netherlands, three months a year I teach at an Eastern rite Catholic university in Ukraine, engaged in an ecumenical programme. Although crossing the borders is not as exciting as it was six years ago when I first started working in Ukraine, there is still the feeling of entering a different cultural and political space, with its own rules, moral and social codes, values, historical experiences, and outlooks on the world. In religious matters the differences may perhaps be most striking.

Let me illustrate it with an example. Within one week I found myself first at the opening of the academic year of “my” Catholic University in Lviv/Lvov, and later in an academic theological conference in Germany. The opening of the academic year in

1 I am very grateful to all members of the WCRC Theology Network, gathered in Mangalore, India, for their critical and constructive comments on this paper, which really enriched the contents of it.



Lviv started with a festive Divine Liturgy, led by the patriarch of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. At least a dozen priests were present. There were so many students and teachers that most of them stood outside the church, watching the liturgy on a big screen. After the liturgy there were speeches given by the patriarch and the rector presenting a roadmap for the future of the university. One thing was clear: the ecclesial vision should be the leading one for all teaching and research. The presence of the Church—with a capital letter—and its male leaders was almost overwhelming in this academic ceremony.

Quite the opposite was my experience at the academic conference in Germany. The conference extended through Sunday, but to my surprise the programme did not foresee that the participants would visit a church service. Instead, a lecture was scheduled from 9:00 until 11:00 AM on the topic, ironically enough, “Church between Communication and Institution”. For all the German participants it seemed quite normal to spend the Sunday morning in this way, just continuing the academic work. Note that the venue of the conference was the birthplace of the Reformation: we were in Lutherstadt Wittenberg with its famous churches where Martin Luther once preached the word of God and rang the bell for the protestant renewal of the church. Now, on this Sunday of Thanksgiving, his secularized followers devoted their highest thoughts to the church without sharing in its worship and visible community.

This experience not only tells about my “culture shock” crossing the borders between Western and Eastern Europe. It also shows the great difference between religious contexts in the same European continent: from a highly secularized to a still (or *again* after Communism) very religiously dominated culture. What do they have in common? For that matter, what do we have in common? After all, the differences also apply to our family of Reformed churches. When visiting the Hungarian speaking Reformed Church of Transcarpathia, in the southwest of Ukraine, I can feel as much like a cultural stranger as in the Orthodox or Eastern Catholic Church. The style of leadership, doctrinal approach to theology, conservative morals, and strong ethnic identification are foreign to me. I discover that in many respects I feel more at home in a local Roman Catholic parish in the Netherlands than in a Reformed sister church in Eastern Europe. Culture is more decisive here than confession. I think we can multiply this example from the European situation with many from our own contexts worldwide.

Today the question at stake is: how does Reformed theology deal with all those contextual differences and tensions? How does it move and negotiate between the local and the global? What is universally valid and what is defined and shaped by context? Is there something like a “shared” theology in the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)? If we confess that we are “called to communion, committed to justice”, what does that imply for our theology and for our way of doing theology?

The structure of my essay is as follows. First, I will state the problem, presenting concrete

topics which highlight context-related differences within our worldwide communion of Reformed churches. Second, I will look at the Section Report on Reformed Identity, Theology and Communion, which was accepted at the Uniting General Council (UGC) of WCRC in Grand Rapids in 2010. How does this document deal with the relation of the contextual and universal? Does it provide us with some common ground for Reformed theology? In the third place, I will present three distinctive ecumenical theological models, as developed by Robert J. Schreiter, Letty M. Russell and Ulrich H.J. Körtner. These aim to relate and to integrate the local and the global. How shall we evaluate these models? Are they helpful to us in finding a way to fruitfully cope with our differences? Finally, I will draw some conclusions and formulate proposals for our future theological agenda. Some reflections about the possible role of academic theology in the WCRC will be included.

1. Stating the Problem: Topics of Debate and Discord

The Reformed tradition has always felt more comfortable with theologies that start from diversity than with those that find their point of departure in unity.² The preferred model is “unity in diversity” and not “diversity in unity.” In the polarity between the contextual and the universal the balance swings to the contextual, the particular. However, this caveat must be borne in mind: Reformed churches have proven to be champions of creedal doctrines and confessional documents, which they have tended to see as expressing transhistorical and thus universal truth. With the gradual acceptance of the historical nature of truth and the development of modern hermeneutical awareness and methodology as a result of the Enlightenment, however, this has changed for a great many of the churches. Additionally, there is a growing awareness, nourished by postcolonial criticism, of the cultural differences in hermeneutical models and attitudes, including those of the Enlightenment.

However, in these processes, Reformed churches travel at a different pace relative to each other. Not all Reformed churches are open to embrace the “hermeneutical turn”, at least not to the same degree. In the various ways they relate to scripture and confessional documents as the foundation of universal truth claims, they articulate different positions towards modernity. It is one of the reasons for their conflicting theological positions.

To begin with, *current* topics of *debate* and discord in the Reformed family are issues of *women’s ordination* and of *homosexuality*. Many feel that in these issues the call to communion (with other churches, but also within parishes) and the commitment to justice (for oppressed minorities) are at stake. For the churches that practice women’s ordination it is a matter of faith that women should have an equal place in the leadership of the church. Similarly, for the churches that oppose women’s ordination it is a matter

2 Cf. Eddy van der Borgh, “Who Decides? About the Catholicity of non-Western Jesus Interpretations in Protestant Ecclesiology”, in *Christian Traditions between Catholicity and Particularity*, ed. Leo J. Koffeman (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck: 2009), pp.117-30.



of faith that men and women have different responsibilities in the church, and that women are not called to the government of the church or the public proclamation of the word of God.

As far as I can see, the cultural context is very influential in the choice of theological position. Either traditional or emancipatory motives shape the reading of the Bible.³ Also a more general criticism and distaste of the modern and liberal society may feed the opposition against women's ordination. All these factors should be taken into account in the further dialogue about this issue.

The same applies to the issue of homosexuality. Blessing of same-sex unions is for the one party a matter of *status confessionis*, for the other party it is precisely a matter of *status confessionis* not to give a blessing to same-sex unions. Both parties will not easily meet. I do not think that theology is the disintegrating force here, but rather cultural assumptions related to context and tradition together with hermeneutical conventions. It is a task of theology to address these issues frankly and comprehensively in our communion of Reformed churches if we want to live up to the criteria of an authentic communion.

A next topic of debate and discord is the theology of justice in the way it is presented by the Accra Confession (2004). When Douwe Visser returned from a series of eight regional consultations on Communion and Justice in 2009 in preparation for the UGC, he confessed: "If I learned one thing, it was that even the most basic confessional and theological truths do need a contextual resonance that deeply influences the way these truths are being expressed."⁴

As an example he takes the current discussions about the Accra Confession. "The basis of the Confession is a series of universal truths, from biblical, social, economic, ecological and political perspectives. It is meant to be applicable in every contextual situation of our worldwide Reformed community. I have discovered, however, that its reception differs greatly according to differences in local contexts The implications of adopting the Accra Confession are different for Europeans than for Africans, although even this is too general, as if the division between global North and South were only geographical There is a global South in the North and a global North in the South."

The statement *Europe Covenanting for Justice* (2010) confirms the tensions in reception of the Accra document. The issue of "Empire" turned out to be the battlefield.⁵ While the churches in Europe declared the use of the term unhelpful, for the churches

- 3 In the discussion about this paper in the Mangalore consultation someone rightly added that there are also emancipatory motives *in* the biblical tradition which have the power to shape and influence our ethical position. I agree with that.
- 4 Douwe Visser, "Being Part of a Movement: The World Communion of Reformed Churches", a preparatory document for the Uniting General Council of WCRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan 2010 <http://www.wcrc.ch/node/475> (Accessed on 11 October, 2011.)
- 5 Martina Wasserloos-Strunk, "Empire—Provocation with a Perspective" in *Break the Chains of*

in the South it became a key term for dealing with their own history and the structures of globalization. The use of the term became almost a *shibboleth* for the acceptance or rejection of the Accra Confession, although it is important here to state firmly that overall the call of Accra has been heard and received positively by the churches in Europe. This reveals that it is not the call for justice that is under debate, but the way this call is theologically articulated. Some, including the Eastern European churches, question the language, which to them has overtones of Marxist ideology. Others question the new “grand narrative” theology that wants to grasp reality in a universal, all-embracing, totalitarian way, leaving no space for the ambiguities of reality. This is not considered to be an adequate way of theological speaking in the 21st century.⁶

The paradoxical outcome is that Accra intended to make a universal prophetic call for justice: *this is what we theologically stand for!* But, in the process of reception, it brought the plurality of theological positions in the worldwide Reformed community to the surface. One might say that this is the fate and the power of a prophetic statement, to produce a holy divisiveness. But we should better ask: can we speak of a *shared Reformed theology* in the Accra Confession?

While fully in accord with the passion for justice reflected in the Accra Confession and its (God’s!) option for the poor, I nonetheless dare to pose three critical questions with regard to its theological points of departure.

- A covenant theology is structuring the whole building. Is covenant theology really the universal theological foundation of the Reformed churches? Should this be the one and only organizing principle for our theology? I have my doubts.
- Where is the concept of communion (*koinonia*) that is so central in ecumenical theology today, and that links justice in the world to full participation in Christ and in the eucharistic communion?
- In its eagerness to speak in a concrete way about the harms of the global free market, Accra violates its own presupposition that theology should always be contextual. Universal and generalizing principles, in the end, lead to universal judgments, not taking into account the particularities of the context.

2. Foundational Principles or Plurality?

At the UGC in Grand Rapids (2010) the Section on “Reformed Identity, Theology, and Communion” was faced with the challenge to formulate the “identity-markers” of the Reformed churches in the 21st century. How did they manage the job?

Oppression and the Yoke of Injustice and Let the Oppressed Go Free. Europe Covenanting for Justice, (World Alliance of Reformed Churches—The Communion of Reformed Churches in Europe, 2010), pp.69-80.

6 Sjaak van ‘t Kruis, “Theology of Hope in Times of Globalization” in *Europe Covenanting for Justice*, pp.57-68.



They were clearly aware of the tensions of the contextual and the universal. In the “Preamble” of the Section Report, the Section states that WCRC sees itself as a part of the universal, catholic church, based on the saving work of the triune God.⁷ Reformed identity comes to expression “in our appreciation of various foundational principles.” But this identity is not a fixed one; we are people on the journey to a fuller communion. This implies that appreciation of foundational principles is open to change.

So which “foundational principles” are mentioned in the Section Report? The *authority of the Bible as God’s word* is one. The historical confessional documents of the Reformed Church are in their authority submitted to the hearing of the living word of God, Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, in ever changing cultures. Here the Report clearly opts for the modern hermeneutic position towards truth. Tradition is dynamically understood. Other foundational principles include *baptism*, *communion of the table*, and *communion of the (Reformed) churches* in life and worship. It is interesting that the “communion of the churches” is ranked as an identity-marker. This counterbalances the almost natural Reformed tendency towards determining one’s own particular identity. Such can also be a pitfall of contextual theology. Splendid isolation in the local context is not the goal! Finally the *priesthood of all believers*⁸ is also a foundational principle of Reformed identity. “We value the equality and dignity before God of all members.”

Following the Section Report further, we note that Reformed theology shows some “characteristics” with regard to how we see our place in God’s world. Here *covenantal theology*, *the gracious sovereignty of God*, and *solidarity with the poor* are mentioned. We have seen in the Accra Confession (2004) that these characteristics are elevated to the status of foundational principles. By relegating them to characteristics, the Section Report seems deliberate in its correction of the theology of the Accra Confession. It has sought to put it in a wider and more ecumenical (catholic) framework.

Can we agree with these foundational principles of Reformed identity and theology? Or are they already going too far and saying too much? Is this selection of foundational principles a good point of departure for further theological dialogue? Or should we rather start from plurality, contextuality, and differences?

3. Models of Relating the Local and the Global

In this section I present three alternative views on how theology can move between the contextual and the universal. How great is their potential for the development of Reformed theology in a globalizing age?

7 Document SE 1 “Section Report on Reformed Identity, Theology and Communion” Received by the Uniting General Council of WCRC, Grand Rapids 2010. <http://www.wcrc.ch/node/491>, (Accessed on 11 October, 2011.)

8 Interestingly enough the “priesthood of all believers” is a typical Lutheran term.

Model of New Catholicity

Robert J. Schreiter is professor of doctrinal theology at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and very influential in the field of mission studies and intercultural theology. He asks how theology can respond creatively and faithfully to the challenges of globalization and responds with his model of a “new catholicity”.⁹ It develops a new understanding of the universality of faith in the globalizing world, calling for intense dialogue and intercultural communication.

Schreiter claims that any theology needs to attend both to its contextual and to its universalizing dimensions. Attention to the context is obvious; theology must be rooted in the context in which people live. It is important to realize that the meaning of context has changed under the impact of globalization. In a world of permanent migration the concept of *context* has become deterritorialized. Boundaries are not geographical, but economic, social, and cultural. The world has become hyperdifferentiated. People are participating in different realities at the same time. And it has become hybridized. There is no “pure” culture, but an interaction of many. The meaning of universal has changed as well. The old idea of a universal theology was that it could extend the result of its reflections to other cultural settings. Its European views on God, man and world were presented as universally valid and applicable.

In rejecting this absolutist understanding, Schreiter remains however a fierce defender of the universal claim of theology. God’s mission to the world, God’s reconciling the world has a universal scope. This affirmation is central to Christian faith. But we need to transform our understanding of the universal function of theology. New universal theologies (mind the plural!) are characterized by (1) the addressing of global, systemic problems and (2) the engaging in intercultural dialogue. In this regard, he mentions the movements of liberation theology, feminism, ecology, and human rights. A universal theology is able to take stock of its own context while rooted in it, as well as to speak beyond its own context, open to hearing voices from beyond its own boundaries.

The global and the local are intertwined in many respects. Global-local encounters are experienced by many in the world as asymmetrical, unequal and violent. People work out all kinds of arrangements in negotiating the effects of globalization upon their own local situation. Therefore we can better speak of “glocalization”, to use the term of Roland Robertson. There is the line of encounter between the local and the global, on which collisions occur and “glocal” arrangements have to be worked out. Theology reflects on faith in the “glocal” dynamics. In order to share across the cultural boundaries theologians have to pay intense attention to communication itself and to hermeneutics. The development of intercultural hermeneutics is essential to theology in a globalizing world.

⁹ Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997).



These are all combined in Schreiter's concept of "new catholicity", which takes up one of the four marks of the church and revitalizes and expands its meaning. Catholicity is "what has always been believed by all in all places" (Vincent of Lerins, 434 AD). For Schreiter, (1) wholeness of inclusion and (2) the fullness of faith are to be achieved in our world only through (3) exchange and communication. Therefore the aspect of intercultural hermeneutics should be incorporated in the "new catholicity".

It occurs to me that neither the Accra Confession nor the Section Report on "Reformed Identity, Theology and Communion" pays specific attention to intercultural or inter-contextual hermeneutics as an *integral part* of doing theology together. The question of "what" seems in those documents more important than that of "how". Attending to the second question would have perhaps made the theology of the Accra Confession less monolithic.

The Round Table Model

Letty M. Russell introduced in 1993 the model of "church in the round."¹⁰ The key metaphor is God's table of hospitality, at which everyone finds an equal place. The round table is a critical principle: God reaches out to those who are "outsiders" and even "outsiders of the outsiders", the poor, the oppressed, women and others who have been excluded.

Theology is table-talk. It is described as a spiral rather than a circle. The method is that of action and reflection, of finding new clues and new questions in a continuing spiral that never ends in exactly the same place. Christian ecumenical table-talk is deeply connected to practices of solidarity with those at the margins. The focus is on context, but the contextual perspective is asked to give account of the ways doctrinal tradition is interpreted and to share that account in dialogue with others at the ecumenical table. Russell speaks of "overturning the master's table", of "kitchen table solidarity", of "welcome table partnership." In her view contextual theology no longer allows for universal principles that can be held in common. Unity in diversity is found in an ongoing dialogue—in faith and struggle—with tradition and with all the partners at the table.

Hermeneutics of Difference

Finally, there is a more radical, postmodern position that emphasizes the remaining differences. Context seems to be prioritized over the universal. Such an approach we can find in Theo Sundermeier's hermeneutics of difference.¹¹ The guiding insight of his proposal is that the perception of other religions (or confessional traditions) includes a relation of difference. Our perception must offer opportunities to understand what is different without appropriating it and of enabling conviviality without submerging the

10 Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1993).

11 Theo Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen. Eine praktische Hermeneutik* (Göttingen 1996).

identity of the other.

In the field of ecumenical theology we find a reception and further elaboration of the hermeneutics of difference in the work of Ulrich H.J. Körtner.¹² He addresses the crisis in the ecumenical movement. Given the fact of the stagnation of ecumenical dialogues, like the dialogue of the Protestant churches with the Roman Catholic Church, we cannot deny the need of a paradigm change, a transition from the “ecumenism of consensus” to an “ecumenism of difference.” Fundamental theological differences between the Christian churches have a far greater impact than we were inclined to acknowledge in the optimistic mood of the ecumenical movement in the sixties and seventies of the last century. Required is a new theory about the relation of unity and difference, of catholicity and particularity in Christianity. How can we productively engage with remaining differences, without relativising the question of truth? Körtner then develops a hermeneutical theory which aims at creating space for “understanding the different understanding(s) of the other(s).”¹³ In the postmodern situation we should no longer bring together the many confessional interpretations under the catholic wholeness of the church. The wholeness and fullness is broken because of remaining differences. Körtner therefore speaks of “catholicity under the cross”.

The focus of Körtner is on the interdenominational ecumenical movement. Are we allowed to apply his hermeneutics of difference to the family of Reformed churches as well? He sees at least one common principle in the Protestant churches, and that is freedom. The doctrine of justification, in essence, is a doctrine of freedom. The event of the “justification of the sinner” leads, according to Körtner, to the deconstruction, the implosion of every system. This radical understanding of freedom prioritizes the context over the universal, and difference over identity.

