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Huldigingsbundel opgedra aan prof DJ Smit met sy 60ste verjaardag

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On being a theologian for "others"

ABSTRACT

This contribution, written in the form of a letter to Dirkie Smit, reflects on his weekly columns that are published in the Cape newspaper *Die Burger*. It addresses two questions: How does Smit, par essence a theologian's theologian, communicate so successfully with the readers of a newspaper? Second, what motivates his faithful writing of these weekly columns? In attempting to address the first question it is suggested that the columns are infused with the intent to achieve a communicative praxis that is liberating, and thus reminiscent of critical theory. Employing language that is simple and straightforward, laced with humour, never devoid of learning, and contextually relevant, Smit's columns are a highly effective exercise in Christian ethics. Here the two questions asked, merge, for the answer to the question of motivation is found to be an expression of Smit's spirituality and his hope for a redeemed world. Discernment (*onderskeidingsvermoë*), a key value in Christian spirituality, is central to his writing. His critical contextual awareness combined with his focus on moral discernment, all couched in a highly accessible format, make him "a theologian for others".

DEAR DIRKIE

Knowing you, you are already wondering who the "others" may be. It is shorthand for readers who are not trained theologians – those whom biblical scholars (rather comically) sometimes refer to as "ordinary readers". Reading your columns in the weekend edition of *Die Burger*[1] has pricked my interest in two ways. First, how does a highly skilled theologian such as you communicate so successfully on quite tricky subjects with readers of a newspaper? Second, what motivates you to continue writing these columns week after week in the midst of a punishing work schedule? Only years of friendship allow me to indulge in such questions on what appears to be a non-academic subject. So bear with me as I, with some chutzpah, try to explore why I think you are a theologian "for others".

I am not discounting the fact that you enjoy this kind of writing. This is patently clear as you move with ease from philosophy to literature, from art to a lecture you have heard or to a book you have just read, and from theological ethics to biblical exegesis. I think you find this pleasurable – drawing others into fields they may not have come across as newspaper readers. You address a wide scope of themes but are not a "ragbag theologian".[2] I find a certain fundamental unity of purpose in your writing and at all times the topics you touch on in your columns are contemporary and highly readable.

But first the "how" question – how does your column work? As you well know I share your desire to write in an accessible yet academically satisfying manner about theological topics.[3] Moreover, I have an abiding interest in what constitutes meaningful communicative praxis. Your writing "for others" has prompted me to backtrack a bit to a time when my theology was nurtured by insights from critical theory.[4] I was, and still am, interested in communicative praxis with emancipatory intent.

Years ago it became clear to me that value-free, objective historiography was a scholarly fiction. What I baulked at was the interpretation and acceptance of Christian beliefs from a patriarchal perspective of male dominance. Our traditions were not only sources of truth but also of untruth and oppression. So, like a number of early Christian feminist theologians, I found critical theory a useful tool for feminist theology as critical theology.

Feminist biblical scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza was one such theologian. She wrote:

> Critical theory as developed by the Frankfurt School provides a key for a hermeneutic understanding which is not just directed toward an actualizing continuation and a perceptive understanding of history but towards a criticism of history and tradition to the extent that it participates in the repression and domination which are experienced as alienation. Analogously (in order to liberate Christian theologies, symbols, and institutions), critical theology uncovers and criticises Christian traditions and theologies which stimulated and perpetuated violence, alienation, and oppression. Critical theology thus has as its methodological presupposition the Christian community's constant need for renewal (1986:49).

Your writing "for others" has reminded me again of the usefulness of critical theory and caused me to plunge back into the work of Jürgen Habermas. I am sure that you read Habermas with greater ease than I did when I wrestled with his writing during my doctoral studies. Nevertheless, at the time of reading Habermas' account of the profound and lasting effect on him as he discovered the horrors of the Nazi regime, I found a resonance with my own struggles in terms of racism and sexism. He tells of how he sat in front of the radio as a teenager and experienced what was being discussed before the Nuremburg tribunal; when others, instead of being struck silent by the ghastliness, began to dispute the justice of the trial, procedural questions and questions of jurisdiction, there was the first rupture, which still gapes (Habermas in Bernstein 1985:41).

How could a culture that had given rise to Kant and Marx have provided such fertile soil for the largely unchallenged rise of Hitler and Nazism? How could Afrikaners who had experienced oppression and loss themselves have perpetrated the horrors of apartheid? How could God-fearing friends not question the male dominance of the church?

Now I am not suggesting that apartheid was our equivalent of the holocaust; neither are millennia of sexist practices (including the unspeakable practice of burning "witches" and the never-ending violation of women's bodies). Today we find ourselves in a constitutional democracy with guarantees for the freedom of all South Africans. Some churches ordain women. So much has been achieved. Yet I watch with more than unease as our newfound freedoms are being assailed and even abused and as the moral visions of Albert Luthuli, Beyers Naudé, Denis Hurley, Helen Joseph, Sheena Duncan, Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela are fast vanishing in the ranks of the powerful. In a different time, in a different context, and for different reasons, practices that are liberating are called for to preserve the values that are enshrined in our Constitution.

What did emerge out of my Habermasian haze was how useful his foundation for critical theory was for Christian theology concerned with emancipation. This interest was not only the concern of a woman trying to find her voice in a male dominated field in a patriarchal society. It was also a concern of a white person whose life was largely lived through apartheid times and who yearned for justice and freedom in our country.

My concerns gelled around the term "liberating praxis". I struggled then and still do daily with what it means "to do the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt. 7:21). I cling to the notion that our praxis should be grounded in actions that characterise what we understand as the reign of God, exemplified in the praxis of Jesus. Jesus never asked people to be "religious". He proposed a radical alternative to what it means to be "religious" that challenged the reigning powers of his day. This brought him into conflict. The powerful had no time for religion that was embedded in sweeping change-making praxis. Christians are called to pray for God's reign to come one earth "as it is in heaven". This prayer requires exacting actions for justice and love that bring good news to our life situations. I understand God's reign as the fulfilment of justice, love, freedom, peace, wholeness and of the flourishing of righteousness and shalom. In essence it calls us – in following Christ – "to a radical activity of love, to a way of being in the world that deepens relation, embodies and extends community, and passes on the gift of life", writes Beverly Harrison (1985:18).

According to Habermas there is always a relationship between knowledge and interests and our interests are both material and ideal. This allows him to differentiate between types of knowledge according to the interests that produce them. Self-reflection yields knowledge and is governed by interest – interest in emancipation from domination. So Habermas revises social theory in terms of communicative interaction. Social reality is seen through the pragmatics of communication.

I have always found Habermas' need for the "ideal speech situation" – a situation in which there is uncoerced and unlimited discussion between human beings who are completely free – to be a bit of pie-in-the-sky. What I do find important in this idea is that it contains a definite moral context and it is relational. The moral subject who is the subject of liberating actions cannot be divorced from communicative relations with others. For such social interaction to be effective, it must be based on mutual recognition and moral interaction. Of course our social communication usually falls far short of this ideal. But it is still worth stating because, despite being utopian, it does serve as a critical principle when we start to analyse the contexts in which we live.

I share Habermas' concern that language contributes towards the formation of consciousness. Every worship service I attend is still peppered with sexist language and my God is only and always a male figure! Language is, after all, foundational for our communicative practices. Reading your contributions I think you share this consciousness. Your language seeks to engage your readers – it is often colloquial, peppered with questions (in the manner of Socrates?) and short conversational comments.

Communication is not without a normative core because at the most fundamental level human beings have inescapable claims on one another. Language expresses intent and the means of communication we choose is done with a certain interest in mind.

> Language encodes our sense of how we are positioned in our basic relations to and with others who make up our social world. This means that language teaches us, below the level of consciousness and intentionality, our sense of power-in-relation… The potential of language, then, is either to expand human possibility or to function as a transmitter of subtle and not so subtle, patterns of human oppression and domination (Harrison 1985:24).

As a feminist theologian of praxis, I feel that a few caveats on Habermas are called for. First, as

regards the question of religion, Habermas initially acknowledged the role of religion in the totality of universalist ideals. Yet, the role he accorded to religion in society was at first less nuanced than his approach in his later work. While not hostile to or dismissive of religion, he now describes his approach as "methodological atheism". He sees different roles for political, philosophical and religious discourse but concedes that religion preserves an indispensable potential for meaning. Second, on the issue of gender, feminist thinkers have found Habermas' understanding of its role in society wanting. On the one hand, his setting out of the relationship between knowledge and interest has been useful for a feminist critique of modern society. On the other hand, the role accorded to gender in his opus The Theory of Communicative Actions is negligible. Critical theory that is usable for a feminist critique must include gender in its analysis. Women are not absent from the work place, women are often the sole breadwinners in our society, and women are conspicuously pre- sent in church structures. Interpreting and communicating in an "ideal speech situation" call for equal participation, with no holds barred, particularly on the grounds of gender.

Despite these reservations, I found, and still find, critical theory a focussed lens through which oppressive ideologies, male-dominated theologies and church traditions and practices that are exclusionary can be analysed, and a finely honed scalpel to excise them. The vision of an ideal situation of free communication in a liberated society remains consonant with our prayers for God's reign to come on earth and God's will to be done so that all may live in love, justice and freedom. I continue to subscribe to Dorothee Sölle's understanding of what it means to live one's faith:

> That God loves all of us and each and every individual is a universal theological truth, which without translation becomes the universal lie. The translation of this proposition is world-transforming praxis (1974:107).

All this harking back is simply to make the point that your columns are an effective exercise in communicative praxis. "Simple and straightforward", they draw readers into a conversation. They work because they are contextually relevant while being critical, and above all they engage readers on ethical grounds where faith encounters morality and where hope and freedom are ever before us.

I have wondered if the fact that you often refer to a range of philosophers' views (for instance, over the last six months to those of Plato, Aristotle, Democritus, Xenophon, Kant, Kierkegaard, Locke, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Gadamer and Hannah Arendt) to bolster your arguments may not be off-putting to your readers. It is a dazzling display of your own interests but it clearly has the potential to open doors for the more interested or informed reader. You certainly made me go back to Kant on laughter. To provoke uproarious laughter says Kant (2000:209-210), "there must be something nonsensical". Quite! When he quotes Voltaire as saying that we are given two things as a counterweight to the burdens of life, hope and sleep (and then comments: "He could also have added laughter"), I suspect that he did not suffer the torments of insomnia!

Now my "how" and "why" questions start to merge. In my kind of language, theological theory and theological praxis come together, a concern that you share (19.02.11). Underlying all of this, I suspect, is something from the heart. Writing "for others" in this way is an expression of your spirituality, your ministry, your hope for a redeemed world. I think you are engaged in drawing your readers into greater discernment (*onderskeidingsvermoë*) required for "knowing how to interpret the present time" (Lk. 12:56) in order to follow Jesus more faithfully.

First of all, discernment is a key value in Christian spirituality. Although not specifically mentioned in the Old Testament, the idea of discerning between good and evil spirits is present. Saul is motivated by both good (1 Sam. 11:6) and evil spirits (1 Sam. 16:14-23). There is a call to discern true prophecy from false prophecy in Jeremiah (23:28). In the New Testament, John (1 Jn. 4:1-6) calls us to "… test the spirits to see whether they are from God …", and gives guidelines for distinguishing between "… the spirit of truth and the spirit of error". Paul lists the *diakrisis pneumatōn* among the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:10). In the Letter to the Philippians (1:9) we are cautioned: "And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight" [my italics – DA]. Ephesians (1:17, 18) speaks of "… having the eyes of your heart enlightened [so] you may know what is the hope to which he has called you". Christians are called to discern knowledge with clear insight and awareness within a life that is shaped by love.

I think that you would agree that the praxis of Jesus, as we understand and interpret it, is our key to discerning the present times. His person, his history, his teaching and his presence with us, help us to understand the present times and how to act on such understanding. Yet, Jesus was quite tough when he berated people for knowing "how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" (Lk. 12:56). In order to do so requires discernment as well as the willingness to act upon what is discerned. We can easily become entangled in apocalyptic judgments or Gnostic certainties instead of trying to glimpse – even through that dark glass – something of God's unfolding acts for the coming of the kingdom. We interpret the present times in the hope that God "can write straight with crooked lines". We need intelligent listening to our deepest hopes and desires, as well as to the sufferings and anxieties of our world. I see something of this need in your writing. You mention *onderskeiding* expressly (see 07.08.10; 16.10.10) while in virtually all your columns there is an appeal for greater discernment (19.02.11).

The call to a discerning interpretation of the present is not an exercise in receiving clear instructions on how to act. It is rather being drawn more deeply into exploring the mind and heart of God – trying to understand what God is most concerned about. At heart this is nothing more than an increased awareness of the movements of the Holy Spirit in us.

Discernment is a quality that the desert mothers and fathers greatly valued and it undergirded their practices as they sought to follow God. Discernment understood as "right judgment in all things", involved the recognition of limits, the humility to know one's spiritual poverty before God, and the assurance that God desires what is good and loving. "The desert is about the struggle for truth or it is nothing", writes Rowan Williams (2005:28). The desert was seen as the place to discern God's will, away from the distractions and demands of everyday life. It required awareness, a kind of watchfulness in search of truth.

Benedict of Nursia (480-547) in his Rule sees discernment, or what he calls "discretion", as crucial. He does not simply mean that avoidance of excess is necessary. Discretion had a far broader meaning in the monastic community. Spiritual discernment aimed at purity of heart and the vision of God. It is attained by listening carefully "… with the ear of your heart" (Benedict 1982:15). Origen (c. 185-254), who knew the need for discernment, counsels:

> We find that the thoughts which arise in our hearts … come sometimes from ourselves, at times they are stirred up by counteracting virtues, and at other times they may be sent by God and the good angels (quoted in Leech 1977:129).

Discernment was also highly prized by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) whose Spiritual Exercises really have no other purpose than the discernment of spirits. He believed that the human heart experiences movements for good – those that are God-directed – and movements away from God. Our spiritual welfare depends on our ability to discern between what is good and what is not. Ignatius arrived at this understanding when he pondered on his future after being wounded in battle. His newfound awareness, described as "eyes [that] were opened a little", led to new understanding and action. Ignatius' experience, translated over years into the Exercises, made clear the great value of spiritually identifying the movements of our hearts. Knowledge and discernment have to be held together by love. Discerning knowledge without love is harmful. Love needs knowledge and discernment.

You point out that, according to Hannah Arendt, moral discernment requires "hearts that understand" (16.10.10). This you quote approvingly and write that evil begins "… when we no longer have hearts that understand. When we no longer see, know or want to know". Discernment could be interpreted as a hermeneutic of suspicion (05.11.10) à la Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Does being discerning thus mean that we are always sceptical? Healthy discernment does involve being aware of the role played by diverse interests, power and our own subconscious desires. After all it was Jeremiah (17:9) who warned us that the "heart is devious above all else, it is perverse – who can understand it?"

In a nutshell, I find discernment a constant theme in your columns. We need to discern whether to laugh or to weep. To know what is appropriate is to have discernment. Too often our views are distorted (*skeef*). We gape at vain pretensions and miss what we ought to see. We complain about the small things and laugh at affliction when we need to find hope among the tears (07.08.10; 14.08.10). We require moral discernment in order to have eyes that truly see. Evil is closer to us than we think, more like us and of us. "We need 'hearts that understand' that see, that know, that want to see and know. If one of these is missing things easily go awry" (16.10.10). Differently put, we are no longer seeing with the "eyes of the heart". When we wrestle with priorities, struggling to discern what is valuable and lasting, we need discernment. If we are not discerning we will wake up one day and be faced with the law of unintended consequences (23.10.10). We may just have "… abandoned the love you had at first" (Rev. 2:4). This has puzzled you since you were young. How is it possible that the early church's "enthusiasm, excitement and dedication became choked by new priorities, plans, projects and pleasures?" you ask, inferring that they may have lost their ability to discern what is truly meaningful.

It takes discernment to unearth the consumerism that erodes our souls, to understand how life is commodified and all is measured in terms of monetary values, resulting in "superficiality and the loss of depth".

> From an ethical point of view many complain that today we have lost virtues, the personal virtue of simplicity, moderation and sobriety, social virtues like caring, concern and charitableness, all is exchanged for greed – but even about this many would say "so what!" (02.10.10).

It takes discernment to know the difference between "smiley-face-happiness … the fulfilment of our desires … and the hurried pursuit of pleasure" and meaningful happiness (27.11.10). You ask:

> Do we really want to be happy? Why then do we often act against our own best interest,

better judgment … Happiness really depends on "the object of our desires", on what we long for. This is the wisdom of thinkers over the centuries (04.12.10).

You cannot easily let go of your theme for the end of 2010 – what do we mean when we say "happy new year"? It requires discernment for

[w]e often do not want to hear what is good for us, we do not want to speak about it or listen to or reflect on it. We fear and avoid places, times, people, silences that can remind us of it (11.12.10).

Discernment is required to understand what a truly happy new year means – something more akin to the Greek idea of *eudaimonia*, the good, successful, fulfilled life.

To be a discerning human being is to understand one's self in relation to others. You raise this issue in a contribution entitled "Unto the third and fourth generation" (28.08.10). This is something we need to be reminded of for we forget our interdependence and imagine that we are islands, sufficient unto our- selves. We rely on our own strength forgetting who went before us and made ready the paths that we tread.

We want to arrogate, grab, have, forgetting that we have nothing that we have not received. Are we not lacking gratitude? Do we not have the time for a telephone call, a letter, a visit? A moment at a grave? Or if that is too far, a time of quiet and thanks?

Once again you use questions to draw the reader in, questions that are purposeful. In this piece there is a clear ethical appeal to self-examination, greater humility and gratitude for all that we have been given.

A second corollary of discernment is the cultivation of a critical, contextual awareness that is always undergirded by ethical norms. Without it we cannot read the signs of present times. So I wonder how you analyse the context of your readers. Is it largely confined to a Western Cape Afrikaans-speaking community? If so, what are the differences in this community? Given that we live in a multi- religious, pluralistic society with many differing "brands" of Christianity, are your readers a more homogenous group?

Navigating contextual issues is not easy for our local context is no longer just familiar, home grown and bounded by a horizon that we can see. Local communal life has in recent times been marked by crucial transitions such as the rapid rate of urbanisation and the irreversible process of globalisation. "Local" is now a pluralistic reality. Societal pluralism is a very vulnerable achievement. Individualism, group egotism, relativism, cultural hegemony all flourish under the rubric of pluralism. The ideal is to be able to live in a complex interplay of order and freedom in which different cultures and traditions can exist side by side. Pluralism as a reality in a country such as ours is a kind of community of communities. This is a complex, fluid, multi-faceted, fragile reality. The goal is to achieve some kind of structured pluralism in which the multi-systemic nature of our society can work together for the well-being of all its people. Pluralism is not a fad of late modernity. It is not just a late modern societal cultural achievement or even a cultural trap, as our friend Michael Welker so often reminds us. Add to this the truth that we live in the tension between contextuality and globalisation and we are confronted with a pretty fraught mixture of issues.

Pluralism is, on many levels, incorporated into Christianity and it is alive and well in the

structures of most Christian churches. We have pluralism in our doctrinal foundations, in the texture of the canon and its interpretation and in the many families of confession in the universal church. The inner texture of the Christian church is thoroughly pluralistic. We even have plurality within particular denominations and the Christian context is itself pluralistic. How pluralistic are the faith communities that read your columns? Perhaps "difference" may be a more appropriate description? I wish I knew. In any event we cannot escape questions of identity and social change raised by our dazzling, pluralistic, cultural context.

Your writing shows that contextual theology listens to culture, to local church traditions, and to the wider community of Christians. You address local political, social and economic factors against the background of what is happening in the wider world, as you forge a response to these factors and to the traditions and practices of the wider church, testing their validity, credibility and authority for the local context. Culture and social change consciously inter- act with Scripture and tradition when doing contextual theology. Contextual theology is theology as praxis. This means that it is concerned with the ongoing reflection on action in the interests of transformation. You do not skirt con- temporary issues such as the fragmentation of our society, broken homes, lack of role models for children, a dearth of skills, conflict, unemployment, poverty and crime (14.08.10). You inveigh against corruption, nepotism, and greed among political leaders and mention the "anything goes" mentality that tolerates criminality in the police force, lazy teachers, paedophile priests and brutal gangsters (19.02.11). How can hope enter a context such as ours, you ask. You tackle the unpopular theme of cultural violence and the underlying systemic violence and injustice that gives rise to crime (21.08.10).

Authentic and appropriate contextual theology can be measured by the quality of action that emerges from its praxis. Is such praxis cohesive? Is it undergirded by a community centred on Word and sacrament? Does it produce a community that is known by its fruits? Does it have dialogue and open relationship with the wider church? Contextual theology is compelled to move outward from itself, often challenging other ways of being Christian, willing to accept difference and disagreement, but never closing in on itself and losing its catholicity and desire for unity with other churches (26.12.10).

No authentic critical, contextual discernment can be developed without the working of the Holy Spirit that equips us for our role in the complex, often trying, and sometimes messy pluralism of local faith communities struggling to live in a shrinking world. I find a clarion call to your readers to hone their discernment while holding out hope for freedom and wholeness presented in an entirely appropriate communicative praxis with emancipatory intent. Like your mentor Calvin, you too are keeping it "straight and simple", and when- ever appropriate, adding humour. You quote philosopher Simon Critchley: "Humour is essentially self-mocking ridicule", and continue, "We need more humour and less tragedy. Tragedy comes from over-estimation … Humour is an anti-depressant … [yet] deadly earnest" (05.02.11). In your writing humour is an effective communicative tool, both funny and utterly serious. You quote Groucho Marx (19.02.11) and I am happy to share your enjoyment of Garrison Keiler's rather deadpan humour that makes connections between humour and politics and the local (12.02.11).