4. Conclusions and Proposals

Finally, I will draw some conclusions and formulate some ideas about Reformed theology on the movement between the local and the global.

At first glance, of the models above the “new catholicity” and the “round table” seem to offer the greatest potential for a shared theology within WCRC. The call to communion and the commitment to justice cannot do without a universal horizon. The hermeneutic of Schreiter’s model is more sophisticated, but I like the spiral methodology of Russell, who starts from practices of solidarity. Both models have a sharp eye for those wounded and excluded by economic globalization. Though less prominent, the universal horizon

12 Ulrich H.J. Körtner, *Wohin steuert die Ökumene? Vom Konsens- zum Differenzmodell*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); idem, *Reformatorsche Theologie im 21. Jahrhundert*, (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2010).

13 “Für den Dialog der Konfessionen ist eine hermeneutische Theorie, welche nicht nur die Grundlagen des gemeinsamen Verstehens schafft, sondern auch das Verständnis für das jeweilige Andersverstehen fördert, unumgänglich.”, Körtner, p.10.



(the catholicity) is not missing in the third model of a *hermeneutics of difference*; it is just perceived in a more critical, eschatological way. The third model warns against too quickly assuming and constructing a “common ground”, and stresses the need to listen in depth to the “otherness” of the partners in dialogue. The eschatological postponement has its strength, but its weakness as well. For the Reformed family of churches, at least, I would not want to give up the possible realization of a visible unity (visible communion) of the churches in history, and this makes me reluctant to join Körtner in his radical view of a “catholicity under the cross.”

I would be interested to hear about possible models from Asian, African or Latin American background. Are there more *alternatives* of negotiating the local and the global in theology?¹⁴

Intercultural hermeneutics should be given a high priority in any contemporary Reformed theology.

Shall we speak of “shared theology” or “sharing theologies” within WCRC? Is it about the product or the process? Or are they two sides of the same coin?

Closely related to intercultural hermeneutics is the *ethics* of intercultural dialogue. How do we approach the “other”? As an epiphanic space (Hans de Wit)? How do contexts and their hidden “codes” operate in intercultural communication? A common example of different codes is that while a European says “I think therefore I am”, an African says “I am because we are.” The sensitive topics within our church communion, like economic justice, gender justice, and the rights of sexual minorities, may find a more fruitful exchange if all aspects of the context are taken into account, including our codes of communicating, and if the people whose interests are at stake play an active role in the dialogue.

It is an open question whether *covenant theology* offers a suitable common ground for Reformed theology within WCRC. In my opinion, it should not be taken as *the* interpretative framework for understanding the overall flow of the Bible, notwithstanding the importance of the metaphor of covenant in biblical tradition. There are other—and less androcentric—metaphors that can claim the right to offer an interpretative framework, like the image of communion (*koinonia*), kinship, or the festive sharing of a meal. Reformed theology, which tends to center exclusively on the covenant metaphor (like in the Accra Confession), will be enriched and broadened by other images. Let us not opt for one organizational principle, but for a policy of “distinctive emphases.”

14 Volker Küster points in his newly published book *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011) to postcolonial theology, which asks in its own way for new attention to the universal dimension of Christian faith. Universal means here the multiple conjunctions, the mutual interdependencies and the permanent exchanges of “glocal” contexts. Contextual and intercultural theology get intertwined in the postcolonial criticism of theologians like Musa Dube and Kwok Pui-Lan (pp. 92-109).

Covenant theology is, as recent research has shown,¹⁵ a narrowing of the perspective of John Calvin. He actually developed a vibrant theology of participation and communion with Jesus Christ in the holy, all-encompassing and all-compassionate life of the triune God. Why should we start in Reformed theology from the idea of God and human beings as originally separated parties (which is the underlying idea of the covenant metaphor), and not begin with the primordial and—in Jesus Christ—restored *communion* between God and human beings? That would meet the often expressed desire for a theology of the Spirit. In my view, further development of a *theology of communion* or a *eucharistic theology* will offer beneficial perspectives for an ecumenically oriented WCRC.

To conclude, allow me to make some remarks about the place and role of *academic theology*. WCRC needs an academic theology which is relatively free from the confessional churches, or, in other words, which serves the churches best when it takes a critical distance to their all too particular beliefs, conventions, and traditions. Let us be reminded that in the Reformed tradition academic theology is seen as an integral part and ministry of the church, which is so beautifully expressed in the title of *doctor ecclesiae*. The Reformed communion is called to support academic theology, for the new articulations it offers to the church, as well as for the dialogues with (post)modern science and culture in which it should engage without fear, believing that the whole earth is the Lord's.

Academic theology can contribute in its own way to the integration of the local and the global. It may see its task in facilitating the communication process about faith, life, meaning, struggle, and hope between people from different contexts, and between Christian and other believers in the same social context. It clarifies the language, offers useful concepts and models, and takes stock through a thorough analysis of the context. It also aids reflection on the painful experiences of the “glocal” boundaries and helps to articulate the mystery of resurrection and new creation right at the places of suffering and crucifixion in today's world. I agree with liberation theologies that academic theology is always a second act, reflecting on the practices and experiences of the community of faith.

When speaking of academic theology we have to be aware of the different *scholarly contexts* in which we are rooted and definitely to make that a theme in our exchanges. For example, for many African and Latin American biblical scholars it is normal to include ordinary readers and their way of reading the Bible in the process of exegesis; there is no split between academic exegesis and popular reading. The Kenyan theologian Musimbi Kanyoro speaks of a “communal theology”, a theology that is rooted in the community.¹⁶ For Western European scholars this is highly unfamiliar and considered

15 I refer to the innovative interpretation of the theology of Calvin in Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder: a Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2010). See also B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: the Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1993).

16 Musimbi Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective*, (London



to be “unscientific.”¹⁷ What are the presuppositions and the standards according to which we develop our theologies? And who do we see, in the end, as the subjects of theology?

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2002).

17 A fascinating dialogue between (mostly Reformed) biblical scholars from Africa and Western Europe took place in Stellenbosch, South Africa in 2006. The papers and reports of the discussion are published in Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West, *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008).

Reformed Theology and Mission

Jurgens Hendriks

This article surveys the interpretations of the postmodern condition advanced by theologians and social theorists to demonstrate that ways of doing theology and mission have to be reconfigured to respond productively to the epochal changes that the world has been undergoing. Major shifts in how power, knowledge and identity are constituted confront the Reformed churches with the tasks of listening attentively to their contexts, rooting their communion and mission in the Triune God, "dwelling in the Word", and developing transformational models of servant leadership.

1 Introduction

It is a privilege to speak about something about which one feels passionate. I will start by defining my understanding and use of the three words in the title of this presentation. I believe we are moving into a new theological paradigm and I will outline aspects of its context. In the new paradigm, discernment plays a crucial role and the leadership style changes. The reality of a new globalized world changes the church's missional agenda. A contextual analysis from the sociological and communicative sciences helps to define these and serves the purpose of triangulation.¹ The missional challenges facing Reformed theology will form the final part of this presentation.

2 Terminology

2.1 Reformed

David Bosch's description of the missionary paradigm of the Protestant Reformation and how it led to, and became connected with, the Enlightenment is helpful in defining how I will refer to "Reformed."² The Reformation, Bosch says, in conjunction with Hans Kuhn, introduced a new theological paradigm.³ The role of justification by faith, the

1 In the *social sciences*, the term triangulation is often used to indicate that more than two methods are used in a study with a view to double (or triple) checking results. This is also called "cross-examination". [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triangulation_\(social_science\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triangulation_(social_science))

2 *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), pp. 239-261, 262-345.

3 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 262.



Fall, Christ, faith and grace, the priesthood of all believers, and the centrality of the scriptures in the life of the church (*sola Scriptura*) constitute the DNA structure of being Reformed.⁴

2.2 Theology

To me, “theology” is a verb. Theology constitutes words about God or is a witness about an encounter with God. Doing theology can take its cue from Mary, the mother of Jesus. Theology comes at the second hour.⁵ Revelation happens first: God’s mission erupts through the words of the messenger. Mary struggled to discern what her role implied with the coming of the Son of God and the realization of the covenantal promises. When she answered: “I am the Lord’s servant, may it be to me as you have said,” she was doing theology. She started to discuss it with Gabriel, Elizabeth and others. Theology is a womb, and takes place in the deepest place where life is born.⁶ It is a product of a community and leads to rejoicing and worship. The Magnificat (Lk 1.46-55) is worship by the first Christian congregation . . . where the majority of believers were women!

I particularly like what Andrew Walls says:

Theology springs out of mission; its true origins lie not in the study or the library, but from the need to make Christian decisions—decisions about what to do and what to think. Theology is an attempt to think in a Christian way, to make Christian intellectual choices.⁷

Elsewhere, Walls emphasizes that these choices arise from specific settings in life, which, by implication, suggest that the theological agenda is always culturally shaped and made more urgent when boundaries are crossed and the cross-cultural diffusion of the Christian faith makes theological activity a necessity.⁸

Chris Wright explains this from the perspective of a biblical theologian.⁹ Theology, he says, is all about God. As in the case of Mary, knowing God is a deeply personal experience, but never merely private, since knowing God always generates both an agenda and a responsibility, that is, a mission. In this sense, by definition, all biblical theology is theology for life, i.e., missional.¹⁰

4 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp.241-242.

5 V.R. Steuermagel “Doing theology with an eye on Mary,” *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 27/2 (2003), p. 103

6 Steuermagel, “Doing theology with an eye on Mary,” p. 100.

7 Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross, *Mission in the 21st century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), p.203.

8 *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2002), p.79.

9 *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), p.19.

10 *The Mission of God’s People*, p.151.

2.3 Mission

In his epochal work, *Transforming Mission*, Bosch summarizes and defines mission:

[M]ission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus, wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie. It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.¹¹

Like Bosch, this presentation does not refer to mission as the observable missionary enterprise of Western missionaries in, for instance, the colonial endeavour. A biblical approach to mission will start with creation. Wright says that we need to begin at the beginning where our identity as human beings is described.¹² We were created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) to subdue and rule, serve and keep. We have a definite mission and authority in, and over, creation that is defined or curtailed by the claim that it should reflect God's own kingship.¹³ Things went awry because of human disobedience and rebellion against the Creator (Gen 3). A theological journey began with Abraham. His election is directly linked to a universal mission explained in Genesis 12.3 (cf. 22.18): "Go . . . and be a blessing . . . and all nations will be blessed through you." Abraham's seed is what today is called "the church", and the most crucial part of its DNA is that it is missional.¹⁴

In summary, we understand all theology to be inherently missional, our active response to God who created us in his image to fulfil the responsibilities of our call to be a blessing to all of creation and to all nations. It is not a sideline affair like a hobby; it is a vocation, the hermeneutic of your life. It is incarnational, something that we received within a family of faith called "Reformed".

11 P.519.

12 *The Mission of God's People*, pp.49-51.

13 Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethic* (New York: Orbis, 1996), pp.227-247.

14 Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 72-73. The term "missional" is often used in the North American context. Alan Roxburgh describes it as follows: "The word missional was coined to express the conviction that North-America and Europe are now primary 'mission fields' themselves. Missional also expresses that *God's mission* (or *missio Dei*) is that which shapes and defines all that the church is and does, as opposed to expecting church to be the ultimate self-help group for meeting our own needs and finding fulfilment in our individual lives. If the West is once again a mission field within which the central narratives of the gospel have been either lost or profoundly compromised by other values, then the focus of this mission must be upon placing the God we encountered in Jesus Christ back in the center of our communities of faith that shape and give meaning to our lives." *The Sky is Falling!?! Leaders Lost in Transition* (Eagle, Idaho: ACI, 2005), p.12. Darrell Guder also explains this usage as a reaction against the North American (Western) culture's domestication of the gospel. See Guder, *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp.5-12.



3 A New Paradigm

Theology is always contextual.¹⁵ God calls and speaks to us in a specific place at a particular time. As such, our (theological) response is inherently contextual and missional. The hypothesis of this section is that we are at an altogether new time and place. Everything is changing. Ours is a new globalized, informationalized, world! The change is so profound that how we are moving into this new paradigm¹⁶ and hearing God's word now, doing theology now, is crucial for the survival of the earth and its people! The way we know and lead is changing dramatically.

3.1 Premises of a Paradigm Change

The fundamental shift that is taking place in the method of doing theology boils down to a move away from a theology that "obediently analysed" the faith tradition towards an approach that says that the safer way to do theology is to "obediently take part" in God's missional praxis.¹⁷ The Enlightenment paradigm worked with a subject-object scheme, where the theologian was the subject who studied texts about God, the church, etc.¹⁸

In a missional approach the essence of theology is to know God, to discern his will and guidance and to be involved in his mission. It is faith seeking understanding.¹⁹ God is a Triune missional God.²⁰

The first premise that undergirds this argument is that mission is an extension or outflowing of God's very being. Karl Barth was one of the first theologians to articulate mission, not in the context of ecclesiology or soteriology, but in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity.²¹ Missional theology took his lead, together with that of others,

15 See Douglas Hall, *Professing the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 93-110 and Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986) ; *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (New York: Orbis, 1998).

16 The Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th ed.) defines paradigm as "[a] philosophical and theoretical framework of a scientific school or discipline within which theories, laws, and generalizations and the experiments performed in support of them are formulated" (Merriam Webster: Springfield, MA USA, 1996).

17 Guder, *Missional Church*, p.4; C. Burger, *Gemeentes in die kragveld van die Gees* (Stellenbosch: BUVTON, 1999), p.55.

18 Bosch discusses in *Transforming Mission* the presuppositions of the Enlightenment, which is a rationalistic paradigm that certainly fails to deal with the realities of our postmodern time and context, as well as with the hermeneutical presuppositions of doing theology and reading the Bible (pp.262-74).

19 N.T. Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick, Rutgers, 1997), p.23.

20 Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) Hall, *Professing the Faith*, pp.55-74.

21 "Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart," in *Theologische Fragen und Antworten* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag), pp.100-126. See also Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp.389-90

who amplified it by saying that theology should be viewed as sharing in the *missio Dei*.

The second premise is that a faith community cannot truly understand God in a personal way without taking part in his missional praxis. It is an activity initiated by the sending, missional God who, in his grace and mercy, entered into a covenant with the faith community in order to use it as an instrument of his mission.²²

The third premise that undergirds our argument is that mission, as an extension or outflowing of God's very being, must pay attention to the fact that God is revealed as three Persons. This assumption deals with identities: those of God, the church and human beings. The revelation of God as Trinity should not simply be objectified and analysed into ontological categories of thought. It has important implications for mission, as well as for our understanding of theology and identity. Because God is a community, humankind and faith communities cannot be any different.²³ Community thus receives a new emphasis. This implies that boundaries that existed between people with regard to gender, race, status, denomination, etc., are secondary and need to be crossed. Since theology is missional in its very essence, it can only be done in a community that reflects the Trinitarian community and its mission.

One of the church's fundamental problems is its notion that mission is an ecclesiocentric activity—an activity of the church along with its other ministries. Thus, a theocentric reconceptualization is needed.²⁴ When viewing mission from the locus of the Trinity, the following facts have important implications: The Creator bestowed the responsibility on humankind for taking care of his creation (Gen 1-2). God's mission and reign involve creation, care, redemption and consummation. Thus, God's mandate and involvement cannot be limited exclusively to the church.

From this it should be clear that, by refocusing theology on the Trinity and believing that this missional God is the creator and redeemer of the earth and its people, the whole paradigm of being church and doing theology changes. This paradigm change will have an intense affect on the church's mission and, as such, on its identity. Paradigmatic changes are profound.²⁵ Reformed theology, identity and mission will likewise be transformed. Paradigm changes take place when the context changes, which has already happened. The next section describes this change.

22 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp.389-93, 510-19; Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethic*, pp. 227-316; See esp. J.D. Witvliet, "Covenantal Communities and Reformed Mission Worldwide:

Covenantal Mission, the Institutional Church, and Freedom from Cultural Captivity" in S.J. Roels, (ed) *Reformed mission in an Age of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), pp. 75-84.

23 Hall, *Professing the Faith*, pp.55-72, 72n.47; Newbiggin, *The Open Secret, passim*; *Proper Confidence, Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp.28-29; Burger, *Gemeentes in die kragveld van die Gees*, pp.141-143.

24 Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), p.135; Guder, *Missional Church*, pp.3-7.

25 T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd enlarged edition (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970).



3.2 *Phyllis Tickle on Context and Theology*

Without understanding the contextual and resultant epistemological shifts and the new emerging²⁶ basis of authority, the exercise of trying to understand *Reformed theology and mission* will be futile in our day and age. Discerning a way forward cannot be done without understanding past and present realities. The challenge is to describe the paradigmatic transitions clearly. To do this, I am using Phyllis Tickle's book, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*.²⁷

Tickle points out that history has remarkable 500-year cycles, at the end of which the basis of authority changes to mark the beginning of a new cycle.²⁸ During the first 500 years after Christ, authority was vested in the apostolic tradition that produced the canon and the ecumenical creeds. When the Roman Empire went into demise,²⁹ the monasteries kept the Christian heritage intact as the "true keeper and promulgator of the faith."³⁰ During the Great Schism in 1054, the Roman Catholic Church established itself as the theological and ecclesial authority (at least in the Western World). "[T]he exercise and definition of authority was shifted to a single position, the Papacy, and the council of appointed cardinals surrounding that throne."³¹

All these forms of authority still exist, but the hegemony has shifted.³² In order to understand the shift of 2000, the 1500 shift that took place during the Reformation should be explained in some detail. What broke Rome's hegemony?

Tickle points out that, when Luther nailed his 95 theses against the church door at the Wittenberg Castle, enough pressures were already present to break the Catholic Church's absolute power and authority.³³ Three popes had been at war in Avignon, Rome and Pisa, illustrating that political instability and a deep questioning of the authority of that paradigm was in the air. The Ottoman Empire was defeating Christian Europe along the Mediterranean and reached Vienna in the East. Monarchies came under pressure as the printing press opened the way for information and knowledge

26 I will use the word "emerging" in its general sense, but am aware of the Emergent Church Movement that is very much part of the process described here. The following Wikipedia description of the movement will do: "Emerging Christianity or 'the emerging paradigm' has been visible for well over a hundred years. In the last twenty to thirty years, it has become a major grassroots movement among both laity and clergy in 'mainline' or old mainline Protestant denominations. The emerging paradigm's central features are a response to the Enlightenment. Borg describes it as 'a way of seeing the Bible' (and the Christian tradition as a whole): historical, metaphorical, and sacramental. And a way of seeing the Christian life: relational and transformational." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_church (Accessed 11 Oct 2011.) Google *Emergent Church* and note the intensity of this debate!

27 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

28 Pp.14-17.

29 P. 23. The Roman Senate officially disbanded itself in 480 C.E.

30 Pp.21-27.

31 Pp.28,151.

32 P.27.

33 Pp.43-61.

to reach the common people. "Individualism" was born. Cash money, not blood and land, became the basis of power. An entrepreneurial "middle" class emerged."³⁴ With this, capitalism eventually came about and the nation-state evolved with Protestantism active in the religious realm. Popular music played a role and Copernicus, the clergyman-astronomer, developed the heretical theory that the earth was a planet that circles the sun. Columbus sailed west and discovered America without falling off the end of the earth. The church could be wrong! Universities were founded in all European countries and the sciences opened new worlds that curtailed superstition. Scepticism became a hallmark of the Enlightenment and modern people.

The Reformation replaced a flesh and blood pope with a paper one: *sola Scriptura*.³⁵ Catechism had its heyday as people had to learn to read and write in order to be able to see for themselves that the pope was wrong. The priesthood of all believers was proclaimed. Now, authority resided in the Bible. Ordinary knowledgeable biblically-literate people could tell that the pope had blundered. Protest against the all-powerful rulers in church and society started religious wars as Protestantism came of age. Bosch's description of the Enlightenment scenario is vivid. Theology and religion were being reoriented. The split between the world of facts and that of values was clearly progressing.³⁶

Now, 500 years after Luther's 95 theses, the decline of the church in the West is no longer in doubt. The centre of gravity of the Christian world is shifting southward, to Africa, Asia and Latin America. This is clear from sources such as the *World Christian Encyclopaedia*,³⁷ as well as from many other authorities.³⁸ Tickle calls the new face of Christianity "*The Great Emergence*". Once again, a typical 500-year paradigm shift is taking place. In order to understand the challenges that we now face and the terrain on which we now must journey, we should understand the erosion of *sola Scriptura*'s authority or, more correctly, the hegemony of those theologians (or churches) who held exclusive power to define dogma and interpret what the Bible actually says.

Tickle does not spend much time in describing the relationship between *sola Scriptura* and the role of academic theology, especially systematic theology and church confessions, in the authority debate. However, she does describe how the hegemony of the strictly rational and dogmatic foundationalism was slowly subverted, concentrating

34 P.51.

35 Pp.44-46.

36 *Transforming Mission*, pp.262-283.

37 D.T. Barrett, G.T. Kurian, and T.M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World* Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

38 See, e.g. Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1995); Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Walls, *Mission in the 21st Century*.



on how it played out on the North American scene. Darwin and Freud's influence and the power of myth are described.³⁹ Questions about our humanness and true identity began to surface. Descartes' "I think therefore I am" became a "woefully inadequate definition of our humanness".⁴⁰ Individualism became the characteristic of our time, but a "cognitive self" no longer helps to answer humankind's identity questions in a world where information and the relativity of all rational knowledge systems are accepted.⁴¹ Where now is authority, if the thinking rational self is no longer in a position to trust his or her own rational judgement in this sea of information that overwhelms us?

Tickle uses Albert Einstein's Relativity Theory and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle to illustrate how science, which once was the absolute solid basis of truth (factual, value-free and neutral), was jeopardized in the same way that the discoveries of Copernicus and others led to the decline of a previous paradigm.⁴² The Jesus debate and other emotional church debates—from slavery to the gay issues—are then applied⁴³ to illustrate how literalism or biblicism and the inerrancy of Scripture were dealt a mortal blow.⁴⁴ *Sola Scriptura* and "the divine authority of Scripture was decentralized, subject to the caprices of human interpretation, turned into some kind of pick-and-choose bazaar for skilful hagglers. Where now is our authority?"⁴⁵ We live in a world of uncertainty where even the truth seems to be relative.

In this emerging world, "Pentecostalism assumes that the ultimate authority is experiential rather than canonical".⁴⁶ In the emerging world, this central belief in the Holy Spirit was the first sensible answer to the question of authority. It swept the globe.⁴⁷

Tickle writes:

We must acknowledge that the world has indeed gone flat again, the Reformation's nation-state having given way to the Emergence's globalization. Cash, which replaced blood as the basis of power during the peri-Reformation, now has had to cede power over to sheer information in the Emergence.⁴⁸

The Christendom paradigm is based in part on the relationship between church and state as an institutional arrangement related to the Greek dualism of the schism between

39 *The Great Emergence*, pp.63-75.

40 P.71.

41 P.71.

42 Pp.77-78. See also Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 266.

43 Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, pp.80-82, 85-117.

44 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.243.

45 Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, p.82.

46 P.85.

47 Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) Cox, *Fire from Heaven*.

48 *The Great Emergence*, p.106.

body and soul, the secular and the religious.⁴⁹ With the demise of the church in the West, this relationship between church and state is disappearing. However, the Reformation's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers found a much stronger infrastructure in the Internet, because here a new virtual community was founded where believers could communicate and network without fear of persecution, excommunication, or accusations about wrong doctrines. Christians are becoming a global community—a wiki-world—that has created a bank of collective information.⁵⁰ Emerging Christians now consult the Internet and fraternal networks to find answers to their questions and to share their witness and vocation. Personal blogs abound! *Authority is shifting to the networked whole of a new time and age.* Tickle remarks that this somehow resonates with what mathematicians and physicists call “networked theory.”⁵¹ She uses interesting phrases such as “crowd sourcing” and calls the emerging church a “conversation” in order to show that this movement finds its authority in the Spirit as it speaks “in the interlacing lives of Bible-listening, Bible-honoring believers. . . .”⁵²

This new emerging world has dismantled the absolute authority of rationality.

The point, in other words, is that logic is not worth nearly so much as the last five hundred years would have had us believe. . . . That is, logic suffers all the limitations of humanity, included being irrevocably contained in time and space.⁵³

Tickle views narrative as the “song of the vibrating network” and continues by saying that narrative is a community affair that helps us to redefine our humanness in relation to one another.⁵⁴ It holds to both body and soul and, as such, returns to Judaism's holistic theology and holistic conceptualization of human life and structure. Thus, it overcomes the dualism of Greek philosophy.⁵⁵ In this process, the emerging theology reconfigures its understanding of the self, “[t]he humanness of being in *imago Dei*”. It will impact everything from medical policy to moral theory as well as evangelism and religious formation.⁵⁶ Therefore, according to Tickle, the emergent theology will be something much more Jewish (i.e. holistic), more narrative and more mystical. The Christendom era became fixed in Greek dualism, a split between body and soul so that “[t]he whole purpose of ‘salvation’ began to shift from a means of effecting or living out God's will on earth to being a ticket for transportation into a paradisaical hereafter. Gnosticism flourished as never before. The body became evil and therefore suspect.”⁵⁷ Authority in this ongoing journey is being redefined and seems to be in community, in communication, and networked with elements of the previous paradigms that are held

49 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp.220-22, 274-277.

50 Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, p.107.

51 *The Great Emergence*, p.152.

52 Pp.152-153.

53 P. 160. See also Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.264.

54 *The Great Emergence*, p.160.

55 P.161.

56 P.162.

57 P.161.

in a paradoxical balance with one another.⁵⁸



3.3 *Discernment and Leadership in a New Paradigm*

David Bosch and Lesslie Newbigin have influenced me profoundly. (Reformed) theology developed from the missional premises that they outlined into becoming missional at its core. Movements, such as the *Gospel and our Culture Network* (GOCN) and the *Partnership for Mission Church* (PMC), can be Googled to note its global impact. In South Africa, it is growing vigorously and is discussed at theological societies.⁵⁹ One of the influential characteristics of this movement can be described as “Dwelling in the Word.”⁶⁰ The point I am making is that scripture does play an absolutely central role, but in a new theological configuration. It is clear that the emerging paradigm is breaking its ties with Christendom and the latter’s emphasis on the institutional, geographic, rational foundationalism.⁶¹

In the emerging paradigm, the process of moving away from Greek dualism and the narrow confines of rationality is creating a new epoch for doing theology holistically. Theology and other sciences can learn from one another.⁶² Van Gelder describes this shift in terminology that we have not yet utilized in this article:

Describing the postmodern condition and attempting to theorize about it are producing a new vocabulary that can sound strange at first. Concepts such as indeterminacy, deconstruction, diversity, decentering, and the aestheticization of all of life challenge the vocabulary of modernity, which emphasized prediction, certainty, absolutes, centers, and the privileging of a particular style as a preferred culture.⁶³

58 Hall’s discussion on authority is very helpful and adds perspective to this discussion. See *Profession of Faith*, pp.369-449.

59 The Afrikaans website is especially lively: <http://communitas.co.za/vennootskap-savgg/?lang> (Accessed 22 Sept 2011). Missional theology was the agenda of the 2010 meeting of the South African Missiological Society with a series of papers outlining the progress of this movement in South Africa. See H.J. Hendriks , “Trauma and Conflict as Prerequisites for Identity Formation: Lessons from the South African Partnership for Missional Churches,” in *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal* 50 (2009): pp.1-2, 109-119, J.F. Marais, “Four Missional Conversions,” paper delivered at the South African Missiology Society January 2010 meeting; D.A. Mouton, “To plunge . . . When Congregations Cross Their Boundaries,” paper delivered at the South African Missiology Society January 2010 meeting; M. Nel, “The Influence of Dwelling in the Word on the Southern African Partnership of Missional Churches,” paper delivered at the South African Missiology Society January 2010 meeting; C.J.P. Niemandt, “Five Years of Missional Church. Reflections on Missional Ecclesiology,” paper delivered at the South African Missiology Society January 2010 meeting. In his book, *Nuwe drome vir nuwe werklikhede*, Niemandt has hailed it as theology in a new paradigm (Wellington: Lux Verbi, 2007), pp.146ff.

60 Nel, “The Influence of Dwelling in the Word;” P. Keifert, *We Are Here Now. A New Missional Era* (Eagle, Idaho: Allelon, 2006).

61 Walls, *Mission in the 21st Century*, pp.34-47.

62 A.E. McGrath, *Science and Religion: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

Wentzel van Huyssteen's work in this field is well-known. This quote summarizes the paradigm shift well:

Postmodernism is, as I see it, first of all a very pointed rejection of all forms of epistemological foundationalism, as well as of its ubiquitous, accompanying metanarratives that so readily claim to legitimize all our knowledge, judgements, decisions and actions. Foundationalism, as is generally defined today, is the thesis that all our beliefs can be justified by appealing to some item of knowledge that is self-evident or indubitable. Foundationalism in this epistemological sense therefore always implies the holding of a position of inflexibility and infallibility, because in the process of justifying our knowledge claims, we are able to invoke ultimate foundations on which we construct the evidential support systems of our various convictional beliefs.⁶⁴

In order to illustrate the implications of the epistemological shift away from the Greek dualism, I shall now illustrate how the business world and its leaders use theological metaphors.

I would like to describe the concept of "discernment"⁶⁵ in Otto Scharmer's terminology and practice.⁶⁶ Here the point is not to describe discernment in any detail, but to illustrate how much it has in common with theology and mission. In the emerging theology and mission, a holistic approach to whatever one does is integral to the notions of *imago Dei* and *missio Dei*. What emerges is the realization of the interconnectedness of creation and our responsibility to be stewards of this creation, no matter where God has called us to serve, no matter what work we do. This is new if compared to the dualistic world of facts over and against the world of values in sway during the Enlightenment and modernism.⁶⁷ In developing his "Center for Servant Leadership", Robert Greenleaf based much of his leadership philosophy on Christian values, while

63 "Mission in the Emerging Postmodern Condition," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, G. Hunsberger and C. Van Gelder (eds.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 114.

64 Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) p.2.

65 The author's view on discernment was formed in a network called NetACT (<http://academic.sun.ac.za/theology/netact.html> 5 October 2011) and is described in Hendriks' *Studying congregations in Africa* (Wellington: Lux-Verbi-BM, 2004), pp.19-34.

66 From the internet (<http://www.ottoscharmer.com/publications/summaries.php> 22 September 2011). Dr. C Otto Scharmer is a Senior Lecturer at MIT and the founding chair of ELIAS (Emerging Leaders for Innovation Across Sectors), a programme linking 20 leading global institutions from business, government and civil society in order to prototype profound system innovations for a more sustainable world. He also is the founding chair of the Presencing Institute and a visiting professor at the Center for Innovation and Knowledge Research, Helsinki School of Economics. Scharmer has consulted with global companies, international institutions, and cross-sector change initiatives in North America, Europe, Asia and Africa. He has co-designed and delivered award-winning leadership programmes for client organizations including Daimler, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and Fujitsu.

67 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp.262-274.



illustrating the emerging paradigm change. Wikipedia explains:

“Servant leadership” is a philosophy and practice of leadership, coined and defined by Robert K. Greenleaf (born 1904 in Terre Haute, Indiana; died in 1990) and supported by many leadership and management writers such as James Autry, Ken Blanchard, Stephen Covey, Peter Block, Peter Senge, Max DePree, Scott Greenberg, Larry Spears, Margaret Wheatley, James C. Hunter, Kent Keith, Ken Jennings, Don Frick and others. Servant-leaders achieve results for their organizations by giving priority attention to the needs of their colleagues and those they serve. Servant-leaders are often seen as humble stewards of their organization’s resources: human, financial and physical. Christian values are espoused by all the people mentioned above. Another very interesting book where quantum physics and the principles of “natural sciences” are used with biblical principles is Margareth J Wheatley’s much acclaimed work, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*.⁶⁸

It would be folly to ignore this emergent reality. Robert E Quinn wrote *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within*. His first chapter is titled: “Walking Naked into the Land of Uncertainty.” Here he says:

When most of us talk about change, we typically mean incremental change. Incremental change is usually the result of a rational analysis and planning process. There is a desired goal with a specific set of steps for reaching it. . . . Deep change differs from incremental change in that it requires new ways of thinking and behaving. It is change that is major in scope, discontinuous with the past and generally irreversible. . . . Deep change means surrendering control.⁶⁹

Otto Scharmer explains the phenomenon in the following way:

We live in an era of intense conflict and massive institutional failures, a time of painful endings and of hopeful beginnings. It is a time that feels as if something profound is shifting and dying while something else, as the playwright and Czech president, Václav Havel put it: “I think there are good reasons for suggesting that the modern age has ended. Today, many things indicate that we are going through a transitional period, when it seems that something is on the way out and something else is painfully born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying, and exhausting itself – while something else, still indistinct, were rising from the rubble.”⁷⁰

68 (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999).

69 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996). Quinn is a professor in Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management at the Business School of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI USA.

70 *Theory U: Leading From the Future as It Emerges* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009)

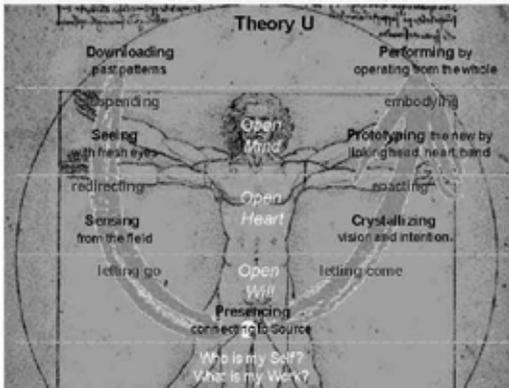
p.1.

This is the wonderfully challenging world in which we must ask about the future of Reformed theology and mission. There is so much scope for theology—it is a profoundly hope-giving mission!

This emerging cognitive skill of finding one's way to the future Scharmer calls "presencing":

Organizations and their leaders can develop this capability by engaging in a different kind of learning cycle, one that allows them to learn from the future as it emerges, rather than from reflecting on past experiences. I suggest calling this evolving new learning capacity "*presencing*". The term refers to the capacity for sensing, embodying, and enacting emerging futures.⁷¹

He does not use the word "discernment", but that is what presencing is all about. The process is illustrated by the sketch below.⁷²



Moving through the U curve is moving away from the type of process that Van Gelder describes so well above. He describes what Christians call "discernment", listening to the Holy Spirit and opening up to God who can speak to us and open completely new and unexpected realities and possibilities. I can't help mentioning that, after its Apartheid blunder the Dutch Reformed Church is undergoing a profound self-examination and has called on its institutions and members to enter into a season of listening⁷³ in order to discern the way forward.⁷⁴ Scharmer calls this "presencing":

71 Scharmer, "Presencing: Learning from the future as it emerges," 2, <http://www.blog.ottoscharmer.com> (Accessed 21 July 2010.)

72 <http://www.ottoscharmer.com/publications/presentations.php>

73 Google "Seisoen van Luister" on the Afrikaans Google search engine and see how surprisingly many references are made. The Dutch Reformed Church has a special website for this: <http://www.seisoenvanluister.co.za/>

74 See also Janel Curry, "Cross-boundary Faith: The Universal and the Contextual," in Roels (ed.), *Reformed Mission in an Age of World Christianity*, pp.47-56.



Presencing is a birth-giving activity. The experience of presencing is twofold: co-creating and giving birth to a new reality and, at the same time, being transformed and born into a new world by the very same process.⁷⁵

Scharmer helps us to understand how this listening is linked to understanding and action: *"For it is only through this listening that we will unlock our collective capacity to create the world anew."*⁷⁶ He then describes four levels of listening that are interlinked with four levels of knowledge. I now paste his figure without explaining it, as, in many ways, it is obvious enough to see what he envisages.