Finally, as the years take their toll, you ask whether it is not time to get our affairs in order? The death of a school friend (20.11.10) and our friend Jaap Durand's latest book *Dis Amper Dag* (It's Almost Day) (09.01.11), both give rise to thoughts on mortality. Facing the reality of death also requires an act of discernment and moral courage. We have lost the art of dying (*sterwenskuns*) familiar to those who lived in the Middle Ages, when death was an integral part of living well.

We resort to self-help techniques such as those advocated by Dale Carnegie, to cope with life. It is better to heed Critchley's advice (22.01.11):

> To be human is to make time to reflect on problems, to recognise problems for what they are – how to die is the most human of questions, as well as suffering, injustice, and violence in our world.

But we tend to ban thoughts of death from our consciousness. We forget the psalmist's reminder (Ps. 90:10) that "… our years come to an end like a sigh".

Death and dying is something I think about more often than ever before. I have come to see that nearing the end of life brings new dimensions to the present day, a sharpness and a gratitude for a bit more time to reflect, to make right, to sort out priorities, and to live with a heightened awareness of the unending nature of grace. Although you are much younger than I am, you are wise in this respect, and writing about it as you have (15.01.11), can renew our awareness of the One "… who satisfies with good as long as you live" (Ps. 103:5). Please continue being a theologian "for others". You are singularly graced for this undertaking.

Best as always

Denise

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KEY WORDS
Communicative praxis
Critical theory
Ethics
Spirituality
Discernment

SLEUTELWOORDE
Kommunikatiewe praxis
Kritiese teorie
Etiek
Spiritualiteit
/Onderskeidingsvermoë

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(Endnotes)
1. Over the years Dirkie Smit has published his writings in this genre in a series of collections. They are too many to list here, but I have in mind books such as Geloof Sien in die Donker (1998), and … Want God is ons Hoop (2000). For purposes of this letter, reference is restricted to columns that have appeared in the weekend edition of Die Burger between August 2010 and February 2011. Quotations are my translation from the Afrikaans.
2. The term "ragbag theologian" is one I have used to describe my theology – cf. Ackermann 2009.
3. See Smit 2009.
4. Critical theory emanated from the Institute for Social Research affiliated to Frankfurt University in the early 1920s. Beginning with the work of Max Horkheimer and later Theo Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, it sought a radical change in social theory and practice to cure the ills of society, as well as to critique any doctrine, including Marxism, that was considered one-sided. Jürgen Habermas subsequently became a leading member of the Frankfurt School. Critical social science, prompted by critical reason is used to interrogate the driving forces of modernism such as questions of power, economy, history and exploitation. Critical theory recognises that a position of resistance can never be fixed but must be refashioned perpetually to address shifting social conditions and circumstances. David Tracy (1987:80) explains succinctly: "Critical theory in the full sense, however, is any theory that renders explicit how cognitive reflection can throw light on systemic distortions, whether individual or social, and through that illumination allow some emancipatory action."

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Dialogue and an advocate of dialogue – Dirkie Smit on dialogue

ABSTRACT

The essay explores Smit's thoughts on dialogue. In the first instance, the essay reflects on Smit's conviction on the need for dialogue in all human endeavours. Secondly, it explores Smit's (together with Leon Fouche) analysis of four dominant discussants on dialogue, namely Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas. What the essay sees as Smit's own idea of dialogue in relation to the four discussants is stated in the concluding part of the essay.

INTRODUCTION

This essay is written in honour of Dirk Jacobus Smit's sixtieth birthday. Smit has published over four hundred articles in scholarly journals of international repute. He has also written several books on a variety of topics. Many of Smit's former students are professors and lecturers themselves. It will be impossible to capture all of such a renowned theologian and scholar's work and life experiences in one essay. Instead, this essay attempts to explore some of Smit's thoughts on dialogue. First, it reflects on Smit's conviction of the need for dialogue in all human endeavours. This is followed by his exploration (together with Leon Fouché) of the views of four dominant participants in the discourse on dialogue, namely HansGeorg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas (Fouché and Smit 1996). The article ends with a brief discussion of what appears to be Smit's own position on dialogue in relation to the views of these four thinkers.

DIRKIE SMIT ON THE NEED FOR DIALOGUE

Postmodernity's emphasis is on "particularity" and "subjectivity" indirectly calls for plurality. But plurality and all its ramifications necessitate dialogue between groups and individuals, between traditions and disciplines; between religious groups and their adherents; between academic disciplines and those that specialise in them; et cetera. With dialogue, pluralism becomes a process that paves the way for communality – something especially cherished in African traditional circles. The different ideas, traditions, communities, theologies, hermeneutics, et cetera become vantage points for looking at the whole – the issue that forms the subject of conversation (the topic of the discussion). The merit of this process is that, by gaining "new insights", various groups come to realise that, even though they all have different perspectives on an issue, the issue itself is one. Therefore, although Smit respects and stresses the pluralistic nature of all theology, society and church traditions, he sees the different views, traditions and even denominations in conversation with each other. Stressing the pluralistic nature of theology, society and church traditions, Smit writes:

Christian theology – probably similar to law and economy – does not speak with one voice. Historically the dominant theological traditions – including the Orthodox, Catholic, and

Protestant traditions – have developed different views concerning authoritative theological positions regarding theories and practices of social, economic or legal justice. All claims are therefore modest and contextual, and reflect specific traditions, experiences and perspectives (2005:225).

The conviction expressed above clearly shows Smit's support of the view that context gives more meaning to and brings closer to home an idea, tradition, theological position, and so on. Writing specifically on the shift from context to dialogue with particular reference to hermeneutics, Smit and Fouché state that contextuality "yielded an insight into the ethic of interpretation"[1] among other things (Fouché and Smit 1996:79).

However, they argue that for long the emphasis, especially of contextual hermeneutics, has been on particularity, creating "awareness of power relations and their impact on responsibility and accountability of the interpretive acts" (Fouché and Smit 1996:79). This unavoidably puts almost too much emphasis on particularity – amongst others on particular contexts, persons, the com munity of interpretation and interpreters, and particular historical traditions – so that what one is left with is an emphasis on the "self" as a particular context and agent of interpretation and theologising. Therefore, we find, even within the same traditions – including Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions – different approaches to and ethics of both interpretation and theologising (cf. Smit 2005:225).

In view of the above situation, Smit calls for dialogue between contexts (contextual dialogue), between communities of interpretation (interpretive dialogue), between different church traditions (interdenominational dialogue), between theologians and sociologists, economists, philosophers, lawyers, educators, et cetera (interdisciplinary dialogue).

Despite his enthusiasm for dialogue, Smit is careful to note and address the ambiguity within the concept of dialogue itself. Therefore, he attempts, with a great degree of success, to give a dialogical description of dialogue between four distinguished scholars who wrote extensively on the subject, namely HansGeorg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas. The following sections follow Smit's concise exploration of their various positions on dialogue. His exposition is important as it will hopefully provide better insight into Smit's own position on dialogue. The first section explores Smit's conversation on dialogue with Gadamer.

DIALOGUE ACCORDING TO GADAMER

Gadamer sees the "event of understanding as dialogue" (Fouché and Smit 1996:80; cf. Gadamer 1975:324-360 and 1972a:27-49; Vandenbulcke 1973:141-178). According to Smit, Gadamer did not use dialogue as the only metaphor to describe the event of understanding but in fact sees the so-called hermeneutic circle of understandinginterpretationapplication as one grand hermeneutical event. Hence, according to Gadamer, understanding is by its very nature a multifaceted event and dialogue forms an integral part of the event he calls understanding.

Furthermore, understanding is a process. This process encompasses "a fusion of horizons in which the horizon of the event to be understood comes to the fore as a single horizon and that changes the understanding and his or her [the dialogue partner's] horizon" (Fouché and Smit 1996:81; cf. Gadamer 1975:284-323). This means that all initial assumptions are "thwarted" as

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1 All italics in quotations of Fouché and Smit are those of the authors.

understanding takes place. The subversion of initial assumptions, coupled with new realisation facilitated by the process of understanding, then brings dialogue to the fore. For this to take place requires what Gadamer refers to as a "trusting goodwill", which to him is "a model for dialogue" (cf. Fouché and Smit 1996:81).

For this reason, Gadamer insists that "authentic dialogue takes place between an I and a you" (Gadamer 1975:340-345; cf. Fouché and Smit 1996:81). Therefore, dialogue takes place when there is an understanding between an I and a you, a willingness to listen to and to accommodate the other. In other words, this calls for – what Gerald West (1997) refers to as – a "transaction" between the I and the you (cf. West 1997 and 2002). It calls for the building of a culture of accommodation – or what Robert Vosloo (2004) would term – the cultivation of the habit of "hospitality". In other words, there has to be a deliberate attempt to develop "an attitude with which to enter into the dialogue if the dialogue is to be an authentic dialogue and not smothered or distorted or forced with hidden motives into a particular direction" (Fouché and Smit 1996:81), an attitude of respect towards the views and insights of the other. If this is not present, then there is no sustained dialogue or no dialogue at all. But what precisely is this attitude that is so necessary for authentic dialogue to take place? Smit and Fouché identify three kinds of approaches to dialogue in Gadamer's philosophy:

(i) An approach in which a particular behaviour is "derived" from human actions and, on the basis of this, a fixed expectation of the other is created. This implies a prediction on the part of the I of the you's behaviour, views and beliefs well in advance and deals with them on the basis of categories drawn up in advance (Fouché and Smit 1996:81). The authors categorically state that in this kind of dialogue the I imitating the you is precisely the "whole intention of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics", namely to dismiss it as "totally unattainable" (Fouché and Smit 1996:81).

(ii) An approach/attitude where I acknowledge you as a person, but not as a you that has any claims on me. In this attitude towards the you, his or her views are considered interesting to the extent that they are listened to. However, they have no impact on the I, and the latter's assumptions are not changed and influenced by supposedly new realisations and insights gained through information provided by the former. Also, there is no mutual impact between the two parties (cf. Fouché and Smit 1996:80-82; Gadamer 1975:324-360).

(iii) The third approach/attitude towards the you that Gadamer distinguished is one whereby the I is open to the you which has something to say to him or her. In this kind of dialogue there exists a mutual willingness, an openness to be addressed by the other (Fouché and Smit 1996:82). There is communication between the I and the you. The former is addressed by the latter – a kind of transaction then takes place between the two participants to the discussion. Both "open themselves to be addressed by and to the impact of what they are talking about" (Fouché and Smit 1996:82). However, "neither the I nor the you submit in any way to the other, but place themselves under the control and persuasive power of what is discussed" (Fouché and Smit 1996:82). For Gadamer this kind of dialogue "corresponds with an authentic hermeneutic experience" (cf. Fouché and Smit 1996:82). It constitutes authentic dialogue (Gadamer 1968:13-80). In this third kind of dialogue, what necessitates a willingness to open up to the other is the constant acknowledgement by the partners in the discussion that they "do not know". This the authors explain as follows: "The role of the question is to subvert fixed opinions in the open space of profession of meaning, so that the partners in the discussion respectfully know that they do not know" (Fouché and Smit 1996:82). They then

summarise what constitutes authentic dialogue for Gadamer:

> … for Gadamer authentic dialogue is thus possible only between participants in a dialogue who are prepared to listen to one another; who are willing to be told something by the other one; who have goodwill towards one another; who are prepared to give in and allow themselves to be persuaded by the power and legitimate claims of the relevant issue (die sache) (Fouché and Smit 1996:83).