Field: Structure of Attention	Micro: ATTENDING (individual)	Meso: CONVERSING (group)	Macro: STRUCTURING (institutions)	Mundo: (global systems)
 I - in - me	Listening 1: Downloading habits of thought	Downloading: Talking nice, politeness rule-reenacting	Centralized: Machine bureaucracy	Hierarchy: Central plan, regulation
 I - in - me	Listening 2: Factual, object- focused	Debate: Talking tough, rule evaluating	Decentralized: Divisionalized	Market: Completion
 I-in-you	Listening 3: Emphatic listening	Dialogue: Inquiry, rule-reflecting	Networked: Relational	Negotiation: (Mutual adjustment)
 I-in-now	Listening 4: Generative listening	Collective Creativity: Presencing, flow rule-generating	Ecosystem: Context, field based	Collective Awareness Based Action: Acting from the w(W)hole

Based on Presencing Institute, Otto Scharmer - www.presencing.com/. Used with permission

According to Scharmer,

75 Scharmer, "Presencing: Learning from the future as it emerges," 26.

76 *Theory U*, xviii.

The key leadership challenge of our time is to shift the inner place from which we operate. As individuals, as teams, as institutions, and as societies we all face the same issue: that doing “more of the same” won’t fix flawed and failed systems. We have to leave behind our old tools and behaviors, and immerse ourselves in the places of most potential. We have to listen with our minds and hearts wide open, and then connect with our deep sources of knowing and self. It’s only when we pass through this eye of the needle—letting go of the old and letting come the emerging self—that we can begin to step into our real power: the power to collectively sense and create the world anew. Theory U describes a social grammar and practical methods for such a transformative leadership journey.⁷⁷

This is our challenge. As Tickle explains, it does not imply that where humankind has been at the previous stations of its journey is rendered worthless. We have a new context in which a new configuration is needed in order to do theology missionally. One big difference is simply this: we are moving away from privatized religion where religion and values were prohibited in a fact-oriented “rational” world. There is a new freedom, a new communion paradigm, a networked society where even the business world is employing theological metaphors.

4 Contextual Changes: Globalization and Informationalization

The logic of triangulation now takes us to a sociological analysis of our time and place. In doing so, we find a new take on the emerging, holistic, interdisciplinary paradigm that will help Reformed missional theology to discern its vocation today.

4.1 Context and Prophets

I believe that missional theology involves a continuing hermeneutical effort to discern how the word of God should be proclaimed in word and deed in the world.⁷⁸ Brian McLaren says: “If you have a new world, you need a new church. You have a new world.”⁷⁹ If we ask about the missional challenges faced by Reformed theology, then we must understand the world as the context in which we live. The previous discussion on the hermeneutical and epistemological changes of a new paradigm is absolutely and intimately linked to the new socio-economic reality of the world in which we find ourselves.

Biblical prophets were people who were able to read the signs of their times. They could understand and interpret the changes that took place politically, socially and in

⁷⁷ <http://www.blog.ottoscharmer.com/?m=201001> “through the eye of the needle” (Accessed on 20 January 2010.)

⁷⁸ Hendriks, *Studying Congregations in Africa*, p. 19.

⁷⁹ *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 11.



the economy of their time and place. When it comes to sociology, Manuel Castells⁸⁰ is indeed a prophet. His diagnosis of the changes in our society will guide the next phase of our discussion:

Globalization and informationalization, enacted by networks of wealth, technology, and power, are transforming our world. They are enhancing our productive capacity, cultural creativity, and communication potential. At the same time they are disenfranchising societies. . . .With the exception of a small elite of globopolitans (half beings, half flows), people all over the world resent loss of control over their lives, over their environment, over their jobs, over their economies, over their governments, over their countries, and, ultimately, over the fate of the Earth. Thus, following an old law of social evolution, resistance confronts domination, empowerment reacts against powerlessness, and alternative projects challenge the logic embedded in the new global order, increasingly sensed as disorder by people around the planet.⁸¹

We are living in a new world because of:

- Technology
- Informationalization
- Globalization
- Crime

Castells discusses four implications brought about by the forces that changed the old world. Since most of this is well-known, I am summarizing them point-by-point to come more quickly to what he sees as the most important key to understanding this new world. This key is crucial to our discussion. The four implications are:

4.1.1 A Globalized, Technology-Based, Capitalist Economy That Polarizes⁸²

There is polarization between rich and poor— inclusion and exclusion become related

80 See *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information age: Economy, Society and Culture*, volume I (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); *End of millennium: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, volume III. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, volume II. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). Wikipedia's article is a good introduction to Castells' work. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manuel_Castells. It states that Castells is "[t]he world's fifth most-cited social science scholar, and the foremost-cited communication scholar."

81 Castells, *The Power of Identity*, p.72.

82 I can truly identify with Roland Hoksbergen in his discussion of the Accra Confession. "The Accra Confession is a confession of faith by Reformed Christians, which was adopted by the delegates of the 24th General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra, Ghana (2004). It is based on the theological conviction that the economic and ecological injustices of today's global economy require the Reformed family to respond as a matter of faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ." See http://warcc.jalab.de/warccajsp/side.jsp?news_id=1157&navi=45. (Accessed 11 Oct 2011.) The economic problems that we face are multifaceted and very complicated and indeed need careful consideration. However, this consideration is necessary to solve global problems and insecurity.

to class.

Those with access to information become richer and less, those without, poorer and more.

In the last 30 years:

- The share in global income of the poorest 20% declined from 2.3% to 1.4%.
- The share in global income of the richest 20% grew from 70% to 85%.
- 33% of the world's population live in misery (less than \$1 per day).
- The nation-states are losing their power
- The ability of the nation-state to care for its citizens is disintegrating because it cannot efficiently tax the movement of money transactions passing through the Internet.
- Democracy is experiencing a credibility crisis
- Result: job creation is becoming more difficult; health care, pensions, and welfare are curtailed. *Insecurity and risk is rife.*

4.1.2 Networks, Powered by Information Technology Play a Crucial Role in the Processes of Alternative Identity Formation

- Nation-states, through the ideology they pursue, coin the identity of the people (legitimizing identity).
- Information leads people to distrust nation-states and multi-nationals, and to reject the identity imposed upon them.
- Social movements network people and influence identity. Resistance and project identity formation now takes place.
- Examples: fundamentalism, local nationalism, gangs, ethnicity, social movements, such as feminism and ecology-groups.

4.1.3 The Decline of Patriarchalism/Patriarchy

- What is patriarchalism/patriarchy? It is the founding structure of all contemporary societies. It is the institutionally enforced authority of all males over females and their children in the family unit.⁸³
- My "crisis of the patriarchal family" refers to the weakening of a family model

83 Castells, *The Power of Identity*, p.192.



based on the stable exercise of authority / domination over the whole family by the adult male head of the family.⁸⁴

Causes of the Decline of Patriarchalism

- Education and information give women access to work.
- Technology helps women to control pregnancy.
- Women's identity and self-image are transformed (cf. the role of projects, e.g. feminism).
- In 1997, 32% (854 million) of the global labour force was made up of women. They receive income and therefore independence.
- Industry prefers women because: they are paid less; have better relationship skills; adapt faster and are easier to hire and fire.

Effects

- Marriages decline, divorces, single parents, living together, out-of-wedlock children increase.
- There is chaos in the sexual realm, an individualistic-selfish ethics, and a capitalistic ethos.
- There is abuse and exploitation of women and children (the 3rd biggest global crime network).
- There is population growth: decline in the rich world, and explosion in the Third World.
- We now wish to focus on what Castells views as the two most important keys to help one to understand the transition process. His analysis is crucial to our quest.

4.2 *Identity Formation and Power*

Castells writes:

I propose, as a hypothesis, that, in general terms, who constructs identity, and for what, largely determines the symbolic content of this identity, and its meaning for those identifying with it or placing themselves outside of it. Since the social construction of identity always takes place in a context marked by power relationships, I propose a distinction between three forms and origins of identity

84 P.196.

building.⁸⁵

Identity is formed in one of three ways:

1. *Legitimizing identity* is generated by civil society and introduced by the dominant institutions of a society and those in authority. It works top-down and dominates. It is illustrated by the nation-state and the Christendom church.
2. *Resistance identity* is generated by those actors who are devalued / stigmatized by the logic of domination. They form communities, or political parties, or rebel groups, in order to resist unbearable opposition / oppression and build upon already existing identities defined by history, geography, biology, belief, race / ethnicity, etc. This is a defensive identity and is illustrated by religious fundamentalism, such as the Religious Right in the USA and in the world of Islam, Al-Qaeda. It is globally active.
3. *Project identity* is built when social actors build a new identity that redefines their position in society and by doing so, seek the transformation of the overall social structure. Examples are feminism and the ecological movements. Collective social actors are networked as movements through which the individual reaches a holistic meaning in his/her experience. Not so much resistance, as a vision, dream or a logical alternative drives this process.

Tickle's 500-year cycles serve to illustrate that the legitimizing identity formation of the European nation-states and their Christendom denominational partners are now discredited. In retrospect, it is clear how they manipulated people's minds and cultures, exploiting them to benefit their scramble for political and economic power and empire building.

By and large, the Reformed identity formation process of the 1500s came about as resistance identity formation—we were "Protestants." From a sociological point of view, the heritage of the church-state Christendom eventually led to the processes of legitimizing identity formation becoming dominant. As such, this is one way of explaining the church's decline in the Western world. We are now entering an era where both resistance identity formation and project identity formation is taking place. Fundamentalism and politically-fuelled resistance movements are rife. However, the emerging church is now rediscovering a biblical identity and mission—a clear example of project identity formation.⁸⁶

The second absolutely important insight to gain from Castells concerns power. From the above brief point-by-point summary of the features of a new world, it is clear that power is moving from the physical to the intellectual; from *Macht* to Mind; from guns to

⁸⁵ P.7.

⁸⁶ Scharmer's first figure pasted above has two questions at the foot of the picture: "Who is my Self? What is my work?" They illustrate this mindset.

information. In his conclusion, Castells argues:

Power, as argued, and to some extent shown, in this and in volume 1 of the trilogy, is no longer concentrated in institutions (the state), organizations (capitalist firms), or symbolic controllers (corporate media, churches). It is diffused in global networks of wealth, power, information and images. . . . Power still rules society; it still shapes, and dominates, us. . . . The new power lies in the codes of information and in the images of representation around which societies organize their institutions, and people build their lives, and decide their behavior. The sites of this power are people's minds. . . . Whoever, or whatever, wins the battle of people's minds will rule, because mighty, rigid apparatuses will not be a match, in any reasonable timespan, for the minds mobilized around the power of flexible, alternative networks.⁸⁷

Social networked movements will shape identity and change cultural codes. There will be two major agencies involved in this process, according to Castells. The first he calls "prophets", that is, symbolic personalities who symbolize new values. There will be good and bad prophets! The second main agency is a "networking, decentered form of organization and intervention, characteristic of the new social movements, mirroring, and counteracting, the networking logic of domination in the informational society."⁸⁸

Only one conclusion can be drawn from all of this: Reformed theology and mission must be conceptualized anew. It is a new world. What Castells helps us to understand is that Reformed missional identity needs to be formed as project identity (God's reign and mission) and that this can be done only if we understand something of how power is exercised today. This is a major ecclesiological challenge, an Acts 15 Ephesians moment.⁸⁹ Legitimizing identity formation is making proselytes of all subjects. It is driven by ideology. It uses Scripture in a fundamentalistic way. This is not the way of the Gospel.

5 A Flat World: Uploading

By continuing the logic of triangulation, we now try to learn from the world of communication.

Thomas Friedman's bestseller, *The World is Flat*, helped me to understand one of the most fundamental implications of this shift for the church and theology.⁹⁰ This

87 *The Power of Identity*, pp.424-425. We have seen this clearly from 2010 onwards, as the regimes of Egypt, Tunis and Algeria tumbled. Other dictatorial nation-states also are in turmoil.

88 *The Power of Identity*, pp. 426-427.

89 Walls, *Mission in the 21st Century*, pp.72-81.

90 *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Picador, 2007). Thomas Loren Friedman was born 20 July 1953. He is an American journalist, columnist and author. He writes a twice-weekly column for *The New York Times*. He has written extensively on foreign affairs

book is a vivid collection of stories that illustrate to what extent the economic playing field has been levelled globally. The world has become a village. Friedman uses a different hermeneutic to confirm what Castells explains in sociological terminology. The first of his ten “flatteners” explains the symbolic import of the fall of the Berlin wall (9 November 1989), a tipping point that unleashed forces (social movements) that ultimately liberated countless people. It was the first of the major breakthroughs brought about by the information revolution that started in the mid-1980s.⁹¹

I found the fourth flattener, called “uploading”, the most important to understand. It is about harnessing the power of communities. Friedman defines uploading as:

The newfound power of individuals and communities to send up, out, and around their own products and ideas, often for free, rather than passively downloading them from commercial enterprises or traditional hierarchies, is fundamentally reshaping the flow of creativity, innovation, political mobilization and information gathering and dissemination. It is making each of these things a bottom-up and globally side-to-side phenomenon, not exclusively a top-down one. . . . Uploading is, without doubt, becoming one of the most revolutionary forms of collaboration in the flat world. More than ever, we can all now be producers, not just consumers.⁹²

This is a major new trend with enormous potential for congregations and seminaries alike. Friedman says: “Our communication infrastructure has taken only the first steps in this great shift from audience to participants, but that is where it will go in the next decade.”⁹³ The top-down view is replaced by a bottom-up and especially side-to-side movement. It is indeed a revolution of collaboration: users become producers, not just consumers. It is a massively emancipating move. The best illustration of the paradigm difference is by comparing the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (EB)—authored by specialists and highly qualified academics—to the achievement of Wikipedia, a network-based encyclopaedia produced through a collaborative effort by voluntary participants. Within a very short time, it outstripped the EB to become the most used and biggest source of reference.⁹⁴ When interpreting this fact in Castells’ sociological categories, one can conclude that legitimizing identity formation is replaced by the power of social networks and movements to facilitate project or resistance identity formation. One can actually see that this happens as people send one another SMSs, Tweets, and exchange information on Facebook and in their blogs.

What do we learn? From all the vantage points that we have visited, it is clear that we are in a new time and place or context. The communication systems and the sociological including global trade, the Middle East, and environmental issues and has won the Pulitzer Prize three times. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Friedman (8 October 2011).

91 *The World is Flat*, pp.51-55.

92 P.95.

93 P.96.

94 From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page: Welcome to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit. 3,205,877 articles in English.



reality of a networked society have enormous implications for Reformed theology and mission, not to mention ecclesiology and worship. The earlier paradigm's picture of a raised pulpit with a robed minister giving an expository sermon to a reverently listening audience dressed in their Sunday-best is a picture of a paradigm in demise.

6 Conclusions

We shall conclude with the three words of our presentation title.

6.1 *About Trust (Authority) and Theology*

I believe that the God who said: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature..." (*Message translation*) is a covenantal God in whom one can put one's faith, a God one has to learn to trust like a little child (Mt 18.3). This God communicates with us. The Bible is our indispensable guide to discern the Triune God's will. Discernment cannot take place without community because somehow, mysteriously, we experience that this God who became flesh and blood in Jesus Christ in order to show us what God's mission involves, continues to communicate with us in and through the Holy Spirit. Thus, through the Bible, we are in community with the faithful through all the ages. In this way, Jesus Christ leads his church by the power of the Holy Spirit. By focusing, trying to follow Jesus Christ, and being drawn into the Trinitarian community, the Church can find unity and remain focused on God's mission. We call this process of discernment and obedience "theology", missional theology.

The story of Genesis 3 tells us that we have a constant tendency to put our trust in something else, which we can manipulate, thus avoiding the discernment community where we must listen and quite often wait for guidance. Even confessions, a pope, a *sola-Scriptura* principle, the institute, etc.—important and valuable as they are—can subtly be put in place of trust. As one is born and grows up in a physical family and bears the characteristics of that family, one is born in a church family and displays the characteristics of that family. Denominations are a present reality. However, the Christendom era highlights the dangers of denominationalism that quite often mirrors the competition between nation-states and their economies. Biblically speaking, the church and its mission are one.

6.2 *About Identity*

I think one of theology's greatest contributions in the 20th century was the realization that the church finds its true identity through its mission. Mission is not something to be linked either to ecclesiology or soteriology, but to the Trinity. As such, our identity as persons (*imago Dei*) and church (*missio Dei*) flows from the Trinity. Thus, the danger of individualism is exposed because we were created as a community that is intrinsically

linked to mission that has as its scope creation and peace.⁹⁵

6.3 *About Context*

One of the most important realizations of our time is the importance and influence of context, to which we must be open to discern the guidance of a living present God, as the forces of light and darkness do battle. An overview of the history of the faith community in the Bible and the 500-year cycles that we have summarized provide a picture of how the church, as institution, has had to adapt over three to four millennia. The change in context that the world now experiences is undeniably the biggest of them all. To discern God's mission in this day and age for the church as such, and for the Reformed family in particular, is daunting. Like a snake, it has to cast its skin off or, like so many insects, it has to experience a metamorphosis.

6.4 *Practical Implications*

There is no doubt that God's agenda puts seriously enormous issues on the table: the ecology may well be our biggest challenge, but the pain of our ecosystem is caused by the global capitalistic economic system, which most probably is the worst cancer in our bones and marrow. Becoming a global village brought us face to face with religious pluralism and the reality of diversity. Issues of justice abound as nation-states struggle, and crime is on the rise. Urbanization is rampant, highlighting the terrible reality of poverty as slums mushroom like a disease and issues of family and sexuality are major social challenges.

However, at a positive and practical level, one has to ask the question: How will Reformed theology address all of these realities missionally? In India, Mother Theresa's example and Mohandas Ghandi's⁹⁶ influence are extremely valuable. However, from this discussion we have learned that we need to *listen* to our context. Several very important clues are available:

1. Our time is characterized by risk, uncertainty and relativity. People trust neither huge institutions nor anybody's claims to the truth. Legitimizing identity formation is no longer an option in an informationalized society, nor is resistance identity formation above board. I believe that it is only through knowing and trusting the Triune God that we can have peace—even in the worst turmoil (Jn 14.27). The God who reaches out to us, who is present in his Son and Spirit is our only good news. This God sends us on a mission of hope about an alternative reality.
2. As literally never before, the priesthood of all believers is now possible and must be utilized. We no longer have audiences waiting on the minister to guide them.

95 See Walter Brueggeman, *Living Towards a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom*, (New York: United, 1976)

96 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohandas_Karamchand_Gandhi (Accessed: 10 October 2011).



We are in the time of uploading—the Wikipedia age where people want to be collaborators in a mission. The movement is bottom-up and side-to-side. The typical institutional tendency to control and govern, to direct from a central point will have to adapt, because it may be obscuring the Spirit’s movement. Trust God more than the institution, and help the institution to have a supporting and servant identity.

3. In all denominations, we find that “dwelling in the Word” remains one of the emerging church’s most distinct characteristics. In a sense, it is the new configuration of *sola Scriptura*. As indicated above, theology is about listening and doing. We have a mission and, as such, to plunge across boundaries is part of this new exciting journey.
4. One of the most daunting challenges is that of leadership. If listening and discernment are key to mission, then the typical capitalistic CEO leadership style will not work. We need to rediscover the principle of *kenosis* of Philipians 1.27—2.18.
5. In a networked society, networked social movements are the key drivers of transformation. The church has this in its DNA structure; it flows from its identity as a community, modelled on the Trinity. We need to learn to understand how it works in a digitalized world.
6. A change in worship style is always part of social change. The organ did that once! We must discern how it will happen now. Without worship transformation, there will be no transformation.

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Church and Civil Society in the Reformed Tradition: An Old Relationship and a New Communion

Jason A. Goroncy

This essay represents an attempt to reassess the relationship between church and state in our post-Constantinian era. In the Reformed tradition, the church has been understood to be committed to the task of transforming civic institutions and social structures. But too close an alliance between the spiritual and the temporal always threatens to reduce the church to an instrument used by the state to advance purposes often contrary to the witness and mission of the church. Alert to this danger, theologians in the neo-Anabaptist tradition have stressed the need for the church to maintain separation from the state in order to constitute itself as an alternative polis and exercise its prophetic witness in the world. The contemporary challenge facing Reformed communities, including their theologians, is to articulate and enact a vision of being in and for the world that conforms to the scriptures on the one hand and promotes engagement in the institutions of state and civil society on the other.

“Grace must find expression in life, otherwise it is not grace.”¹

It is an oft-made thesis that while the sixteenth-century Protestant reformations altered the structural uniformity of the medieval church and paved the way for national Christian identities, they “left the underlying construct of Christendom intact.”² We might recall, for example, the way that Calvin did not hesitate to employ the instruments of the state in order to further the perceived interests of the church.³ We might also remember that a chapter in the nearly final version of the Scots Confession describing the legitimacy of civil disobedience appears to have been deleted by censors appointed by the Scottish Parliament in August 1560.⁴ Or, more recently, we might point to those patterns of political life in Latin America or in South Africa where, in John de Gruchy’s words, “Constantinianism has been cultivated by the state in the service of its own

- 1 Karl Barth in Helmut Gollwitzer, *An Introduction to Protestant Theology*, trans. David Cairns (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), p. 174
- 2 Jehu J. Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books 2008), p. 94.
- 3 Calvin, it seems, is not entirely consistent here. Note, for example, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), III.xix.15; IV.xx.1: “Now, these two [kingdoms] . . . Christ’s spiritual Kingdom and the civil jurisdiction are things completely distinct . . . [I]t is a Jewish vanity to seek and enclose Christ’s Kingdom within the elements of this world.”
- 4 See W. Ian P. Hazlett, “The Scots Confession 1560: Context, Complexion and Critique,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 78 (1987), p. 316.



legitimation, and where the church has cooperated in the process.”⁵ Of course, this is not to tell the whole story and there are some notable exceptions—the witness of the Covenanters against the Stuart monarchy in seventeenth-century Scotland, for example; or, more recently, the Uniting Church in Australia’s persistent criticisms of the Australian Government’s shameful policies regarding seekers of asylum. But still I suspect that few contemporary Reformed theologians and historians would challenge the claim that the relationship between church and state has most often been too closely set, producing on the one hand a deplorable prejudice against all those not professing the Reformed faith and, on the other, an alliance between the two that has sponsored political corruption, a denigrated witness of the body of Christ, and a crisis of her vocational identity in the world. What exposed the fact that Christendom remained the dominant model of Christianity among western European peoples and subsequently those colonized by them, was, more than any other factor, the modern missionary movement. That same movement also, in many cases, helped to “expose the limitations of Christendom as an exportable model or universal ideal.”⁶

My intention here is not to flag concern over the Reformed instinct to perceive *both* the community and the individual as living under the word of God and to perceive *both* the law and the gospel as expressions of divine grace.⁷ I believe that this instinct remains the proper one. But the kind of co-operation of which de Gruchy (and others) warns engenders some unsalutary features, not least, for example, those exposed in our own tradition by the theology of Barmen. However, such exposure has birthed relatively little by way of creative reassessment of Reformed ecclesiology and mission. Nor has it led to conversion or repentance that such re-assessment hopes to encourage. In spite of the gifts that the modern missionary movement and the Barmen Declaration have bequeathed to the church, de Gruchy’s assessment remains accurate: that since its genesis the Reformed tradition has struggled to maintain the tension between “a church seeking to be faithful to scripture, yet trapped by the prejudices and weaknesses of its members, their cultural norms, and the protective cocoon of Christendom.”⁸ Moreover, how far such exposure has encouraged a rigorous reassessment of the Reformed church’s continuing identity vis-à-vis Christendom’s underlying commitments⁹ is an

5 John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate* (Grand Rapids/Cape Town: Wm .B. Eerdmans/David Philip Publishers, 1991), p. 197.

6 Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, p. 94.

7 See Eberhard Busch, “Church and Politics in the Reformed Tradition” in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 180–95. We see some vestige of this instinct, for example, in Article 22 of the Accra Confession: “We believe that any economy of the household of life, given to us by God’s covenant to sustain life, is accountable to God. We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and well being of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation.”

8 de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, p.197.

9 This is not a criticism of Christendom *per se*. While I think that Oliver O’Donovan’s claims in defence of Christendom that Christendom “is constituted not by the church’s seizing of alien power, but by alien power’s becoming attentive to the church,” and that “it was the missionary imperative that compelled the church to take the conversion of the empire seriously and to seize the opportunities it offered. . . for preaching the Gospel, baptising believers, curbing the violence and cruelty of empire

important question for the Reformed communion at a time in history in which the social context of pluralism and the de-christianization of the West demand calls for a more credible Christian script and prophetic witness. Coupled with this, there is a resurgence of neo-Anabaptist models which encourage, to varying degrees, the separation of ecclesial life from its wider civil counterpart.¹⁰ While Reformed attempts to understand the church as committed to the tasks of social transformation and critical support for the state remain valid, the contemporary Reformed community, including her theologians, have some work to do here.¹¹ This essay simply represents a modest attempt to place the discussion on the table.

While there is some truth in the assessment that we are always in a new situation, the work that this essay invites Reformed theologians to take up is not a new work. The tradition of discerning how to rightly “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mk 12.17) has a long and vexed history in the church, from Stephen’s stoning (Ac 7) in the first century, to Hildebrand (or Gregory VII) and the investiture conflict¹² in the mid-eleventh century, to the work of

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- and, perhaps most important of all, forgiving their former persecutors” represent an idealization of the data at our disposal, O’Donovan is not oblivious to the danger of the church’s colluding with the state’s assumption of its own inherent and autonomous authority. He writes: “The peril of the Christendom idea—precisely the same peril that attends upon the post-Christendom idea of the religiously neutral state—was that of negative collusion: the pretence that there was now no further challenge to be issued to the rulers in the name of the ruling Christ.” Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.195, 212, 213. For a recent and careful defence of Constantine and Constantinianism, see Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010); cf. Stanley Hauerwas, “Review of *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* by Peter Leithart” *The Christian Century* (2010) <http://www.christiancentury.org/reviews/2010-09/nonfiction-1>. (Accessed 19 October 2010.)
- 10 So John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), p.198: “the function exercised by government is not the function to be exercised by Christians.” It is helpful here to recall Jüngel’s reminder to us that Barmen had something significantly more important to say than any mere “No.” Rather, its primary concern was to affirm God’s “Yes”, i.e., the “inconceivable” and unconditional divine affirmation of humanity which God has spoken in Jesus Christ. “The meaning of the Barmen Declaration for the church’s task today,” Jüngel avers, “consists in learning anew what is meant by, ‘Lo! I am with you always till the end of the world’ Listening to this ‘I’ means stating *positively* what is to be affirmed validly as evangelical truth in the context of a world which is increasingly setting in motion its own apocalyptic devastation.” Eberhard Jüngel, *Christ, Justice and Peace: Toward a Theology of the State*, trans. D. Bruce Hamill and Alan J. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), p.18.
- 11 This is not to suggest that such work is unfamiliar territory to the Reformed communion. See, for example, Karel Blei, *On Being the Church Across Frontiers: A Vision of Europe Today* (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches/WCC Publications, 1992). See also *Reformed World* 57, nos. 2 and 3, (June and September 2007).
- 12 This refers to that conflict which took place between the Holy Roman Empire and the Gregorian papacy over the question of who would control appointments of church officials. See Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); Maureen Catherine Miller, *Power and the Holy in the Age of the Investiture Conflict: A Brief History with Documents*, Bedford Series in History & Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).



Barmen, Belhar and Accra in the past century. That the time for reassessment of our ecclesial identity in a post-Constantinian situation is upon us is simply an invitation to take up another chapter in this ongoing work. One way to take up this challenge in my part of the world (and I suspect in others too) might be to begin by asking, "What would a post-colonial Reformed theology look like that neither denies nor blindly defends our rich heritage but expands (in the spirit of the *semper*) our understanding of it in order to engage missionally with the culture where God has placed us?"

But it is precisely at this point, if Michael Welker's assessment is to be believed, that the Reformed are particularly vulnerable. For, he argues, while the Reformed community has made its mark on the dialogue with the social sciences and with jurisprudence throughout the twentieth century, and has been one of the most actively committed proponents of the ecumenical movement, "it seems that precisely Reformed theology's delight in innovation and new departures, its interdisciplinary, cultural, and ecumenical openness, has brought it into a profound crisis at the end of the twentieth century." This crisis, he avers, finds its nexus in the rapid, diverse and diffuse cultural and social developments that have characterized the Western industrialized nations. Welker believes that Reformed theology with its special openness to contemporary cultural developments has been particularly tested and assaulted by these developments in ways in which other theologies, perhaps those with more dogmatically or liturgically oriented brakes, have been less vulnerable. The *theologia reformata et semper reformanda* seems "to be at the mercy of the shifting *Zeitgeist*". The profile of Reformed theology seems to have disintegrated into "a plethora of attempts to engage contemporary moral, political, and scientific trends, either strengthening them or fighting them". Exposure to continual renewal has left Reformed theology both vulnerable to losing its profile through the "cultural stress of innovation", and in danger of betraying its "typical mentality and spiritual attitude".¹³ Welker's prescription for response to this "travail" is to clarify our understanding of, and attend to the address of, the word of God over against the cacophony of competing utterances, addresses and presentations. Such "evangelical freedom" will mean not only joining the ancient Hebrew prophets in naming the perversion of justice, the misuse of the cult, and the refusal to practice mercy, but also drawing repeated attention to "the situation in which religion, law, politics, morality, rulers and ruled, natives and foreigners make common cause against God's word and God's presence." It will mean bearing witness to the creative power of the word of God who "overcomes the power of sin, renews and lifts up Christian persons and communities in the church of all times and regions of the world, and radiates a beneficent influence on their environments."¹⁴ Such freedom also invites a change of direction (*metanoia*) regarding the church's yielding to three temptations: (1) the turn inwards, or the burying of itself, in its own affairs to the almost complete neglect of any meaningful engagement with non-churchly cultures; (2) the engagement in a flurry of

13 Michael Welker, "Travail and Mission: Theology Reformed According to God's Word at the Beginning of the Third Millennium" in *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, ed. David Willis and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp.136–137.

14 Welker, pp.146–147.

welfare activities, or what P.T. Forsyth once referred to as “affable bustle”,¹⁵ the focus and essential content of which is set by the moment’s popular interest; and (3) the uncritical alignment with the most sympathetic leaders of other faiths in a profession of loyalty to “Truth.”¹⁶ Such actions threaten to retard the church’s ability to be the priestly, royal and prophetic community it is called to be in the gospel, and to embrace the new situations in which it finds itself in hope and with a robust and theologically informed imagination.

In a helpful essay on “Church, State, and Civil Society in the Reformed Tradition,” David Fergusson argues for a necessary differentiation between church and state for two reasons. The first is what Fergusson sees as the need for greater eschatological reserve. “The eschatological *polis* of the New Testament, cannot be identified with any earthly *polis* in the interim period. This means that the church cannot constitute itself a *polis* in advance of the eschaton, nor can the civil state be viewed as the perfect instrument of God’s will.”¹⁷ Here the Reformed position is at odds with the neo-Anabaptist insistence that the community of faith is “the true politics.”¹⁸ The second reason Fergusson offers concerns the freedom of the Christian life in the Spirit, a freedom, he insists, which “is threatened by any attempt to create political conditions under which the Reformed religion is imposed upon a community.”¹⁹ So, after some discussion on the role of the civil magistrate in Chapter 23 of the Westminster Confession of Faith,²⁰ Fergusson writes:

The problem facing Reformed theology today is whether this social theology is irretrievably anachronistic. Does it reflect the context of early modern Europe? Is it available for *fin de siècle* [“end of the century”] western society let alone for the different polities of South East Asia or Africa? At least two problems require to be faced. One is the emergence of pluralism, with its insistence on tolerance of variations in religious practice, lifestyle choices, and patterns of association in both the household and civil society. This is particularly acute in those cases where the church finds itself

15 P.T. Forsyth, *The Preaching of Jesus and the Gospel of Christ* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1987), p.119.

16 This situation was acutely observed more than half a century ago by Lesslie Newbigin. See Lesslie Newbigin, “The Quest of Unity through Religion,” *Journal of Religion* 35 (1955), pp.17–33.

17 David Fergusson, “Church, State, and Civil Society in the Reformed Tradition” in *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity* (ed. Wallace M. Alston Jr. and Michael Welker; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), p.116.

18 William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2002), p.15: “It is the Church, uniting heaven and earth, which is the true ‘politics’. The earthly city is not a true *res publica* because there can be no justice and no common weal where God is not truly worshipped.”

19 Fergusson, “Church, State, and Civil Society in the Reformed Tradition,” p.116.

20 The relevant section reads: “The civil magistrate . . . hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.”



as a minority religion overshadowed numerically by other faiths. A second problem . . . is whether the critical and prophetic voice of the church can be articulated if there is too close an alliance between the temporal and the spiritual.²¹

This brings us back to Fergusson's first point about church as an eschatological *polis*. Among his concerns here seem to be those in the Reformed family who are tempted to uncritically embrace Anabaptist ecclesiologies (whether those of the so-called "new monasticism", or those more carefully articulated by Stanley Hauerwas). Fergusson acknowledges Hauerwas' "colorful call for a distinctive, countercultural church that will eschew the task of contributing to a social consensus in the interests of greater Christian authenticity". Hauerwas, *According to Fergusson*, Hauerwas:

speaks to those who are conscious of the divorce between church and culture at the end of the second millennium, particularly those within liberal, western democracies. Christian theology and ethics become distorted by increasingly forced attempts to stand on common ground with those outside the colony. [Hauerwas'] stress upon the distinctiveness of the Christian community and its narrative provides a stronger basis upon which ministry can be conducted. In a context of social fragmentation and moral disarray greater Christian authenticity becomes possible.²²

Fergusson believes that the ecclesiological model proposed by Hauerwas (with its suspicion of the Lutheran doctrine of justification as an inherently ethical description of faith, its withering criticism of mainline Protestantism, and its desire to further distance the church from civil society) is likely to find increasing and widening support, at least in the short term.

The declining membership of the established churches, the loss of social influence, the dissociation of the rising generation from the precepts, traditions, and scriptures of the Christian faith—these", Fergusson avers, "will make it inevitable that the church is perceived as a distinct, if smaller, community that nurtures, forms, disciplines, and makes greater demands upon its members. Greater stress will be placed upon a ministry that evangelizes and builds up the life of the congregation. There will be a questioning of 1960s enthusiasm for the setting up of chaplaincies in hospitals, factories, prisons, and educational institutions. There will be a loss of confidence in centralized, bureaucratic mechanisms for dealing with these problems. The widespread questioning of the practice of infant baptism should be seen as one symptom of all this."²³

Fergusson acknowledges that the imprecise and loaded charge of sectarianism²⁴ often

21 Fergusson, "Church, State, and Civil Society in the Reformed Tradition," p.119.

22 Fergusson, p.121.

23 Fergusson, p.122.

24 See, for example, Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (South Bend: University of Notre

leveled at Hauerwas is manifestly unfair, that Hauerwasian ecclesiology acts in the interests not of withdrawal but of witness and mission, and that the purpose of a countercultural distinctiveness proposed by Hauerwas is not isolationism but rather a proper contribution to the wider social world, cautioning other churches against too easy an accommodation with civil society. “For the Reformed community”, Fergusson writes, Hauerwas’ project “might remind us of the ways in which a political theology that at one time warranted opposition to the political powers, at other times too easily lapsed into quietism”.²⁵ We shall return to this point soon.

In further defence of Hauerwas, I think his project is driven by a profound alertness to the fact that the politics of the church is a social ethic in itself which forms a way of life, of life-together, and of life-in-community. He understands that all politics—whether ecclesial or “secular”—are simply the practices, conversations, and processes of forming and sustaining particular communities, and that the church has her own particular formation activities—sacraments and prayer, for example.²⁶ The Reformed too understand the church as elected to engage in practices, conversations, and processes which are both formed by, and bear witness to, the reign of God among us in Jesus Christ. Moreover, that her catholicity contrasts to all nation-states, whose geographic and cultural boundaries are defended at all costs, does not mean that she does not have boundaries. Nor does it mean that some of those boundaries may not overlap. Rather, it means only that the boundaries established by the gospel (of the *esse*, and not merely of the *bene esse*, of her life) *alone* justify her presence in the world. And this is important to clarify, because it is precisely *in* the world, and *for* the world (because *for* God), that she exists.