Authentic dialogue is, therefore, not just an event; it is also a process of opening up to the other.

DIALOGUE ACCORDING TO DERRIDA

Smit and Fouché also explore Derrida's position on dialogue. They follow Derrida's description of dialogue as "suspicious dialogue in counterposition". Unlike Gadamer, for whom dialogue takes place in a living exchange between an I and a you, dialogue – according to Derrida – takes place in a written text (Fouché and Smit 1996:84; cf. Derrida 1982:109-136). What is a written text? For Derrida "language is always already text" because the writer is "already a disrupted sign, infiltrated by absence" (Fouché and Smit 1996:84).

Derrida's scepticism towards authentic dialogue is further revealed by his insistence that it is "constantly impossible to decide which possibility is the true and authentic one" (Fouché and Smit 1996:84). Hence Caputo (1987:116-117 cited in Fouché and Smit 1996:84) likens the works of Gadamer, emphasising openness and willingness to be addressed by the other you to a rabbi, while that of Derrida, emphasising counterposition and never a position, is likened to a poet:

> Gadamer is like a rabbi who conveys the truth of the ancient text respectfully and truthfully; Derrida is like a poet who sees the impossible possibilities in the text and caricatures it in a matter of associations (in Fouché and Smit 1996:84).

Gadamer assumed that one participates in dialogue in order to understand and to be understood. Hence his view of dialogue as an event that mutually benefits the I and the you engaged in the dialogue. Derrida always withdraws from this eagerness to engage in a dialogue by adopting a strategy of irony in which he wishes to overwhelm his discussion partner through a deliberate misunderstanding of the other (Fouché and Smit 1996:84). In this way, for Derrida, what actually ensues in dialogue is a counterposition to a position taken in a dialogue and, in his own view, it is this that gives meaning to the dialogue. Hence Derrida's attitude to dialogue is simply the second kind of attitude found in Gadamer's analysis of dialogue. Derrida is not influenced by information offered by the (other) you and insists that the I is absolute, so that the latter finds no possibility in the text of the (other) you.

However, Fouché and Smit – perhaps for the sake of dialogue – do identify some useful contributions that Derrida makes to the discussion on dialogue. They argue that

> [i]t would be more appropriate to see that Derrida has a tempering function in the dialogue on dialogue which could lead to a fuller realization of what we are doing when we engage in a dialogue … [Thus] … Derrida's contribution to the dialogue on dialogue is to demonstrate that constructive contributions should not be taken too seriously, but with a pinch of salt. His subversive suspicion directed at the scaffolding does not lead to

the joyful and mirthprovoking, and draws the marginalized being into the centre of the discussion (Fouché and Smit 1996:84, 85).

Rorty's idea of dialogue

According to Fouché and Smit, Rorty examines dialogue as therapy that changes our vocabulary. This is because Rorty

> … characterizes the tendency of Western thought as a search for foundations, a striving for the ideals of objectivity, rationality and truth. His intention is to show that these ideals are unattainable. He does this by proposing a better system of thinking which, according to him, could liberate these thinkers from enslavement to "unattainable ideals" (Fouché and Smit 1996:85).

Rorty's intention, according to the authors, is therapeutic and interestingly characterises dialogue partners as "excessively serious and plagued by unnecessarily hang-ups and afflicted by the unfortunate tendency to scratch where it doesn't itch" (Fouché and Smit 1996:85).

For Rorty the better way is to accept "the contingency of existence" which makes it meaningful for one to search for the truth. Both truth and objectivity are relative in Rorty's view. Dialogue is the best way of achieving solidarity with the society in which one lives (Fouché and Smit 1996:86). In fact, dialogue is strictly participation in discussion within society. It is dialogue between people whose path through life have fallen together united by civility rather that by common goal, much less by common ground (Rorty 1980:318 cited in Fouché and Smit 1996:86).

Dialogue is, therefore, not a mutual understanding impacting on the I and the you as in Gadamer's view. It is almost an empty exercise devoid of set goals, but it is nevertheless important for society, and the I that is engaged in dialogue with that society. Fouché and Smit (1996:87) locate the importance of dialogue in Rorty's intention "to free people from fundamental thinking for the sake of a new vocabulary, a new way of learning, so that they may become new people."

Habermas' view of dialogue

Smit and Fouché's discussion of Habermas' concept of dialogue as noncoercive dialogue according to rational procedures shows that, for Habermas, dialogue is necessitated by his appeal to rationalism (Fouché and Smit 1996:87). For Habermas "ideology criticism should take place through rationalisation". This is because of his understanding that rationalisation "will lead to a better, more human, life in society" (1996:87). This is also because of Habermas' deep conviction that only a society built on rationality and not supposedly on "false democracy" – the latter being, more often than not, a product of manipulation – is an ideal society (Smit 2007:17, cf. Habermas 1962). But for ideology critique to take place through rationalisation there has to be dialogue and true democratisation. The latter occurs in a context where everyone affected is really and fully informed, empowered and in the position to take part in a rational discussion, and not in a false democracy as it is found in political systems all over (Habermas in Fouché and Smit 1996:87).

True democracy is linked to, what Habermas calls, noncoercive dialogue. Noncoercive dialogue, the so-called ideal speechsituation, is found where "an open, free and informed

discussion in which no partner has the power to force or influence the other into accepting ideas" exists (Fouché and Smit 1996:87). Therefore, Habermas distinguishes his own idea of rationality from those popular in the society. Smit reports that Habermas does this in his *Knowledge and Human Interest* (German edition 1968). Habermas' kind of rationality is the one understood as "interhuman conversation and debate, the kind of rationality that is intended to promote ideals of freedom and liberation, humanness and dignity" (Smit 2007:17). In this sense, Habermas' idea of dialogue is similar to Gadamer's description of the third approach to dialogue with the other, where there is a willingness to be informed by and to listen to the other.

Smit's paradigm of dialogue

For the purpose of dialogue itself, Smit and Fouché do not choose Gadamer, Derrida, Rorty or Habermas' paradigms of dialogue as having any comparative advantage over the others. At the end of their detailed discussion of these four views of dialogue, they expressly state:

> Perhaps it would be best, in line with a typical postmodernist approach or simply in line with Paul Celan's words – "wahr sprichtwer Schatten spricht", not to choose between these alternatives, but to juggle them in the awareness of the abundance of possibilities! Different metaphors, including dialogue, function in different ways in different historical situations. What may be more suitable in one situation, may be problematic in another (Fouché and Smit 1996:135; cf. Celan 1975:135).

One finds, therefore, with Smit and Fouché a deliberate and conscious attempt to understand and to be informed by, to be in conversation with (cf. Tracy 1981 and 1987), the partners in the dialogue. In the view of the authors, the emphasis on contextuality, on particularity, however important, must be complemented by a move towards the other, respecting the otherness, the strangeness, the particularity, and legitimate claims, of the other. And perhaps this is what dialogue proper should be (Fouché and Smit 1996:90). This perhaps informed their decision not to choose between the four alternative paradigms of dialogue they discussed.

However, like the American theologian David Tracy (1990) whom Smit very often cites, Smit's position is closer to Gadamer's third approach to dialogue. Like Gadamer, Smit emphasises the importance of respecting the otherness, strangeness and particularity of the apparent legitimate claims of the other. When this takes place there is mutual understanding and influence that impact on all the partners in dialogue – a position towards which Rorty and Derrida are not favourably disposed. While Rorty calls for, what Smit describes as, "empty dialogue" – saying that there is nothing outside of the dialogue that can support it or guide it or guarantee anything – Derrida is sceptical about the legitimacy of truth claims made by the other you.

In any case, Smit's attempt at a dialogue between the four alternative views on dialogue he does by searching for a perspectival view of the four alternatives rather than by looking at them as mutually exclusive. By "juggling" the four paradigms one is likely to end up with a variety of possible approaches to dialogue that can be applicable in different situations and contexts. This is again close to Gadamer's third approach to dialogue where there is a willingness to listen to and to be informed by the other. Like Gadamer, Smit sees the wisdom of listening to the views of Rorty, Derrida and Habermas, though he seems to part ways with some aspects of relativism in their analyses of what dialogue is and should be. In many of his works Smit favours

dialogue between positions, persons, traditions, contexts, communities, disciplines, et cetera, rather than making a biased selection of seemingly alternate positions and traditions. For example, in a discussion of the Barmen Declaration and the Belhar Confession, Smit states that "[t]he Belhar Confession is the product of a conversation with the Barmen Declaration. Without Barmen there would have been no Belhar in its present form" (2006:291 – my emphasis – GIA; Cf. also Smit 1982, 1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2005). With this statement, in the case of Barmen and Belhar, Smit underscores the importance of conversation, of dialogue and of the willingness to listen to the other as that did and will open up new possibilities that otherwise would have been impossible. When Smit elaborates on how Barmen should be listened to today, he argues that it is important to read Barmen not as six separate and distant theses – precisely as it is true of Belhar – of which we can adhere to some while ignoring and neglecting others. Only in their joint claim do they confess what is truly at stake. Therefore, the informed structure, the overall thrust of Barmen is of extreme importance (Smit 2006:293).

Conclusion

Dirkie Smit's appreciation of dialogue does not come at the cost of an under estimation of the reality of the ambiguity and the pluralistic nature of academy, church and society (cf. Tracy 1981 and 1987). As was seen at the beginning of this essay, Smit admits, in commenting on the pluralistic nature of contemporary theological discourse, that "Christian theology … does not speak with one voice" (2005:225). However, Smit acknowledges that the genius of dialogue lies exactly in the possibility that conversation creates between a plurality of views, ideas, possibilities, traditions, theologies, hermeneutical methods, philosophies, church doctrines, ethical approaches, as well as between different approaches to dialogue itself. Hence Smit's idea of dialogue is not a call for hegemonic views, opinions, methods, persons, traditions et cetera. He does not call for a choice between paradigms or for the adoption of a single approach to an issue such as dialogue. Rather, Smit thinks that various perspectives on an issue, together with its discussants, should speak to each other and that they should be listened to as a way of learning from each other. In this sense Smit comes close to Gadamer's (third) approach to dialogue. Smit succeeds in advocating authentic dialogue while upholding the reality of a plurality of views, societies, traditions, hermeneutics, communities, ideologies, et cetera. Therefore, he also listens to Rorty, Derrida and Habermas even though their concepts of dialogue are quite different from his own.

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KEY TERMS
Dialogue/
 Dirkie Smit
Jacques Derrida
Hans-Georg Gadamer
Jürgen Habermas

SLEUTELWOORDE
Dialoog
Dirkie Smit
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Poverty, wealth and ecology – A theological perspective

ABSTRACT

Reflecting on poverty, wealth and ecology – and connecting it with a call for social and environmental transformation – demands an understanding of the
present and at the same time a vision of a transformed future. For this reason this the essay takes as point of departure a fictitious newspaper report on a conference in 2100 that reflects on the history of the world over the past century, a history of exploding globalization, economic injustice, massive growth in the divide between rich and poor and increased ecological degradation. All of this, this according to the report, lead to a gradual global change in consciousness and efforts to address these challenges to make the twenty-first century an age of global transformation towards a true "world society". In light of this fictitious future, our societies, but especially also our churches, and where they find themselves today are reflected upon. Then some of the sources we come from, beginning with the Bible and continuing onto some of the rich traditions of our churches is followed by an appeal for overcoming certain false alternatives in how we as churches act in a developing global civil society.

Introduction

Reflecting on poverty, wealth and ecology – and connecting it with a call for social and environmental transformation – demands an understanding of the present and at the same time a vision of a transformed future. Sometimes the best way to understand the present is a look into the future. We need distance from the practices of our own time in order to understand the deep contradictions amidst which we live and which we have gotten used to, often without noticing. One of the fascinations of science fiction movies is their implicit or explicit assessment of our own time as either a lost paradise or a dark age from which we will have been delivered in a fictitious future. Being aware of the limits of such simplifications, I want to take the reader into the future for a moment, on a journey into the year 2100; and when we arrive there, to read a news report from the Global Electronic Observer, with two billion subscribers the world's leading newspaper at the beginning of the twenty second century.

The report gives some interesting insights into the results of an international conference of historians, and the reader may recognise him/herself or people he/she knows in the conference discussions:

At an international millennium conference in Cape Town, South Africa, leading historians

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yesterday pleaded for new efforts to gain an understanding of the history of the twenty first century. Renowned German historian Michael Misakwani recalled the massive violation of human rights characterising the whole first half of the twenty first century. Misakwani, who has African roots himself, was referring especially to the immense misery that was caused by the lack of food and basic medical care in many countries in Africa. Nowadays 25 000 deaths are mourned every day as a result of poverty. Even at that time it was clear that there was enough food and medicine to guarantee an existence minimum for every human individual. Especially in the first decade of the twenty first century, wealth in parts of the world increased massively, but was not used to fight poverty determinedly. Not even the global economic and financial crisis of 2008 generated a fundamental reorientation. The guaranteed global basic income that is an entitlement of every citizen of the planet today was seen by many in those days as an illusion, even though the resources were available. According to Misakwani, faith communities continuously and publicly pointed out those global injustices. But many of their members were in positions of power without using it to stop the immense poverty that caused violations of human rights. Until today historical science has not really understood how this could happen.

Harvard historian John Obama, a descendant of the first black president of the USA, pointed out the complexity of the economic situation in those first decades of exploding globalisation. The economic dynamic was so strong that the humanitarian dynamic did not keep up with it. Many of the leading economists and politicians of the time honestly thought that overcoming poverty would automatically follow if economic activities were hindered as little as possible. Therefore, they did not realise the moral ambiguity of the existing economic system.

A widely acknowledged point was made by Chinese church historian Ka Wee Yan. Yan, who represented the OECC (One Ecumenical Church of Christ) at the conference, analysed the role of the churches in her lecture. According to Yan, the churches – which were still divided in different denominations then – were in many cases so occupied with themselves that they underestimated the moral volatility of the situation. In addition, despite media coverage on a global scale, direct confrontation with daily misery and death was lacking in the churches of the North. At the time many Christians, when they were personally confronted with such misery, were already engaged in helping those in need. However, they deemed global injustices to be insurmountable – as little as this is understandable from a contemporary point of view. Yan advocated further efforts for a just and sustainable future. Even though, in the past decades, it was made possible for every human being to live without serious material concerns, the complete integration of robot technology into daily environments has created new challenges for human social life.

Australian historian Irabinna Ngurruwutthun spoke about ecological reorientation in the twenty first century. Today we can hardly imagine the massive amount of violence that human beings had perpetrated against the earth at the beginning of the twenty first century. At the time people spoke of "garbage" referring to many things used in daily life. They burned or buried these materials. With some materials, such as glass and paper, recycling processes were already in use. According to Ngurruwutthun, the complete recycling system that we are used to today was, however, considered too expensive at the time. In only a few decades those societies extracted precious resources from the earth, resources that took millions of years to form. The great resettlement programmes of the last decades, said Ngurruwutthun,

had become necessary because of massive climate change that was still developing more or less unrestrained at the beginning of the twenty first century and which had led to a considerable rise in sea levels. Many politicians and scientists of the time still thought that a complete conversion of energy supplies to regenerative sources was an illusion – a process that was completed later, by the middle of the twenty first century. Lifestyles were still based on wastage of water and energy. Only through the well organised internet based global civil society movements of the early twenty first century did a fundamental change in consciousness occur. The Australian historian further emphasised that today we cannot even imagine anymore why a century ago people considered ever more material consumption to be a source of happiness. This insight, she said, should teach present generations to overcome contemporary ignorance on issues of the future.

Various other contributions to the symposium emphasised in a similar way the necessity to learn from history. The general perception was that the twenty first century occupies a special place in modern history, a place only comparable with the age of the Reformation in Europe when constellations were formed that shaped the centuries that followed. The twenty first century was seen as the age of global transformation towards a true "world society". The reflections that follow here are nothing more than a commentary on this news report. My comments are firmly rooted in the theologically based conviction that another world is possible and it reflects a reading of the signs of the times today that sees God at work. Nobody described this theological basis as clearly as Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his *Ethics* fragments, written only a few years before his execution by the Nazis, Bonhoeffer affirms his Christological understanding of reality and emphasises the necessity of fully engaging in worldly reality without simply repeating what the world says:

> In Christ we are offered the possibility of partaking in the reality of God and in the reality of the world, but not in the one without the other. The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world, and when I encounter the reality of the world it is always already sustained, accepted and reconciled in the reality of God. This is the inner meaning of the revelation of God in the man Jesus Christ (Bonhoeffer 2005:55).

From this perspective our reading of reality can neither demonise the world nor remain blind to its grave inner contradictions. It looks instead at the world with love that includes grief in the face of suffering as much as hope in light of potential change. I will, therefore, after this first introductory step, look at where we find ourselves in our societies but especially also in our churches (2). I will then recall some of the sources we come from, beginning with the Bible and continuing onto some of the rich traditions of our churches (3). I will, furthermore, plead for overcoming certain false alternatives in how we as churches act in a developing global civil society (4) and then conclude (5).

WHERE ARE WE?

What, Dirkie Smit once asked, is globalisation? Then he added, "There simply seems to be no satisfactory answer to this question" (Smit 2007:125). Moreover, an assessment of the risks and chances of our increasingly globalising economy is highly dependent on its starting point. If we assess globalisation in terms of developments from an earlier period, we are faced with both good and bad news. Many people are materially better off. Some countries, notably in China and Brazil, have progressed considerably in combating poverty and developing their

economies. If we consider the overall global picture, however, far too many people's situation has remained miserable or has worsened. As far as ecological destruction is concerned the overall situation has definitely grown worse, especially due to climate change and its negative impact, primarily on many poor countries. Questions regarding ecological justice are only beginning to appear in international debates. Given these downsides, the overall assessment of the 2010 United Nations Human Development Report is relatively optimistic in its assessment of the global human development indicators, even though backlashes are mentioned as well. For the first time the authors looked at long term developments. They summarised as follows:

> The past 20 years have seen substantial progress in many aspects of human development. Most people today are healthier, live longer, are more educated and have more access to goods and services. Even in countries facing adverse economic conditions, people's health and education have greatly improved. And there has been progress not only in improving health and education and raising income, but also in expanding people's power to select leaders, influence public decisions and share knowledge. Yet not all sides of the story are positive. These years have also seen increasing inequality – both within and across countries – as well as production and consumption patterns that have increasingly been revealed as unsustainable. Progress has varied, and people in some regions – such as Southern Africa and the former Soviet Union – have experienced periods of regress, especially in health (UNHDR 2010).[2]

If we do not base our assessment of globalisation on relative improvements but on normative accounts of what would be a "natural" situation, the conclusion is far more negative.[3] Every human being dying from lack of food or medication represents a serious moral shortcoming. Moral questions of this kind are a matter not only of ethics but of ecclesiology (Smit 2007:262-269). Faith in the triune God is inseparably linked to human dignity (Koopman 2010:231-236). This is why the churches' assessment of globalisation has and *must have* an inbuilt critical bias. Even if we could name considerable improvements, we can never be satisfied with the speed or extent of the process. To be sure, assessments of what the best options would be to improve the situation are highly relevant. We, therefore, need an intensified discourse in the scholarly world as much as in the churches on this exact question.

Dirkie Smit has given an insightful overview of some recent scholarship on globalisation in the global South that has not been acknowledged and reflected upon enough in Northern discourse (Smit 2009). In a recent excellent, comprehensive article on the discussion in the

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2. The report summary continues: "In some basic respects the world is a much better place today than it was in 1990 – or in 1970. Over the past 20 years many people around the world have experienced dramatic improvements in key aspects of their lives. Overall, they are healthier, more educated wealthier and have more power to appoint and hold their leaders accountable than ever before. Witness, for example, the increase in our summary measure of development – the Human Development Index (HDI) – that combines information on life expectancy, schooling and income in a simple composite measure. The world's average HDI has increased 18 per cent since 1990 (and 41 per cent since 1970), reflecting large aggregate improvements in life expectancy, school enrolment, literacy and income. But there has also been considerable variability in experience and much volatility."

3. See also Section IX of the final document of the 10th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (Winnipeg, 2003) entitled "Transforming Economic Globalization".

churches, Konrad Raiser has shown how many churches in Europe and worldwide have addressed the challenges of globalisation in public statements (Raiser 2009). Among the most vigorously discussed contributions to an on-going debate are: the document produced by the 24th General Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in August 2004 in Accra, Ghana; the World Council of Churches (WCC) document Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (the so called AGAPE document) produced in 2005 in preparation for the 9th Assembly of the WCC in Porto Alleger in February 2006; the Conference of European Churches' 2005 statement, European Churches Living Their Faith in the Context of Globalization; the German Protestant Churches (EKD) synod's Organizing the Global Economy Responsibly, issued in 2001 already; and the 2005 document by the Swiss churches, Globalance. Christian Perspectives on Globalisation with a Human Face (Swiss Church Federation).[4]

Since the Porto Alegre Assembly the world has experienced a serious economic and financial crisis that confirmed some of the worst fears that the ecumenical movement had been expressing for a long time. The WCC Central Committee (meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August to 2 September 2009) called upon governments to take actions that would clearly show that a fundamental reorientation was required regarding the dominant ways of doing economics. Similar insights can be gained from a recently published book, a fruit of the WCC's now continuous study on poverty, wealth and ecology. Justice Not Greed was produced by the WCC Advisory Group on Economic Matters and can be seen as a call to finally face the consequences of the highly ambiguous global mechanisms, which are even more evident now than before the crisis (Brubaker and Mshana 2010).