But while Hauerwas and Yoder exercise more care than do many who are working in their shadow, the neo-Anabaptist vision with which their names are associated remains vulnerable on a number of fronts. At this point, let me simply name two. First, it is something of an irony and a paradox that the dominant grammar and primary frame of reference for the neo-Anabaptists is political (e.g., Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus*). This suggests a striking and somewhat embarrassing resemblance to both the Christian Right and Left against whom neo-Anabaptists are keen to set themselves. Second, and more importantly, the neo-Anabaptist criticism of the Reformed on the basis that the

Dame Press, 1995), pp.231–247. See also Stanley Hauerwas, “Why the ‘Sectarian Temptation’ Is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp.90–110.

25 Fergusson, “Church, State, and Civil Society in the Reformed Tradition,” p.124.

26 William Cavanaugh too argues that the church must constitute itself as an alternative social space, economy and authority vis-à-vis the nation-state, and not simply rely on the latter to be its social presence. He encourages us to think of the nation-state “as a kind of parody of the church” and argues, with Alasdair MacIntyre, that “the urgent task of the church . . . is to demystify the nation-state and to treat it like the telephone company.” William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), pp.41–42; cf. William Cavanaugh, “Killing for the Telephone Company: Why the Nation-State is not the Keeper of the Common Good,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 2 (2004), pp.243–274.



latter's theo-social position has been carved out against the backdrop of Christendom recalls something about logs and splinters. For the Anabaptist position itself was carved out in such a milieu. Furthermore, it still seems to operate as something of a parasite insofar as its own position seems to *require* that parts of the church with a less separatist impulse exist. So James Hunter:

[Neo-Anabaptist] identity *depends* on the State and other powers being corrupt and the more unambiguously corrupt they are, the clearer the identity and mission of the church. It is . . . a passive-aggressive ecclesiology. The church depends on its status as a minority community in opposition to a dominant structure in order to be effective in its criticism of the injustices of democratic capitalism.²⁷

Fergusson proposes a less antithetical, more constructive and more carefully nuanced reading of the Reformed tradition of critical support for the state and the institutions of civil society than the polemical Hauerwas. But at the same time he sustains a reading that is more sympathetic to Hauerwasian concerns for the church's distinct witness and mission than Oliver O'Donovan's proposal for some kind of modified Christendom.²⁸ Fergusson, however, is concerned about the "incipient Pelagianism of the radical position" over against the (especially) Lutheran and (later) Reformed emphasis upon *sola gratia*, which sponsors a view of the church as a community gathered by the grace of God and not by human ethical achievement. "For this reason", writes Fergusson, "it has generally been willing to accord membership to those whose allegiance is faltering and intermittent. Ecclesiology has in practice often been inclusive rather than exclusive. There are ever-widening circles of formal commitment that have been tolerated in the name of grace and catholicity."²⁹ And against the inclination in some Anabaptist ecclesiologies towards insularity, the Reformed are more emboldened by the fact that God's covenant people inhabit multiple communities and fulfil social roles beyond those of church membership. Fergusson suggests that this has two consequences: "On the one hand, the insights, experiences, and practices that accompany these roles will be of hermeneutical significance in the understanding of Christian belief . . . on the other hand, the church has a responsibility to provide its members with the resources by which they can live faithfully and with integrity in modern society."³⁰ Here, the ecclesiological task concerns not merely prophecy against, but also support for, and conservation of, those elements of society which accord with the word of God. Rather than adopt the neo-Anabaptist pessimism and disparagement about, and negation of, the world, which only "reinforces rather than contradicts the discourse of negation so

27 James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 164.

28 Hauerwas offers a helpful critique of O'Donovan in Stanley Hauerwas and James Fodor, "Remaining in Babylon: Oliver O'Donovan's Defense of Christendom" in *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy* eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Peter Ochs (London: SCM Press, 2001), pp.199–224.

29 Fergusson, "Church, State, and Civil Society in the Reformed Tradition," p.124.

30 Fergusson, p.125.

ubiquitous in our late modern political culture”,³¹ the Reformed seek to hold together and bear witness to a triple awareness: that the earth *is* full of the glory of God (Ps 19; Isa 6.3; Hab 3.3), that *at present* it is groaning in travail (Rom 8), and that it *will* be full as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11.9; Hab 2.14).

That we live in an age of unprecedented complexity of “intradependence”³² highlights the provincial nature of the *corpus christianum* and brings to the fore the celebratory reality that wherever and whenever the church in its involvement in economic, political and cultural processes bears witness to the lordship of the one word of God she is involved in world processes. Such involvement is characterized by a putting to death the temptation to exist for its own sake rather than for the coming of the kingdom of God as the future of the whole creation, a future for which the church prepares together with others.³³ It is also characterized by total immersion into the world but with no loss of saltiness (Mt 5.13), as kept by the word of God alone. So Karl Barth:

The community of Jesus Christ is for the world [It] is the human creature whose existence as existence for God has the meaning and purpose of being, on behalf of God and in the service and discipleship of His existence, an existence for the world and men. That it exists for the world because for God, follows simply and directly from the fact that it is the community of Jesus Christ and has the basis of its being and nature in Him. He calls, gathers and upbuilds it. He rules it as its Lord and Shepherd. He constitutes it ever afresh in the event of His presence and by the enlightening power of His Holy Spirit.³⁴

To retreat from the world, therefore, is to retreat from God, for in Jesus Christ and in God’s election of a people, God has self-disclosed as the one who is for the world. It is at this point that there is both significant convergence and divergence between Reformed and neo-Anabaptist tendencies. Both traditions are certainly concerned with the question of what it takes for the church to be free *for* the world. The neo-Anabaptists insist on a more radical disassociation and freedom *from* the world in order to be free *for* the world and to address the world as a concrete “foretaste” of the eschatological politic than do the Reformed. Moreover, the former typically charge the latter with not fully appreciating the need for both kinds of freedom, i.e., freedom *from* and freedom *for*. The challenge posed by our neo-Anabaptist sisters and brothers should be welcomed as a gift with which we might profitably engage as we seek to faithfully articulate for our time the substance and shape of the Christian faith.

31 Hunter, *To Change the World*, p.166.

32 See Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), pp. 26–27.

33 See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1977), pp.163–189.

34 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.3.2* eds. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), pp.762–763.



I have sympathy for the notion that God's people best serve the world not by becoming more like it but rather by becoming more unlike it. Such a position reminds us that the only way the world can know that it is "the world" is if the church is "the church."³⁵ When the church is "the church", i.e., a people who embody a different form of politics, the world is given a vision of an alternative way of being that recognizes the necessity for repentance. This is the reality, for example, that martyrdom presents as a gift to the world, for this is the kind of gift that exposes false cities from the true one in an effort to bring all cities under Christ's rule. But I am concerned about the posture of anxiety that often attends such a position, as if the one who encounters us in the fleshliness of the world is not also our other, the divine stranger whom we "pass by on the other side" (Lk 10.25–37).

Our tradition, at its best, has embraced in hope the riskiness of encountering God in the world (here meant in both senses of the word³⁶). It has shown a commitment to the transformation of civil society in the light of the life given in Christ *both* from without *and* from within. And it has embraced and joined a multitude of voices who have engaged in the socio-political-ethical orientation of theology and stressed the involvement of the church in critical and formative conversations taking place both within and outside her gates.³⁷ At work here is the theological impulse that the church cannot be saved apart from the world. Again, it is Christology which does the work here. Specifically, it witnesses to the vital tension between Christ's *distinction from* the world, on the one hand, and his *solidarity with* and *conformity to* it, on the other.³⁸ Here, James Hunter's proposal of "a theology of faithful presence" contains many aspects of the Reformed vision I am seeking to articulate.³⁹ Proposing an ecclesiology grounded in the reality of God's incarnation as the Creator's kenotically-shaped movement towards the world in the face of its erosion of trust and its dissolution,

35 See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p.461; Karl Barth, *Gespräche, 1959–1962* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1995), pp.352, 354.

36 To be sure, the Reformed have tended to blur the grammar of "world" as creation and "world" as fallen sociality, a blurring which has led to some ambiguity about what precisely is being proposed. Here too we might also welcome the challenge posed by others to articulate with greater clarity what we mean when we say "world."

37 See, e.g., The Accra Confession, Article 41: "The General Council commits the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to work together with other communions, the ecumenical community, the community of other faiths, civil movements and people's movements for a just economy and the integrity of creation and calls upon our member churches to do the same."

38 See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.3.2* eds. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), p.773; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III.3*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and R.J. Ehrlich (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), pp.242–243; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.1* eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), pp. 750–751; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.2* eds. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), pp. 610–611; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.3.2* pp.762–795; Karl Barth, *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*, Kirche für die Welt 7 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1946).

39 See Hunter, *To Change the World*, pp. 238–254.

Hunter calls upon the church to embrace “a theology of engagement in and with the world around us.”⁴⁰ Beginning with the acknowledgement that God’s faithful presence with us calls for our faithful participation and response, Hunter asserts that this means we are called to be fully present to ourselves and to those outside, directing our pursuits, identity and lives towards mutual flourishing through sacrificial love. This calls not for retreat but for the full affirmation, presence and commitment of the people of God in their various vocations, and for the exercising of power in conformity with the way of Jesus (Phil 2). But this in no sense implies

passive conformity to the established structures. Rather, within the dialectic between affirmation and antithesis, faithful presence means a constructive resistance that seeks new patterns of societal organization that challenge, undermine, and otherwise diminish oppression, injustice, enmity, and corruption and, in turn, encourage harmony, fruitfulness and abundance, wholeness, beauty, joy, security, and well-being As Miroslav Volf puts it, [it is] a “bursting out” of an alternative within the proper space of the old. This does not, by any means, preclude direct prophetic opposition to established structures, but rather makes such opposition a last resort. Instead, prophetic witness becomes the net effect of a lived-vision of the shalom of God within every place and every sphere where Christians are present.⁴¹

So where does this leave the Reformed? The churches scattered across Australasia and the Pacific face many of the same challenges as those in other parts of the world where a largely uncritical synthesis between gospel and culture transplanted by nineteenth-century missions continues to (1) provide social structure and religio-cultural stability for the community,⁴² and (2) widen an already significant disconnect (felt most acutely

40 Hunter, p.243.

41 Hunter, pp.247–248.

42 Of course, as Alan Torrance reminds us, the social context from which the Barmen Declaration emerged was also one where “prior cultural and nationalistic (one could say ‘indigenous’) agendas were prescribing and determining the church’s political perspectives together with its theological affirmations and, indeed, self-affirmations.” Alan J. Torrance, “Introductory Essay” in *Christ, Justice and Peace: Toward a Theology of the State* (ed. Eberhard Jüngel; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), p. xi. For a contemporary expression of this thesis in the context of Vanuatu, see Randall Prior, *Gospel and Culture in Vanuatu: The Founding Missionary and a Missionary for Today* (Wattle Park: Gospel Vanuatu Books, 1998); Randall Prior, ed., *Gospel and Culture in Vanuatu 2: Contemporary Local Perspectives* (Wattle Park: Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2003); Randall Prior, ed., *Gospel and Culture in Vanuatu 3: The Voice of the Local Church* (Wattle Park: Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2003); Randall Prior, ed., *Gospel and Culture in Vanuatu 4: Local Voices on Jesus Christ and Mission* (Melbourne: ATF/Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2005); Randall Prior, ed., *Gospel and Culture in Vanuatu 5: Women in Culture and Church and Other Issues* (Melbourne: ATF Press/Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2007); The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, *25 Tingting: Reflections on 25 Years of Independence in Vanuatu* (Wattle Park: Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2010). Cf. Annelin Eriksen, *Gender, Christianity and Change in Vanuatu: An Analysis of Social Movements in North Ambrym*, Anthropology and Cultural History in Asia and the Indo-Pacific (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008); Fiama Rakau, “The Prophetic Role of the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu as a Conscience to the Nation and its Government” in *25 Tingting: Reflections on 25 Years of Independence in Vanuatu*, ed. The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu (Wattle



in the young and 1.5 generations) between faith and existence in the world, and (3) encourage the “justification” of the church’s existence in a competing marketplace. The work of the Gospel and Culture Network, inspired in no small part by the ministry of Lesslie Newbigin, is but one example of a constructive, strategic⁴³ and faithful response to the new missionary situations and rich opportunities made available by the crumbling of the high wall of the *corpus christianum* and the engagement in mission outside of the old compounds.⁴⁴

Speaking only of the western context of dechristianization, Fergusson calls upon the Reformed to recognize that the “use by this date” attached to those models of establishment derived from early modern Geneva and Scotland has now passed:

We can no longer assume nor aspire towards co-extensive membership of church and civil society, and shifting patterns of establishment in western Europe confirm this. In this limited respect, the secularization thesis which recognizes the differentiation of civil and religious spheres must be accepted. The separation of the state, the market economy, and science from the influence of religious institutions is an undeniable feature of modernity. Yet, this entails neither the decline of religion nor its confinement to a private or sectarian sphere. The public contribution of the Christian churches . . . works not so much at the level of the state or political parties but instead through the exercise of influence upon civil society. Here much depends on making common cause with other groups and movements, and articulating anxieties and aspirations that are experienced both inside and outside the church. At the same time, the public contribution of the churches will depend upon the maintenance of a distinct Christian subculture that nurtures and equips individuals for authentic service at a time of increasing moral fragmentation and confusion. While there may no longer be an organic unity between church and secular society, the Reformed vision of social transformation and critical support for the state is still relevant. It continues to offer a badly needed perspective in its intent to make common cause in search of a positive social contribution, in a hopeful though sober vision of political possibilities, in the affirmation of public service, and in the dignity of political office which, though frequently demeaned, remains a gift and a calling of God.⁴⁵

Park: Gospel Vanuatu Books, 2010), p.57: “The Presbyterian church [sic] of Vanuatu is right to believe that there are Christian insights about human nature which are significant for the welfare of the State. As servants of Christ it is incumbent upon us to impact society and government and place the stamp of Christ’s love upon all peoples and nations; and so it is in Vanuatu.”

43 John Flett argues that one imperative for mission to the West arises from the significant role that Western culture continues to play in shaping global culture. He writes: “Through the process of modernization many values implicit in the technological, commercial and democratic enterprise are being exported to non-Western countries.” John Flett, “Unpacking Gospel and Culture” in *Collision Crossroads: The Intersection of Modern Western Culture with the Christian Gospel*, ed. John Flett (Auckland: The DeepSight Trust, 1998), p.11.

44 This metaphor of the compound is taken from Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM, 1953), p.12.

45 Fergusson, “Church, State, and Civil Society in the Reformed Tradition,” pp. 125–126.

Finally, in light of this discussion and with a view to fostering further conversation, I wish to change tack here and offer a few thoughts regarding the life and witness of the member churches of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). While history encourages us to maintain modesty about what bodies such as WCRC and its members and networks might achieve, the challenge of rigorously reassessing the Reformed church's continuing identity vis-à-vis the state and civil society has implications too for what it might mean for WCRC to be a "communion" and no longer simply an "alliance" or "fellowship". Some of these implications may impinge on how we as a communion and our member churches relate to various civil authorities. WCRC acknowledges that the affirmation of communion has implications for our life together. The shape of this life together is fashioned upon the gospel, that is, upon the gracious economy of the Triune God who makes us one. Our identity and communion is created, sustained and fleshed out by Jesus Christ. This reality, which the Bible calls "life in Christ Jesus" (Ro 6.23; 1 Co 1.30; 2 Tm 3.12), redefines and reconstitutes our identity. It makes all other identity-forming relationships secondary.

Therefore, as one of many concrete expressions of being in communion, we might embrace the following four propositions:

1. We will refuse to kill one another. Not only is this the proper response to a direct command of God (Ex 20.13) but it is also a basic implication of the divine command to love one's neighbour as oneself (Lv 19.18; Mt 22.39; Mk 12.31; Lk 10.17; Ro 13.9–10; Gal 5.14; Jam 2.8; *et passim*). Moreover, it is a basic implication of our principal ecclesial identity in Jesus Christ, the violation of which can only mean in this case our readiness to give up following Jesus and to give to Caesar what is God's alone (Mt 22.21). One implication of such hideous infidelity would be a loss of the ecclesia's witness to the radical reconstitution of human community in him who came "preaching peace" (Ac 10.36) and who made "peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1.20).
2. We will make disciples in our congregations who might learn to resist participation in the state's machinery of violence and thereby offer a distinctively Christian witness to an alternative way of living that is determined not to perpetuate the practices of that world which is passing away but which is formed by the new creation inaugurated in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
3. We will communicate—in word and in action—to our respective nation-states and governments that while it is possible, and insofar as it depends on us, we will live peaceably and hospitably with others, but our principal allegiance is not to the nation-state but to Jesus Christ. This will mean that there will be times when we will be considered poor citizens of the nation-state.
4. We will support by all means possible all those in our communion for whom such a commitment will come at great cost.



The Reformed are a people who profess to follow one who puts himself in the way of evil, who intervenes on behalf of the oppressed and the weak and the downtrodden, and who does so not with swords and spears, but by bearing on his body blows and resisting retaliation. Jesus confronts the cycle of violence and declares that “the violence stops with me.” He suffers in his own person the wrong that is done, and entrusts the outcome to God. That is the pattern of obedient life that all Christians are called to follow and into which they are incorporated through baptism. Forgiveness, compassion, prayer and sacrifice are the tools that Christ takes up in his war against evil and sin. When those who bear his name take up arms to wage war, and insist that such action is necessary, unavoidable and a last resort, they are resorting to a logic other than that of the Logos incarnate. It must be confessed therefore that they have failed in the call to inhabit God’s new creation, a call which allows for no exceptions when it comes to loving even our enemies.⁴⁶

Alan Torrance reminds us that political theology, even when engaged in the name of the church, has too often been theologically naïve and superficial. While it might reflect admirable and widely held sentiments and concerns, it can lack theological consistency and coherence and so theological warrant. Historically, one of the real gifts that the Reformed have bequeathed to the wider church and to the discipline of theology has been the rigour with which it has undertaken this indispensable task of talking about God. The twin temptations of abandoning this rigour and/or buying too uncritically into the humanist and enlightenment programme with which it has sometimes been associated are real. But it is only to their detriment and—more importantly—to the detriment of the church’s ongoing witness to Christ that the Reformed would neglect this fundamental task. So Torrance:

If the Church and the Gospel are not simply to be used to claim divine sanction for various world-views then much more is required than appeals to individual life experience, political ideologies and “intuitive” ethical convictions. What is necessary here is serious theological consideration as to how precisely we do determine God’s will and God’s Word to us in our various contexts. Furthermore, at a time when the church and society are becoming increasingly characterised by cultural and ethical pluralism, theological affirmation requires clarity as to the theological criteria which operate in relation to our God-talk within the Christian faith. This requires us to ask questions of the form: What is the nature of the critical controls upon our attempts to interpret the divine intention? What are the theological grounds of the socio-political claims we make? How far does the specific and concrete Word of God to humankind in Christ require a revision of our intuitive interpretations of the nature and function of the state and of its obligations and responsibilities for justice, peace and freedom? How far does the Word, as the impetus and warrant for God-talk within the political domain, involve a semantic reconstruction of these terms reorienting their meaning rather than simply

46 I am indebted here to an unpublished paper by Murray Rae on “The Unholy Notion of ‘Holy War’: A Christian Critique”

endorsing their everyday usage? These questions are of fundamental importance if there is to be responsible and integrative engagement with socio-political issues and if we are to avoid further fragmentation and division within the church and society with different parties indulging in claims of divine sanction from their various perspectives.⁴⁷

Embracing the liberty that comes in the word of God, we are called to freedom from the tyranny of tradition, creative fidelity to the scriptures, to an ecclesial hermeneutics characterized by faith, hope and love, and to messianic fellowship and hopeful living *in* and *with* the world in the face of the violent and hopeless forces within and about us. A Reformed vision of social transformation involves a celebration too of the strength of the Reformed tradition and the contribution it has made and continues to make to wider Christian witness and life. This is a vital undertaking for our communion, because societies or organizations which ignore or abandon their heritage and their history are societies or organizations which have abandoned any soteriology which involves time. And this is a particular problem for those bodies who wish to claim any interest in God. "A people without history," wrote T.S. Eliot in *Little Gidding*, "is not redeemed from time."⁴⁸ Eliot might properly be read here as saying "To lose one's history is to be condemned to an 'unredeemed' condition, to absolute bondage to the temporal process."⁴⁹ This is not to encourage a kind of gross nostalgia. On the contrary, it is to confess that our ability or otherwise to be liberated from the ways in which the present and the imagined future might serve as a trap and an enslavement requires that we engage in an ongoing work of historical awareness.

By way of conclusion, I have chosen to attend to the matter of the relationship between church and civil society *not* because this is *the* matter of *most* pressing concern to the contemporary Reformed churches (who but God can tell!), but because many Reformed theologians seem to have developed again a habit of placing this ever important task in the "that's too hard basket" even when we discern that the stakes are so high. This is not to record that there have not been a significant number of political theologies

47 Torrance, "Introductory Essay," pp.ix-x.

48 T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1943), p.58.

49 I am indebted to Rowan Williams for this point. See Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982), p.30: "We do need to be careful not to fall into the trap of regarding 'the self' (or the 'soul', or whatever) as a spring of action determined by pure will' or as a timeless substance operating by pure reason. Both these myths represent attempts to guarantee that the self remains transcendent of its surroundings, free and (possibly) immortal—that it is more than an 'automatic' system of conditioned reflexes. But it might be truer to say that the self's transcendence is in its memory, precisely in its recollection *now* of another reality, a past reality, both distinct from and part of the present situation. Memory affirms that the present situation has a context; it, like the self, is part of a continuity, it is 'made' and so it is not immutable. By learning that situations have wider contexts, we learn a measure of freedom or detachment from (or transcendence of) the limits of the present When we see societies losing or suppressing their past, we rightly conclude that they are unfree, diseased, or corrupt: either they are oppressed by an alien power intent on destroying their roots and identity (the classic case being the colonial contempt for indigenous memory and culture), or they are engaged in an internal repression, a conscious or unconscious restriction of present human possibilities."



advanced in recent decades. But, as Alan Torrance has reminded us, there is literally all the difference in the world between “political theologies” and “theological politics”, between a politically-driven approach to God and a theologically-driven approach to the state. While there has been no shortage of the former, there’s been an embarrassing and painful paucity of the latter. That is, there are few approaches which interpret the church’s responsibilities *to* and *with* the state in the light of “God’s inclusive, recreative and healing purposes held forth in God’s Word of grace to humanity. Such [approaches] to society, to culture, to the state and to the ecosystem would be both more *radical* and more *liberating*—theologically and politically—than so much that has sought in recent times to lay claim to these attributes.”⁵⁰

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50 Jüngel, *Christ, Justice and Peace*, pp. xx.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches and its Office of Theology

Douwe Visser

Introduction

“Why are we here?” In the widest sense this is a religious question or, if you prefer, a philosophical question. But we could also keep it simple and ask ourselves why we are here as participants of a consultation organized by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). If we keep it that simple I would still like to expand on it a bit further and pose it this way: “Why should there be a WCRC?” What is the reason for the existence of such an organization like WCRC? To begin to answer this question, we could first look at its history. For WCRC that is not a long period of time. But then we can broaden our scope and look at the two organizations that merged to form WCRC: World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC). Both have longer histories. REC goes back to 1946, WARC to 1875. However, it would make no sense to say that the reason for the existence of WCRC is that WARC and REC had such long histories. You may feel sorry that an organization that has survived for so long finally disappears, but merely because it has a venerable history is no valid reason that the organization should continue.

There may be other good reasons for the existence of WCRC, but to me those that stand out among them include: Reformed churches all over the world want this organization; our member churches are prepared to pay for it (although by no means as much as we ask them to pay); they are prepared to participate in its meetings; and they expect it to do work that cannot be expected from any other ecumenical organization. Our member churches see in WCRC an added value. Most of them belong also to the World Council of Churches (WCC). Many are members of regional ecumenical bodies like the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in Europe or the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in Africa. Some of our united and uniting churches are even members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) or another Christian world communion. For their diaconal and mission work, most of our member churches participate in worldwide bodies like Council for World Mission (CWM). Still, they are looking for something else, something more that they do not expect from any other organization than a World Communion of Reformed Churches. And WCRC should provide this something more for which our member churches are looking. But it should provide this not only for



them. In the broader ecumenical world, WCRC should contribute added value to the community of churches with which it participates in mutually enriching dialogue. And finally, at the risk of sounding too presumptuous, it should provide added value to the world wider than only the community of churches.

Ecumenical Dialogues

It is not necessary for our purposes that I explain now the added value of everything WCRC does. But as its Executive Secretary for Theology, I feel privileged to be in a place in which I can at least present a broad survey of its activities. Let me begin by calling your attention now to one central to our organization. I refer here to the ecumenical, interconfessional dialogues. It goes without saying that no one else can be a dialogue partner on behalf of the Reformed community except a global representative of the Reformed community, which in this case is WCRC. If the community of Reformed churches wants to be represented at the ecumenical table, it needs a global organization for this purpose. It must be conceded, however, that this need is not perceived as obvious as it may appear at first glance. For it is doubtful whether our member churches really find our involvement in these dialogues relevant to their concerns.

Comments that we are wasting our time with discussions about sixteenth-century controversies are made frequently, especially but not only by the global South. That is to say, we are not focusing on today's problems. Interfaith matters are far more pressing than inter-confessional disagreements. Within WCRC, matters of economic and ecological justice have also become a very important priority. Recent theological reflection in large part has been devoted to issues of justice. In light of these developments, some see the dialogue process as obsolete. Therefore WCRC should make space for the relevant questions with which churches struggle in their contexts. And there is after all always the risk that an interconfessional dialogue becomes an end in itself.

It is important to take these comments on the relevance of ecumenical dialogues very seriously. Perhaps WCRC should no longer participate in them. There are, however, some good reasons to stay involved:

- The merger of REC and WARC into a Communion of Reformed Churches is being regarded as an intermediary step in a continuing process toward church unity.
- Involvement in ecumenical dialogues is a self-critical process that contributes to a growing awareness of what Reformed identity means.
- The tension often felt in ecumenical dialogues between the desire for unity and the desire for truth has a creative impact.
- Involvement in dialogues has positive consequences for developing contextual

theological understanding.

- WCRC's commitment to justice asks for sharing and cooperation with the wider community of churches.
- The global situation requires global and ecumenical Christian understanding.

But it goes without saying that in the composition of dialogue teams and the choice of themes for discussion every effort should be made to strengthen an "ownership" shared by both the global North and South.

Through the years, WARC has been involved in dialogues with almost every partner one can name. At the moment only two dialogues are in process. In April this year we had the first meeting in the fourth round of dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church. The theme for this round is "Justification and Sacramentality—Christian Communities as Agents for Justice." This round will keep us busy until 2015. If our community wants to be involved in dialogues, doubtless one with the Roman Catholic Church should take place. That church is a natural choice for a dialogue partner, even if we resist because of our criticisms, disappointments or objections to the institution of the papacy. If we have resources for only one dialogue, it should be this one.

Another dialogue whose relevance can hardly be questioned is that with the Pentecostals. The charismatic tendency in our churches is strong. Within the evangelical world there is increasing focus on social and economic issues. Many of our churches struggle especially with neo-Pentecostal trends, including the idea of a "prosperity gospel." It is doubtful, however, at this point that we will get the neo-Pentecostals around the table.

The relevance of all the other dialogues may seem less obvious. In June this year we began exploratory discussions with a few representatives of the Anglican Communion (AC). One of the best reports in our history came out of a dialogue with the AC: "God's Reign and Our Unity." Our ongoing process of becoming a communion could benefit from discussions with the AC, in spite or maybe even because of all the problems that communion faces. So out of the meeting in June came a proposal for starting a new round of dialogues. Nevertheless, I foresee that convincing our Executive Committee of the relevance of this dialogue will be difficult.

I have to be realistic. With my present overloaded portfolio I can hardly organize more than three dialogues and even then I am not taking into account the challenge of getting these dialogues funded. But it is a question open for debate whether our community must be involved in global ecumenical dialogues only through WCRC's office in Geneva.

Reformation Jubilee 2017

One of the great events of this decade will be the 500th anniversary of the Reformation



in 2017. It will be different from the Calvin jubilee in 2009. That was something the Reformed community could claim. The Reformation of 1517 has a wider meaning. There the whole of Reformation history has its origin. The Reformed community is certainly part of that history. But what is there to celebrate? Is celebration the only word applicable to this anniversary? Should it not also be a moment of confession because of the ongoing division it introduced among the churches?

The 2009 Calvin jubilee gave rise to renewed reflection on Calvin's theology. It was important because it contributed to a renewed understanding of Reformed theology and identity within and outside the Reformed family. WARC played a substantial role in this too, although, in my opinion, Calvin was sometimes too easily acclaimed as spokesperson for the Accra Confession. But how will WCRC be involved in the 2017 jubilee? What opportunities are there? As you can see, I still have far more questions than answers. It will be good to start searching for answers in this consultation.

Reformed World

When I started my job as WARC's Executive Secretary for Theology on 1 June 2008, I was confronted with the fact that the publication of *Reformed World* (RW) was costing WARC between CHF50,000 and 60,000 per year. We decided that this amount had to be reconsidered in the light of WARC's overall financial situation. The point at issue was whether to find extra income for the publication or to stop printing it altogether and have it on the web only. I took up the challenge of working this problem out by undertaking a general review of the publication and its future. I concentrated on:

- financially guaranteeing publication
- the academic level of the articles
- the position of the publication within the organization
- the need for the publication and its reason for existence

I don't think it is necessary here to say too much about the financial situation of RW. Let me make just a few remarks. We changed the number of issues from four to three per year. We also reduced the number of print copies by critically going through our list of subscribers. I also looked at partial sponsoring of RW. Since 2009 we have guaranteed a rate at which to publish RW for no more than CHF30,000 per year. That is 50 per cent of what it was before.

Let me now shift the focus to the academic level of the articles. RW is definitely not a peer-reviewed academic theological journal, such as the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, for example. I had been considering whether to make RW a more academic theological journal, but I faced a few problems.

A critical concern is the WCRC constitutional requirement that every publication come under the responsibility of the General Secretary. This responsibility is logical insofar as RW is the journal of a membership organization. But it could lead to conflict if RW were to become an academic journal with a board of peer reviewers. Moreover, a second conflict could arise with the requirement that every article be submitted to these reviewers. Many interesting articles RW featured in the past simply would not have been accepted. As it is now, RW is a journal with a mix of non-academic and academic articles: some issues feature themes on WCRC policies; others on scholarly theological subjects. As such, RW is well-liked and can expect to have a future. Given that the world of academic theological journals is rather overcrowded already, it seems preferable for RW to remain the hybrid that it is.

Still the most basic question whether WCRC even needs to publish a theological journal has not been answered. I think it should, for the following reasons:

- WCRC needs to be a participant in the ongoing development of Reformed theology. *Reformed World* is one of the best ways of realizing this need. Theology is at the heart of all the work the organization is involved in.
- *Reformed World*, with the niche it occupies between a purely academic journal and a news bulletin, provides a forum for experimental and creative thinking. As such, it is a worthwhile task to raise the profile of the publication and to keep it high.
- *Reformed World* should be as independent as possible even in relation to the organization whose journal it is. *Reformed World* is also a forum for critical reflection on the policy of the organization. WCRC will benefit from that independence because of that critical reflection.
- *Reformed World* presents now one of the profile-building opportunities for WCRC. Without *Reformed World* the organization would lose quite a lot of its profile.
- *Reformed World* is a link between the organization and the academic theological world.
- *Reformed World* provides young theologians with a place where they can develop their writing skills.

Since May 2009 we've had for RW an editorial advisory board. Seven names are printed in each issue on the inside cover. Two members of that board are present here. I have to admit that I still have to find out how to work as editor with the advisory board. I normally send a memorandum with possible themes for an upcoming publication year with an invitation to submit ideas for other themes. I also ask for possible involvement of the board members in one of the issues. However, at present the board hardly functions as more than names on the cover. It would be good to have a discussion here about real involvement.



The Global Institute of Theology (GIT)

The GIT can be regarded as the flagship of the Office of Theology. It occupies a central place within the totality of our work. In fact, almost all our other work could be seen as supporting in some way the GIT. That is surely the case concerning this network. The outcome of this consultation should be foundational for the GIT. That is the reason why in terms of the budget this meeting is regarded as one of the preparatory meetings of GIT 2012.

The first GIT was organized in 2004 in Accra, Ghana. It ran in conjunction with WARC's General Council (GC). As an idea it was promoted by Philip Wickeri and Volker Kuester, who were also Dean and Dean of Students that year. They both deserve honour for an initiative that from the outset was a great idea. GIT 2004 had a core course that all students had to take. It was the theme of the GC 2004: "That all may have life in fullness." This theme was also worked out in the various sub- courses. Besides the core course there were four electives out of which the students had to choose two. In that year there were 67 students. Twenty-nine of these came from Africa (18 from Ghana). From Europe and North America there were 17 students.

Both Philip and Volker wanted to have the GIT preferably somewhere in the global South apart from a GC. Plans were made for GIT 2007 to take place in Indonesia, but for several reasons they did not materialize. However, a second GIT was planned for 2010 together with the Uniting General Council (UGC) in Grand Rapids. Both Philip and Volker were asked again to be part of the team, but it was immediately clear that they were not so keen on having the GIT in the US. In the course of 2009 they resigned and so we had to look for a new Dean and Dean of Students. We found Peter Wyatt from Canada and Annette Mosher from the Netherlands. Under them GIT 2010 took place both in Chicago and—together with the UGC—in Grand Rapids. It was substantially more expensive than in 2004, but the fundraising was a great success. We had 43 students, but 14 were denied a visa to enter the US and thus could not make it. Geographically speaking, there was a greater variety among the students than in 2004. The organization of the courses was the same as in 2004. The theme of the core course in 2010 was the same as that of the UGC: "Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace."

We are now at the stage of making preparations for the third GIT, which will take place in June 2012 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This GIT is different from those in 2004 and 2010 in that for the first time there will be no GC at the same time. The curriculum will be the same—a theme core course with electives. But without GC providing the main exposure, the exposure programme of the GIT has yet to be worked out.

What is the objective of the GIT? I quote from the fundraising letter we have sent out:

The specific goals of the Global Institute of Theology are fourfold:

- To build a community of learning and faith as students and faculty work together on

vital themes in Bible and theology today and create for themselves an immediate international context;

- To encounter contemporary biblical and theological approaches in their interconfessional, intercultural, and interreligious dimensions. This will include the study of lived and living missiologies and the ongoing WCRC study on Reformed identity and mission;
- To introduce the varying contextual perspectives on the Christian witness of the global Reformed family—bearing in mind our understanding of God’s mission in every continent, and being aware of what all our churches have to learn from Reformed witness in every land;
- To strengthen global networks of sharing and reflection among theological students and faculty, church workers, theological institutions, and churches for continuing action and reflection in the WCRC. This will also contribute to the ecumenical formation of a new generation of church leaders within the Reformed community.

We have to work out here how there can be a link between this network and the GIT.

WCRC and Reformed Theological Institutions

From 18 to 22 June 2007 Princeton Theological Seminary held a consultation for “Heads of Theological Institutions related to WARC Member Churches.” I have seen in the documents that Ofelia was there. I have also seen that there were 50 participants, which is, I think, a good representation. The participants clearly saw the need for a regular meeting and the role WARC should play in it. A second meeting like this one has not taken place since. The reasons for this are:

- The suggestion was to have a second meeting two to three years after the one in 2007. At that time WARC was too occupied with the upcoming UGC and the merger with REC.
- The 2007 consultation was sponsored by Princeton Seminary. Funds for a second consultation were not available but, to be honest, no effort was made to raise funds.
- Notwithstanding the positive tone of the report, there was not much enthusiasm for organizing a second meeting.