I shall not repeat the contents of all these statements and documents. What I want to comment on is the lack of impact it had on public discourse, which makes no sense. The Christian churches represent one of the most important religious traditions in the world. It lies in the nature of religious traditions to touch the deepest levels of existence in their followers – and to open their wallets. People give tremendous amounts of money to their religious communities. But, and this is even more important, religious traditions also have power over their members' souls. Therefore, at a global level – as Piet Naudé rightly stated – "the institutional church's witness against the systemically uneven distribution of economic goods in the world and the declaration of a confession like that of Accra should not be underestimated" (Naudé 2010:215). Yet the churches have not lived up to their potential in this respect. There has been an illogical and unsatisfactory impact on global political life by statements on economic justice issued by ecumenical bodies. Especially in the wealthy countries of the North, where many of the far reaching decisions regarding the global economy are made, Christianity is the formative religious tradition. If the churches in these countries, together with the churches worldwide, would succeed in drawing Christians in their sphere of influence into a process of ethical

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4. The report summary continues: "In some basic respects the world is a much better place today than it was in 1990 – or in 1970. Over the past 20 years many people around the world have experienced dramatic improvements in key aspects of their lives. Overall, they are healthier, more educated and wealthier and have more power to appoint and hold their leaders accountable than ever before. Witness, for example, the increase in our summary measure of development – the Human Development Index (HDI) – that combines information on life expectancy, schooling and income in a simple composite measure. The world's average HDI has increased 18 per cent since 1990 (and 41 per cent since 1970), reflecting large aggregate improvements in life expectancy, school enrolment, literacy and income. But there has also been considerable variability in experience and much volatility.

reflection and self-examination on their place in and possible calling towards the economic life, the seed for a reorientation of global economic life would have been planted. Why has this not happened? In short: because churches have not listened to each other and, therefore, have not found a unified voice in global civil society.

Many voices in the North have reacted against the radical condemnation of globalisation in the Accra and AGAPE documents. Many of those who at least took notice of these documents are closely connected with market economies as consumers, business people, employees or politicians. They could not see those statements as helpful contributions, because they did not see the value of these documents for orienting daily life and the political processes in their own countries. What some critics in the North do not understand is the clear focus of Accra and AGAPE on *neoliberal globalisation as an ideology*. They read these documents as a condemnation of globalisation as such, rather than a condemnation of a certain version of globalisation. Maybe they also do not sufficiently understand, in their very souls, how destructive the concrete experience of capitalism has been in many countries of the South.

On the other hand, the detrimental effects of certain practices of global trade have had such a an impact on the South that those countries do not see the marked differences between Swedish social democratic policies and the rigorous free market policies of the Bush administration. Although both approaches go under the label of capitalism, their consequences are very different, and so is their moral value. Especially in light of the situation in Europe, the label "neoliberal globalisation" and the notion of "empire" do not sufficiently take into account these widely differing approaches. In Germany, for example, where the model of a social market economy is held in high esteem in the social teaching of the churches, the ecumenical documents are misunderstood as constituting a critique on market approaches as such, including the social market approach. Therefore, to some people in the Northern churches these documents seem easy to dismiss. The potential for common ground has been overlooked.

It is time to move beyond such miscommunication. It is, above all, the biblical tradition and its reflection in the churches' teaching that creates such common ground. What I shall give now is not an in depth analysis of all these teachings, but a kind of summary. The purpose is to highlight the surprising extent of the consensus across the vastly different traditions we come from. If we could raise an awareness of this common ecumenical ground, the churches might gain new momentum in forming a strongly united ecumenical voice in global civil society.

WHERE DO WE COME FROM?

The biblical option for the poor has become a key phrase for a characteristic of both the Old and the New Testament that has gained wide acceptance in churches all over the world. No ideological distortion of the biblical witness has ever been able to extinguish this key feature of the Bible, so prominent in its various layers. We only have to recall the notion of humankind being the image of God, which forms the basis of equality, or the astonishing fact that the very founding story of God's people is a story of liberation from slavery. We may simply look at the specific character of the Torah as protecting the weak and marginalised, or listen to the prophets' passionate critique of a religious cult that ignores the struggle for justice. We only have to consider Jesus' understanding of his mission as proclaiming the good news to the poor (Luke. 4), his critique of wealth detached from the needs of the community, and his radical identification with those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, strangers or sick

(Mt. 25).We simply have to make an effort to understand the deep socio ethical implications of a God's incarnation on earth that ended in him becoming a victim of torture, and we need only take seriously Paul's reflection on the cross as a key to God's work in the world (1 Cor. 1). If we reflect on all of this, we cannot but understand that concern about the situation of the poor and disadvantaged, and making every effort possible to improve their situation, is not a special interest of some politically biased Christians influenced by radical theologians; it is a central characteristic of the Christian understanding of God and, therefore, an indispensable dimension of Christian faith and the personal practice that flows from it in every Christian's life – including its political consequences.

It is, therefore, not surprising that in the foundational traditions of the churches and the denominational expressions thereof, this concern plays a special role. Alexandros Papaderos has shown how the witness of the church fathers, so central to the Orthodox tradition, has always expressed this concern. He quotes Basil the Great in his homily against the usurers, condemning oppressive attitudes towards the poor that are guided by greed and self-centeredness (Papaderos 2005:78). He points out how John Chrysostomos continuously admonished the wealthy to share their possessions with the poor (Papaderos 2005:79). Many other examples could be given.

A similar plea on behalf of the poor can be found in Martin Luther's work. Whole libraries have been written on his doctrine of the two kingdoms and his rediscovery of the idea of justification by faith. However, Luther's ethic of economics, with its passionate critique of early capitalism, seems widely forgotten. Even in the Lutheran world almost nobody knows that Karl Marx quoted Luther many times in his famous *Das Kapital* – in most cases affirming Luther's views. Luther's critique of the practices of banks and multinational corporations of his time, such as the Fuggers, cannot be directly applied to our world. It was motivated by a conservative defence of the old feudal system. Nonetheless, his scepticism about the new practices of early capitalism was fed by the biblical command to love and by the Golden Rule, which he interpreted in a way similar to what we today call the "preferential option for the poor".[5] Regarding the economic practice of multinational companies, such as the Fuggers (who at that time were growing powerful), Luther states:

> Kings and princes ought to look into this matter and forbid them by strict laws. But I hear that they have a finger in it themselves, and the saying of Isaiah [1:23] is fulfilled, "Your princes have become companions of thieves." They hang thieves who have stolen a gulden or half a gulden, but do business with those who rob the whole world and steal more than all the rest, so that the proverb remains true, "Big thieves hang little thieves." As the Roman senator Cato said, "Simple thieves lie in dungeons and sticks; public thieves walk abroad in gold and silk" (Luther 1962:271-272).

These words express a protest against the alliance of power and money that denies the interests and rights of the poor. If we look at the work of John Calvin and its connection to modern capitalism, most people think of Max Weber's thesis on the close connection between Calvinism and capitalism. It has, therefore, often been overlooked that for Calvin himself economic activity undoubtedly came with a social obligation. Matthias Freudenberg has shown how Calvin emphasised the social responsibility of wealth. According to Freudenberg

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5. For a closer look at Martin Luther's ethics of economics see BedfordStrohm 2008:151-154. There is an excellent interpretation of Luther's works on these lines from a South African perspective that has not received the attention it deserves, namely Nürnberger 2005. Cf. also Duchrow 1987:53-56.

(2009:163), while Calvin was no social revolutionary, he "pleaded for a balance between economic growth and social justice."

An assessment of later Calvinism in theological scholarship, too, results in a different understanding than popular use of the Weber thesis might suggest. In an article on charging interest in the Reformed church, German early twentieth century church historian Karl Holl comes to the conclusion that Calvinism was "the strongest enemy of capitalist striving" until the middle of the seventeenth century (quoted in Körtner 2008:211). Ulrich Körtner has even stated that original Calvinism always tended to turn towards Christian socialism (Körtner 2008:213). In its decisiveness to contribute towards society and its economic well-being, says Körtner, Calvinism has always criticised capitalism and called for the church to be socially and practically involved in politics (Körtner 2008:215).

We can thus conclude that not only the Bible but also the teachings of great traditions of our churches speak clearly concerning the moral basis of economic activity. The exclusion of the poor is irreconcilable with the Christian faith. The goal of the economy should be just participation for all members of society.

I cannot discuss here the different traditions with regard to our relationship with nonhuman nature; I have dealt with it elsewhere at length (BedfordStrohm 2001). But what Musa Panti Filibus has described as the consequence of the "principle of enough" can very well be seen as a summary of all the work that has been done in developing a new ecological understanding of creation over the past decades. According to Panti Filibus, an economy built on the principle of enough

> …urges us to shape our thinking differently, to recognise that the earth is not just a place for unrestrained growth but also a place of stewardship and responsibility towards each other, a place where human beings can live in peace and justice and, together with all creation, can relax and share God's gifts of nature (Panti Filibus 2010:54).

Closely echoing this biblical description of our task, German economist Hans Diefenbacher has pointed out the way from a growth oriented world economic system towards one of sustainability:

> A way to manage a reduction of economic growth in the developed world by the combination of an efficiency "revolution" and a positive change of lifestyles. Such a strategy would aim at a deliberate and democratically planned reduction of economic growth. Such a reduction would have to be the consequence of political influence and control, a result of changing values in our societies, and not the consequence of a bellicose world economic crisis that inevitably will occur if we keep on following the current growth strategies (Diefenbacher 2011:86).

What Diefenbacher has said regarding the ecological question can be applied to the necessary reorientation of the global economy as a whole: it flows from the Christian faith and its constructive "will to the future" (Bonhoeffer 1972:15f) that we should not wait until some catastrophe forces us to change radically, but that we should become aware that we are not facing a blind fate; we are historical agents who are able to shape the world according to the will of its Creator.

To fulfil the task connected with this vision we need – this is my firm conviction – to develop

a new public theology that is firmly grounded in biblical and theological tradition and at the same time supports concrete political reforms, however limited they may be. If we want to be more successful as churches in making an impact on global economic and political processes, we need to move beyond false alternatives. In the next section, I shall explain what I mean by that.

TOWARDS A PUBLIC THEOLOGY THAT MOVES BEYOND FALSE ALTERNATIVES

Inspiration vs. incentive

The first false alternative I call "inspiration or incentive". In much of the work on economic and ecological justice in the ecumenical movement the existing economic order is criticised because it relies heavily on the profit motive. Indeed, churches around the world widely agree that greed, as an attitude that knows nothing but self-interest, clearly contradicts the Christian faith. But does this apply to the majority of business people who make a living, often a very good living, by profiting from selling their products? Their daily activity as business people is not a charitable activity; it is based on incentives. If it would increase their chances of selling their products they would try really hard to ensure that it is the best on the market. They are not greedy; they pursue their self-interest while respecting everybody else's right to make a living. If they are Christians, they might even stretch their willingness as far as distributing the fruits of their labour among all workers involved in the process without running the risk of going bankrupt. Still, the profit motive plays a role in their economic activity as an incentive beyond pure engagement for the sake of the community.

How do we evaluate their activity as Christians? In many ecumenical documents the instrument of incentives does not play any role. Therefore, any efforts towards an ethic of entrepreneurial action are suspicious – they seem to sanctify what is fundamentally contradictory to gospel values. The WCC Central Committee has stated in its document on Just Finance and the Economy of Life that

> …the system that privatizes productive goods and resources, disconnecting them from people's work and needs and denying others access to and use of them is a structural obstacle to an economy of cooperation, sharing, love and dynamic harmony with nature. Alternative morality for economic activity is service/*koinonia* (fellowship) to human needs; human/social self-development; and people's wellbeing and happiness (quoted in Brubaker and Mshana 2010:219-222).

We can wholeheartedly support this call for an economy of solidarity, love and sharing. All the better if this call is successful and leads to a conversion of all people to this new way of doing economics. However, we must be aware of the fact that this call relies on inspiration, not on incentive. It does not offer any solution to our economic problems short of calling for a world in which people are willing to share freely. This is why I think we need both inspiration and incentive. Concern for incentives is based on the assumption that people do not always spontaneously act in an ethically responsible way but act in such ways only, or only effectively, when it is in their own best interests. A solidarity model of economics would tend to dismiss this assumption because its point is exactly to overcome self interest driven economics.

We have to honour inspirational examples as signs of a new world in which sin has been overcome. But to generate change effectively, we must put equal emphasis on incentives that connect ethical goals with self-interest. These raise, for example, the political question whether incentives have to be created so that it would be in everybody's self-interest to save energy. One of the possible out comes of this reflection would be a call for an ecology tax that makes ecologically hazardous goods expensive and gives market advantages to products that save energy. The appeal to consumers to live more in tune with the environment would be supported by good economic reasons, not only for every individual in his or her consumer habits but also for the companies to produce their goods in ecologically friendlier ways. Ecological consciousness at the sociocultural level would both support and be strengthened by such an ecology tax.

Moving beyond the false alternative of incentive versus inspiration would mean directing much more energy towards conceptualising incentives for ecological and justice oriented economic action. It would mean acknowledging the value of ethically grounded entrepreneurial action, and dialoguing with business people on the ethical dimensions of their daily professional lives. With this I come to a second false alternative.

Prophetic speech vs. dialogue

The prophetic tradition has always played a prominent role in church history, and with good reason, even though often enough a close alliance between throne and altar has silenced critical voices in order to protect church privileges. Those who voiced prophetic criticism have often been criticised in turn as being naive, unconstructive or overly negative.

On the other hand, defenders of prophetic speech have attacked those in dialogue with power as betraying the moral values of the gospel by adapting according to the demands of those in power. We need to move beyond such false alternatives. We need both prophecy *and* dialogue, for they have different roles.

The primary task of prophetic voices is to call for repentance and for change of mind and attitude. Therefore, prophetic voices need not always be constructive. They can criticise injustice passionately without necessarily offering a clear practical path towards justice. Yet deconstructive prophetic voices cannot claim any moral superiority over those approaches that work towards justice by means of little steps in the daily political process. There is a time for both; both can even be elements of the same church statement.

Prophecy has an especially prominent role in dictatorships, where fundamental criticism that delegitimizes the system is the most appropriate mode of achieving change. In democratic societies, prophetic speech must be related to the "ecology of consciousness" of a dynamic civil society. If prophetic speech can help to change basic attitudes, it is ethically justifiable and necessary. However, if it prevents a change of mind in the public realm, it may even be ethically questionable.

In a democratic public with many voices but unequal possibilities of drawing public attention, prophetic action, creative forms of protest and civil disobedience in morally crucial situations fulfil an important function. But they must be related to free discourse and the exchange of arguments about the best way to achieve moral goals. If prophetic witness blocks such an exchange of arguments, it is an obstacle to change. The churches' mode of action in democratic societies is, therefore, what I would call an "inclusive prophetism" based on Biblical truths and supported by good arguments in the public discourse.

In terms of theological paradigms we may say: Where dictatorships have allowed room for the development of civil societies, liberation theology has to be developed further into public theology. The latter provides the grounding for church based inputs in public discussions in pluralistic democratic societies. In such societies, voters decide deeply ethically relevant political questions by way of democratic elections. Therefore, the churches, in order to reach the public, have to be "bilingual". That is to say they must have a clear theological profile and speak a biblical theological language while speaking the language of public discourse and showing why their contributions to the debate in civil society make sense, not only to Christians, but to all people of good will.

Prophetic speech, therefore, must be related to discourse as well as dialogue. This leads me to a brief discussion of a third and final false alternative to be overcome.

Moral rigour vs. discursive openness

Church statements have often been accused of moral rigour. Those who make the accusations usually say that moral rigour does not replace expertise in the field. However, there is also a frequent attack from the opposite side. The word "experts" sometimes becomes pejorative. Experts are people who believe in and work with numbers and often ignore the stories of suffering of the victims of grave injustices. The statistics given by experts that, for example, show certain successes in fighting poverty are countered by the moral scandal of undoubtedly still existing poverty. We need to move beyond the false alternative of numbers versus stories, of moral outrage versus sober statistical analysis.

If economists can convincingly show that certain mechanisms have increased participation of the poor, we need to leave all political prejudices behind and learn from it. There must be completely open discourse regarding the best ways to overcome poverty and ecological destruction. We need as much data as possible to judge what works and what does not.

At the same time, the moral rigour in pursuing these goals cannot be strict enough. Deep solidarity with the victims of human made suffering is exactly the reason why the best ways to overcome their suffering should be searched for as thoroughly as possible. Only complete discursive openness can ensure that effective ways to a better future are not overlooked only because they do not fit our political worldview or our common intellectual designs. Moral rigour also needs radical curiosity. Sometimes it will be a desperate curiosity; at other times it will be a hopeful curiosity. But it will live from the eschatological vision of God's kingdom and it will breathe the air of *shalom* which is promised to us on earth.

Conclusion

I conclude with an example of new efforts to move beyond the false alternatives which I have described. From 11 to 13 October 2010 leading representatives of German and South African churches met during a consultation in Stellenbosch, South Africa, joining global church bodies such as the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Lutheran World Federation or bilateral church projects such as the German and South African Joint Globalisation project (Boesak, Weusmann and AmjadAli 2010 and Lombard 2010) in trying to reach a new consensus between North and South on the ethical foundations of globalisation and its consequences. The meeting included church leaders, theologians and economists ranging from the president of the World Communion

of Reformed Churches and a representative of the World Council of Churches' process on Wealth Poverty and Ecology to the chairperson of the Social Chamber of the EKD, which had published several public memorandums with a quite different tone not long ago. At the final meeting participants discussed twenty theses that had met with wide ranging consensus. In light of the different approaches that the churches of the South and those of the North have taken, this "Stellenbosch consensus" is remarkable and can possibly strengthen already existing efforts of ecumenical bodies to move beyond unfruitful polarisations.[6]

This is only one initiative among many that are necessary to unify the voices of the churches worldwide in order to be at the forefront of a new global movement to open the door to a world for us all where we can live with dignity and where nature is seen as a precious gift from a Creator who, in the end, has "got the whole world in his hands".

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KEY WORDS
Public Theology
Poverty and Ecology
Globalisation
Church Response
Sources of Christian involvement

TREFWOORDE
Publieke Teologie
Armoede en ekologie
Globalisasie
Kerklike reaksie
Bronne van christelike betrokkenheid

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The doing of the little righteousness – the on-going search for justice after the TRC

ABSTRACT

Taking as point of departure, South African theologian Dirkie Smit's theological oeuvre, particularly his theological reflections issues such as politics, justice, peace and reconciliation, the essay moves on to focus on Mahmood Mamdani's view of the differences between the Nuremberg trials, South Africa's political negotiations held in Kempton Park and the TRC and his critique of the latter. This once again raises the matter of justice, different forms of justice – especially as either "victor justice" or "survivor justice" and the consequences of this for the TRC and for Christians in the call for the doing of justice. With reference to the views of Desmond Tutu (especially his understanding of the concept of *ubuntu*), it is suggested that the TRC's only choice was not just between retributive and restorative justice, revenge and forgiveness, but that it was incumbent upon it to advance the gains made at Kempton Park and to move from victim's justice to survivor's justice and from the foundation of political justice to social justice which it did not do.

POLITICS, PEACE, JUSTICE, RECONCILIATION

Dirkie Smit's impressive theological oeuvre defies simple characterisation. He is at once the consummate Reformed theologian yet thoroughly ecumenical; he revels in complex theological and philosophical argumentation but is simultaneously the epitome of clarity. Systematics is his field, yet he burns with ethical concern; himself eminently peaceable, yet in his own way he engages every battle for justice, peace and reconciliation. He is the last to call himself a politician, not even an "accidental" one,[2] but his work shows that he, like Karl Barth, knows that

> Christianity has do to with politics thus theology is itself political action. There is no theological reflection or elucidation, no sermon and even no catechism for children which does not imply political meaning the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is itself a political reality (Barth 1962:17177; cf. Smit 2007:361).

Smit's work reflects passionate defence of those social, ethical, and political issues that are of great import to South African society in general and to the Christian community in particular, yet he is comfortably global in his thinking.[3] He is convinced that for Reformed Christians

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2. See Allan Boesak, *Running with Horses. Reflections of an Accidental Politician* (2009).
3. Cf. The collections of excellent essays where Smit addresses a wide range of issues, some pure theoretical theological reflection, others practical, directly addressed to pastors and other audiences, but always rich, clear and elucidating. Cf. As just a few examples of this wide ranging, insightful and always relevant thinking: Reformed Faith, Justice and the Struggle against Apartheid; On the Impact of the Church in

"involvement in political and economic life is clearly a matter of faith" (Smit 2007:383) just as he knows that "more fundamental than any possible political, social or ethical use of the Bible, is the fact that reading the Bible itself is political" (Smit 2009:53, 54).

What is always striking is not just that the inherent humility Smit exhibits does not quite succeed in subsuming the brilliance of his work, but that in the broad range of his theological endeavours the themes he constantly returns to do characterise his theological commitments: politics, peace, reconciliation, justice. As theologian he captivates me because I sense in him the theologian as described by James Cone:

> The theologian is before all else an exegete, simultaneously of scripture and of existence to be an exegete of existence means that scripture is not an abstract word, not merely a rational idea. It is God's Word to those who are oppressed and humiliated in this world. The task of the theologian is to probe the depths of scripture exegetically for the purpose of relating that message to human existence (Cone 1997:33).