Having gone through the documents of this first meeting, I think it is well worth our while to organize a second consultation in the coming years. Because of our full agenda, I would be in favour of a meeting in 2013. This network should, in my opinion, be part of the consultation and even be responsible for preparing the agenda.



Affiliated Members: IRTI and NetAct

WCRC has three categories of members. The first is that of the member churches. Then there are associated members. Under the third category are the affiliated members. About the last group the constitution says:

An institution established by one or more member churches or whose faith basis and operation is in agreement with that of the historic Reformed confessions is eligible for affiliate membership, without voting privileges.

We have two such members at the moment: the International Reformed Theological Institute (IRTI), which is a global network, and NetAct, which is an African regional network. I think it is important for them to be part of this network. It is very unfortunate that IRTI could not be represented, but I am glad that Jurgens Hendriks from NetAct is here. I have not much to say about how I see the relationship. That is something to be worked out further in the course of our participation in this network of theologians.

Conclusion

I started with asking the question “why are we here?” I think that this group should become in the coming years the theological think tank of WCRC. It is of the greatest importance that WCRC be intensely involved in the coming years in the ongoing global development of Reformed theology so that it may give a firm basis to our communion of churches for listening to God’s call to be part of God’s mission to the world, to live out the communion and to be committed to justice.

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Book Review

Christopher Dorn

Michael Weinrich and John P. Burgess (eds.), *What is Justification About? Reformed Contributions to an Ecumenical Theme* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009 268pp. USD30. (ISBN 978-0-8028-6249)

Composed by an international group of Reformed theologians, the essays compiled in this volume offer several engaging Reformed discussions of the doctrine of justification in our present ecumenical context. It is common knowledge that this doctrine was at the heart of the theological controversies in which the church of the Reformation era was embroiled. Especially for Luther, a fruitful reception of the gospel of God's free grace in Jesus Christ depended on a proper grasp of the doctrine of justification by faith. Indeed, in this doctrine are implied the watchwords of the Reformation: Through faith alone (*sola fide*) in Jesus Christ (*solus Christus*), God justifies us, forgiving us our sins, thereby enabling us to live without condemnation before him and to serve others in freedom (*sola gratia*). For Luther, theological compromise on this doctrine was unacceptable, because it is no less than the "sole solid rock" on which the church stands (9). It is famously the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* ["article by which the church stands or falls"]. Similarly, for Calvin justification is "the main hinge on which religion turns" (9, cf. *Inst.* 3.11.1).

But why revisit the doctrine of justification now? The occasion for the volume is the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on 31 October, 1999 in Augsburg, Germany. An outcome of thirty years of bilateral dialogue, the consensus statement was regarded then as a significant milestone on the ecumenical journey on which the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches have traveled together. But this historic event has obvious ecumenical implications for the other churches that did not participate in the preparation of the Augsburg Declaration. For this reason, its signatories invited the World Methodist Council (WMC) and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (now World Communion of Reformed Churches=WCRC), together with observers from the World Council of Churches (Faith and Order) to a theological consultation in Columbus, Ohio USA in 2001. The purpose of the invitation was twofold: (1) to submit the *Joint Declaration* to these churches for theological evaluation; and (2) to explore ways that they might continue to be involved in discussion



of its content. The delegates of the WMC received the content of the *Declaration*; the Council confirmed the *Declaration* at its world conference in July 2006 in Seoul, Korea (ix). WCRC did not follow suit. Its European Area Committee, however, did appoint a Theological Subcommittee to address the theme of justification in Reformed perspective. *What is Justification About?* is the product of its labours.

The value of the essays that comprise the volume consists in helping readers to understand the theological basis for the Reformed response to the *Joint Declaration*. In this regard, they serve not only to clarify the Reformed understanding of the doctrine of justification for the Reformed churches themselves, but also contribute important theological insights to the ongoing ecumenical discussion about this doctrine.

What emerges in the first two essays is that while the Reformed tradition has affirmed the central importance of the doctrine of justification, it has refused to “elevate it to the position of a super-doctrine that determines the meaning of all other doctrines” (3). Rather it has sought to integrate it into a comprehensive account of the relationship between God and human beings as narrated in the scriptures. The title of the leading essay by Michael Weinrich is suggestive in this regard: “Justified for Covenant Fellowship: A Key Biblical Theme for the Whole of Theology” (8-34). The meaning of the doctrine of justification cannot be abstracted from God’s will to create and maintain covenant fellowship with sinful human beings, whom he justifies as his partners through Jesus Christ (33). In Jesus Christ, “the covenant was not only reconfirmed, but fulfilled” (33). Weinrich shows how the message of justification is rooted in the wider context of biblical covenant theology.

John Webster proposes an even wider framework within which to situate the doctrine of justification. In his remarkable contribution titled, “*Rector et iudex super omnia genera doctrinarum?* The Place of the Doctrine of Justification” (35-56), Webster sketches in effect an outline of an entire systematic theology. More specifically, he demonstrates that the “setting of Christian soteriology, and therefore . . . of justification, is in a comprehensive account of the works of God, which in its turn is grounded in a theology of the *opera Dei immanentia* (38). The definition of covenant fellowship is situated here in a doctrine of God that accounts for the acts by which God “who is life in himself gives life to creatures, defends them against the mortal enemy of sin, and brings them to fullness of life in the kingdom of God” (41). Having anchored the doctrine of justification in a Trinitarian ontology and soteriology, Webster then turns to the claims of recent Lutheran theologians (Eberhard Jüngel, Wilhelm Dantine, Mark C. Mattes, et al.), according to whom justification is the starting point and norm for all areas of Christian teaching (42-56). Webster argues persuasively that it is not possible to arrange the entire content of the Christian faith around this one doctrine. These theologians mistakenly expect the doctrine to answer questions that it simply cannot.

Several of the contributors take up issues that are problematic for the thought and life of the churches today. John P. Burgess reminds Reformed Christians that in Calvin

justification is not privileged above sanctification but that the two together are a double grace that come to the believer in virtue of his or her union with Christ. He spells out the consequences for ecclesial life when the two are not properly ordered to one another in the proclamation and practices of the church. Dirkie Smit explores the connection between the controversial theory of substitutionary atonement and justification. Justification includes forgiveness of sins, which in turn is linked with the crucifixion of Jesus. But how is one to understand this link? Is Christ's death a "satisfaction" made to a just God who demands the blood of his Son before he can extend mercy to sinners? But does this not make God's mercy a prisoner of God's justice, and thereby introduce a contradiction within God? Smit explicates the problem in conversation with Anselm, Calvin, the Heidelberg Catechism (3-18), and Karl Barth. Through his review Smit makes clear that the Western tradition has been more or less aware of this problem from the outset and struggled theologically to relate divine justice and mercy. In his massive exposition of the doctrine of reconciliation (CD IV/1-4), Barth dialectically relates the two divine attributes: judgment is a form of God's mercy, which in relation to the destructiveness of sin finds its necessary expression in sin's judgment and removal at the cross of Christ. "The judgment of this God is never without grace, but it is the redemptive fire of his love, judging because it is merciful" (112). Helpful in this connection is Smit's observation that "judging" and "saving" belong together in a biblical conception of justice. According to Smit, the Western legal or judicial orientation to justice has obscured this conception of God's justice, which includes the divine mercy and love in the broader context of God's purpose in creating us for abundant life in covenant. God shows himself faithful to this covenant by saving us from "all forms of destruction and self-destruction, misery, evil and threats" (114). As Barth has asserted, in the Christ event, God at once justifies sinners and himself (111).

It is not possible within the space of this review to discuss at length the content of the remaining essays. It will be enough to note that the contributors have admirably fulfilled the aim of the Theological Subcommittee to address the Reformed understanding of justification from a wide range of theological points of departure (x-xi). Thus Katherine Sonderegger shows that for the Reformers the presupposition of the doctrine of justification is predestination, which the Apostle Paul teaches in Romans 8.29ff., the so-called "golden chain" (122-138). Laura Smit treats the issue of the crucifixion of Christ as sacrifice (139-162). Martien E. Brinkmann draws out the ecclesiological consequences of the doctrine of justification (163-184). Christiaan Mostert discusses the doctrine in connection with eschatology, clarifying in the process the past, present, and future dimensions of God's saving work in Christ. The collection also contains two essays on justification and ethics. George Hunsinger develops the ethical implications of the doctrine in the thought of Luther and Barth. For the former, evangelical ethics was "a matter of acting toward others as God had acted in justifying us" (210). But in Luther this ethic applied only to private or interpersonal relations, a consequence of his "two-kingdoms theory." Barth succeeded in socializing this evangelical "as" when



he rejected this dichotomy between the spiritual and secular domains in favor of a view which sees both as under the lordship of Christ (220). Sándor Fazakas' essay shows the connection between justification and the historical, interhuman reconciliation in the case of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, which have struggled to come to terms with issues of historical guilt and reconciliation since the end of the Communist era (231). The volume concludes with an essay by Hendrik M. Vroom, who poses the question whether the message of the justification of the sinner is even meaningful in the "modern, secularized, and religiously plural culture" (248). Vroom reexamines Paul Tillich's famous assertion that for Luther's question, "How can I find a merciful God?" the modern man or woman has substituted, "what is the meaning of my life?"

These essays deserve to be read and studied carefully, especially in view of the current interest in the *Joint Declaration* among the Reformed churches already in union with Lutheran churches or anticipating union, like the *Église évangélique luthérienne de France* and the *Église réformée de France* in 2013. Indeed, in the Section on Christian Unity and Ecumenical Engagement at the WCRC's Uniting General Council in 2010, several members urged fellow delegates to explore together what it might mean for WCRC to "associate" with the *Joint Declaration*. If this moves forward, the interested parties will certainly find this volume helpful as they attempt to discern what is at once an authentic Reformed and ecumenical witness to the gospel of salvation in Christ.

Book review

Christopher Dorn

Joseph D. Small, *To Be Reformed: Living the Tradition* (Louisville, Kentucky: Witherspoon Press, 2010) 161pp. USD 12.57. (LCCN 2010927777)

At the Uniting General Council of WCRC in Grand Rapids in 2010, the Section on Reformed Identity, Theology and Communion reflected on the need to reaffirm Reformed identity and to advance a shared theology among the Reformed churches around the globe. Joseph D. Small's *To Be Reformed: Living the Tradition* ought to be welcomed as a worthy contribution towards these important aims, especially by the Reformed family of churches in North America.

Small explains in the Preface that he undertook the task to provide North American pastors and study groups with an introduction to Christian faith and life in the Reformed perspective a decade ago. The result was *God and Ourselves: A Brief Exercise in Reformed Theology*. Approached by the publisher with the request to revise the work, Small readily consented. He soon discovered, however, that insofar as his understanding of the Reformed tradition and its contemporary relevance had broadened and deepened, he could not merely prepare a revision. Instead he would have to write a new book.

This decision itself is a kind of performative expression of Reformed identity. For, as Small observes, a distinguishing mark of the churches that trace their descent from Zwingli and Calvin is the conviction that “each church is called to confess the faith in *tempore* and *in loco*—in its particular time and place” (2). By the themes he has chosen and the issues he has raised, it soon becomes very clear that Small is addressing a post-confessional, post-denominational North American context in which the churches and their traditions are no longer integral to American culture. Indeed, the very titles of chapters 7-10 contain *in nuce* a cultural critique from a Christian perspective (“Gratitude in an Age of Achievement”; “Worship in an Age of Self-Fulfillment”; “Community in an Age of Individualism”; and “Justice in an Age of Self-Interest” (87-142)). But throughout he remains aware that it is the *faith* that the church is called to confess. The Reformed churches share in the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic church as embodied in the ecumenical creeds (the Nicene Creed and the Apostles’ Creed). But within this one faith there are distinctive emphases that are precious to the Reformed tradition. Small identifies these as grace, the sovereignty of God, and the character of Christian community (73). To explicate these emphases,



Small turns to the “apostolic benediction” in 2 Corinthians 13.13: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” Small does not fail to point out here that this formula gives expression to the “rich Trinitarian perspective” (73) within which the Reformed tradition has developed these emphases, even up until recent times. For it is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s Confession of 1967 and A Brief Statement of Faith (1983) that develop their content according to the order of this Trinitarian formula.

None of this seems objectionable. On reflection, however, it does not appear to be the case in the Reformed tradition that the sovereignty of God is at all linked with God’s love. Citing the Westminster Confession of Faith, Small concedes that the Reformed confessions often give the impression of God as the free and omnipotent creator who orders the destinies of all things according to his inscrutable will and wisdom. But Small helpfully points out that this conception of deity is abstract speculation unless it is grounded in God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Indeed it is in Christ crucified that we see the “power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1.24). “In Jesus Christ, we know the God whose power is that of One who loves, seeks, calls, and saves” (79).

If one sees in this move the Christocentrism of Karl Barth, he or she is not mistaken. Small acknowledges at the outset that in addition to the works of John Calvin, he has drawn extensively on those of the great Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth. For an author whose aim is to present an account of the Christian faith as interpreted and handed down by the Reformed tradition, this is certainly unremarkable. But Small also includes among those who have broadened his understanding of the Reformed tradition several women theologians. In addition, he mentions works from “Reformed racial and ethnic perspectives” (x). But readers may find it most interesting to learn that between *God and Ourselves* and the present volume, Small familiarized himself with the theological and ethical reflection that comes out of the Dutch Reformed tradition in North America, especially as embodied in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and the Reformed Church in America (RCA). This is to be welcomed, for the volume of quality theological output of these two little churches is disproportionate to their insignificant numbers.

The influence of this tradition may be most conspicuous in chapter 7, “Gratitude in an Age of Achievement” (87-100). The title does not reveal the fact that the chapter contains an extended reflection on the Heidelberg Catechism. Now this catechism is included as one of the eleven creeds, catechisms, and confessions acknowledged as authoritative by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), but it is certainly on the character of the CRCNA and RCA that the Heidelberg Catechism has left its deepest mark. Small observes that the catechism divides its questions and answers into three parts: “Of Man’s Misery”, “Of Man’s Redemption” and “Thankfulness”. For the purposes of the chapter’s theme, it is instructive to note that the catechism subsumes under “Thankfulness” questions and answers about the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s

Prayer. It is known that a distinctive emphasis in the Reformed tradition is the so-called “Third Use of the Law.” To use Small’s succinct definition, “the law helps us to shape our lives in love of God and neighbor” (94). The desire so to shape our lives stems from our gratitude to God for the redemption Christ has accomplished for us. Let me add parenthetically that this third use finds liturgical expression in the Reformed tradition already in Calvin’s French Strasbourg Liturgy (1540). Calvin’s rite opens with the vatum, confession of sins, assurance of pardon/absolution, followed by the Ten Commandments. One sees here that it is as forgiven sinners that the worshippers are invited into the new life in Christ, the blueprint for which is the Ten Commandments (cf. 134). Small notes that in the Heidelberg Catechism we perhaps unexpectedly discover that thankfulness is “something we *do*, the defining quality of who we are and how we live” (92; emphasis in original).

To say that ethics is a concern today in the Reformed churches—in all churches—in the North American context is an understatement. Small correctly observes that for most contemporary Christians theological doctrines are subordinate to moral issues. Christians seldom dispute, for example, the manner in which Christ is present in the Lord’s Supper; rather, they argue passionately about the issues that are at the heart of the “culture wars” that still rage in North America: abortion, homosexuality, and the appropriate role of the church in the social and economic spheres. The real problem, however, is that Christian moral discourse about these issues does not differ appreciably from the general discussion within the culture. In a particularly poignant passage, Small exclaims: “debates continue in the church as they do [in] society, alienating individuals, splitting congregations, and tearing denominations apart. Just as there seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture, there seems to be no faithful way of securing moral agreement in the church” (130). For Small the failure here on the part of the church lies in its neglect of theology. “What we believe and how we act are not two distinct things; shared conviction and common action are inseparable . . .” (131). “Shared” and “common” are terms to be underlined here, for Christian ethical deliberation and moral choice should be done within the community of faith. In an individualistic North American culture, persons are too often forced to rely on their own resources in making difficult—and lonely—choices.

But does this mean that a revitalization of theology in the Reformed churches would make it more likely that theologically informed Christians choose the “right” side in the debates that are tearing apart the social fabric in North America today? Posing the question in these terms presupposes a conception of justice according to which conflicting rights must be adjudicated in a legal system. But this means accepting the “inevitability of adversarial relationships” since there will always be disagreement on whose rights take precedence. For example, “confining the church’s discussion of homosexuality to the individual’s right to be ordained, or the presbytery’s right to ordain whoever it wishes, the General Assembly’s right to issue . . . authoritative interpretation of who may be ordained, ensures that legal compulsion will be the only



available resolution” (138). As an alternative, Small suggests that the church can begin to “live in freedom from battles over conflicting rights” by relating justice to God’s purposes for creation, summed up in the rich Hebrew word *shalom*. The word connotes the fullness of life lived in loving relationships with God and with all neighbors. Within this wider horizon, the debates would appear differently, even if the impasses remained.

No doubt Small could have said more here. And at times one wishes that he had. But then, it is more to his purpose to invite the churches to do what according to Reformed ecclesiology they are called to do for themselves: to listen for the “one Word of God accompanied by critical attention to the words of other events and powers, figures and truths that vie for our attention and acquiescence” (136). The church is summoned to the difficult task of discerning in the freedom of obedience what the one word of God is commanding it to do—whether with regard to the issue of homosexuality or any other issue.

Insofar as it succeeds in bringing theology to bear on the critical issues of today does *To Be Reformed* illustrate the need for good theology in the Reformed churches. One hopes that it will help to inspire the Reformed churches to rediscover and reaffirm their identity and make their own contributions towards a shared Reformed theology.

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