Herein Smit presents himself in the words of Karl Barth – and one must read him like one reads Barth. It is, Smit says, "not very heroic – very unassuming", an effort towards human righteousness that is "imperfect, fragile and highly problematical" (Smit 2007:367). Nonetheless, it is the call of the kingdom of God, and even though it sometimes demands "swimming against the stream", it is prayerfully ("Your kingdom come!"), "accepting the responsibility for the doing of the little righteousness"[4] (Smit 2007:359-378). Secure in the knowledge that Jesus came, "and since He came, we are sanctified for the service of this King", we work for the coming of this kingdom (Smit 2007:361). This service takes the form of a "revolt", "a struggle", not against people, but against a "plight" that has stricken all humanity, "a disorder which both inwardly and outwardly controls and penetrates and poisons and disrupts all human relations and interconnections" (Smit 2007:362). While waiting for the kingdom we hasten towards it, determined

> to do resolutely what we can here and now on this side in orientation and with a view to God's side, without claim or illusion, not trying to anticipate what only God could begin and finish, but rising up for righteousness and order in the midst of disorder and opposition (Smit 2007:363).

Even though this is done "in weakness", we engage it because "something [then] happens" (Smit 2007:365).

Twice Smit returns to Barth's injunction that no matter how unassumingly, we must still engage in this battle, to "say Yes and No and often to do it resolutely" – albeit not absolutely – "not afraid of taking sides for or against" – in freedom, that is – with a certain distance, a certain hesitancy, for we must remember that our total yes, a "definitive decision" is "always for human beings and never for any cause" (Smit 2007:369).

At the end of this fascinating piece on Barth, Smit – always somewhat reticent – finally takes ownership in an expression of the need for support of

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South Africa after the Collapse of the Apartheid Regime; The Symbol of Reconciliation and Ideological Conflict in South Africa; Theological Assessment and Ecclesiological Implications of Human Freedom.

4 This sentence, taken from Karl Barth's 1962 *Theology Today* article, is the title of Smit's essay The Doing of The Little Righteousness On Justice Barth's View of the Christian Life (Smit 2007:359-378). In my view, this is one of the finest theological pieces in Smit's highly remarkable oeuvre.

many South African Christians in their participation in their on-going struggle, albeit small, relative, provisional and ambiguous to contribute to a little human righteousness, while praying *sol iustitiae illustra nos,* and waiting (Smit 2007:378).

I find this theological reflection quite characteristic of Dirk Smit's work and his person, and in offering my own reflections here, I wish to pay tribute to that invaluable contribution to Christian faith as politics, theological engagement as a struggle for peace, reconciliation and justice. As he says of Barth, "beneath the seemingly quiet and peaceful surface" Smit's work resonates with these themes and never more so as when he struggles with South Africa's truth and reconciliation efforts, Reformed faith and confessions, and our endeavours towards justice.

As is clear from Smit's reflections, Barth's terminological intention is *Gerechtigkeit* (justice), constantly translated as "righteousness" in this piece, but his reference is to the terms in the Hebrew Bible, mishpat and *tsedeqa,* and the New Testament word for justice, *dikaiosune,* also usually translated in most English translations of the Bible as "righteousness".[5] This biblical justice is the undoing of injustice and the bringing about of justice for those who are vulnerable and wronged, the poor and the lowly. It is Yahweh's "abiding cause" (Wolterstorff 2008:81) as well as that of Jesus, "the One who brings justice" (Wolterstorff 2008:115ff.). This is how I believe Smit understands it and this is how "righteousness" will be understood in this contribution.

This essay will continue the conversation with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) monumental work and will raise questions from what I consider to be less explored perspectives.

Taking as point of departure Mahmood Mamdani's intriguing thoughts on the Nuremberg trials, South Africa's political negotiations held in Kempton Park and the TRC (Mamdani 2010), we shall once again reflect upon the issue of justice, the way it is understood and the consequences of that understanding for the TRC and for Christians in the call for the doing of justice.

Nüremberg; Kempton Park and the question of justice

In a profound and provocative lecture Mahmood Mamdani, the world renowned social scientist of Uganda's Makerere University, reflects upon the difference between the Nüremberg trials, the Kempton Park negotiations and the TRC. He begins naming "the two great human wrongs that occurred in the twentieth century – the Holocaust and apartheid" (Mamdani 2010:1) He then contrasts the ways in which we have settled accounts "with these great crimes against humanity": with criminal trials in Nüremberg and with a political settlement in Kempton Park.

Mamdani makes the point that, while the world has become fascinated with South Africa's TRC, it has not taken the lessons from Kempton Park as seriously as it should have. To begin with, whereas Nüremberg shaped a notion of justice as criminal justice, few recognise that

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5 For a discussion of the extraordinary difficulties English translators have had with these terms cf. Wolterstorff 2008:69-75. Wolterstorff argues convincingly that the biblical authors do not deal in a theory of justice, but in the truth that justice is Yahweh's cause in which Israel is called to participate by pursuing justice. "It is not the abstract entity *justice as such* that God loves.

Kempton Park calls on us to think of justice primarily as political justice. Furthermore, and more importantly, whereas Nüremberg has become the basis of a notion of victim's justice – as a complement of rather than a contrast to victor's justice – few acknowledge that Kempton Park provides the basis for an alternative notion of justice, which Mamdani calls "survivor's justice" (1). South African's failure to understand this distinction contributes to the limitations of the South African transition, which Mamdani traces to "the failure to broaden the discussion of justice beyond political to social justice" (2).

Mamdani previously (1996) wrote a telling critique of the workings of the TRC. In it he argued that the problem was that the TRC made an improper distinction, namely between victims and perpetrators. Properly, the distinction should have been between *beneficiaries* and victims of apartheid. While *some* white South Africans perpetrated human rights crimes (for which the TRC tried to hold them accountable), all white people benefited from apartheid. This, Mamdani said, is how we should address the questions of guilt, repentance, reparations and restitution. He then warned:

> If reconciliation is to be durable, would it not need to be aimed at society (beneficiaries and victims) and not simply at the fractured elite (perpetrators and victims)? And does not justice then become a demand for systemic reform of society as a whole, so that the "target" is all who benefited, rather than just the personal conversion of "the perpetrator"? (Mamdani 1996.).

This issue has been pursued and, following economist Sampie Terreblanche, it has been pointed out that the TRC has indeed failed to understand the systemic nature of the wrongs perpetrated against an economically oppressed and exploited population. The TRC also failed to grasp the causative role played by the systems of white political dominance, racial capitalism and apartheid over a considerable period of time in bringing about and sustaining white wealth and privilege on the one hand, and black poverty, black deprivation and black humiliation, on the other (Boesak 2005:192-193). That point was well taken.

Now, however, Mamdani both broadens and deepens his critique. In the popular imagination, he says, the South African transition is mainly identified with the work of the TRC. However,

> [t]he TRC had more in common with the logic of apartheid than is often realised. First, when the TRC held individual state officials criminally responsible, it was only for actions that would have been defined as crimes *under apartheid law*. It did not hold them accountable for the violence that was authorised by apartheid law, but only for the violence beyond the law, violence of which they were individual authors rather than implementers. When it held them accountable, it was for excess, for violence beyond the law. By ignoring the violence authorised the apartheid state and apartheid law, the TRC ignored political violence. Instead, it set out to identify criminal violence – violence that exceeded political orders, violence that would have been punished as crime even under apartheid law had it been fully implemented. In other words, the TRC upheld rather than question the rule of law identified with apartheid (2010:5).

In my view this analysis has immense consequences. Without doubt it had an enormous impact on the outcomes and conclusions of the Commission. Not only was the work of the TRC limited to a rather random period of South Africa's history – it did not include the historical wrongs of colonialism and slavery – but, regarding the period, it did focus on the apartheid era; it worked only with what was lawful under apartheid law. Not only were historic

injustices ignored, but whole communities – victims of historic wrongs – were thereby also excluded from consideration for justice.

But this is an entirely different matter. The TRC argued, Mamdani writes, that most rights' violations under apartheid – roughly over half of it – had occurred during the period of transition from apartheid, and not during apartheid proper; hence the strange outcome of the statistical analysis made by the TRC. Working from the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report* (Volume 1, page 172, paragraph 25), Mamdani (2010:5) calls the TRC's lists and rankings of "victim organisations" and "perpetrator organisations". The list of "victim organisations" is headed by the ANC followed by the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), with the South African Police in seventh place. The IFP comes first among "perpetrator organisations", the ANC second, the SAP third and the South African Defence Force is in fourth place.

Since the TRC also declared apartheid a "crime against humanity", Mamdani (2010:6) feels compelled to ask: Who authored this crime? "If", he states, "not only most victims, but most perpetrators, were black people, then was apartheid, this 'crime against humanity', primarily a "black-on-black" affair?"

I believe this is a most disturbing question, but a necessary one. Beyond political theatre and human drama, what precisely, then, was the efficacy of the TRC? What purposes toward real truth and reconciliation did it serve? That would mean that black people would now have to live with the most painful of contradictions: being both victims of apartheid and perpetrators of a crime against humanity – in effect against themselves. Where does this leave white South Africans, not just as individual perpetrators but as collective, *generational* beneficiaries of apartheid? This surely is an issue of justice, but one far beyond social justice alone. At another level this raises questions we cannot pursue here: What is the meaning of "violence"?; and, more importantly: What does this mean for the forgiveness black South Africans were called upon to extend?

However, Mamdani goes yet further still: The expectation would have been that, since Kempton Park moved beyond the Nüremberg paradigm (moving from criminal justice to political justice and from victim's justice to survivor's justice), the TRC would, as it were, complete the circle by moving from political justice to social justice.

Kempton Park did not ignore the question of justice, Mamdani insists. On the contrary, it provided us "with a radically new way of thinking about justice" and this represents "a double breakthrough" (2010:6). First, it distinguished between criminal, political and social justice – so as to prioritise political justice: the reform of the political system above the other two. This is important, since the object of criminal justice is punishment; that of political justice is political reform. Second, "it decriminalised the other side so as to treat it as a political adversary". Finally, and this is a hugely important point to which we shall return, political justice prioritises the claims of the living over those of the dead (2010:8).

A PARADIGM SHIFT

We are following Mamdani yet another step forward. Whereas Nüremberg was "backward looking" in its preoccupation with justice as punishment, Kempton Park sought a balance between past and future, between "redress for the past and reconciliation for the future" (2010:7). The "real trade off" between truth and amnesty did not occur at the TRC, but at

Kempton Park: "The amnesty offered perpetrators and the stay offered beneficiaries was in return for political reform. It is at Kempton Park where the rules changed" (2010:7). Mamdani is right. The rules agreed on were the same for all survivors, beneficiaries and victims alike, not just for surviving victims. "The shift in paradigm changes the meaning of survivor to include all those who survived yesterday's catastrophe, apartheid" (2010:7).

We have mostly missed the extraordinary magnanimity in and theological import of this: that we speak of both the victims and the beneficiaries, even the beneficiary as perpetrator, as survivors. In a real sense victims of apartheid survived not simply because they were left alive, but because they resisted and overcame the systems of oppression despite the determination of the beneficiaries to uphold these. "Looking forward", Kempton Park not merely shaped a common future because we had no other choice: there was no clear victor in the struggle against apartheid. One can say that perhaps only in the military sense. In all other ways apartheid was defeated, rendered unsustainable (Boesak, 2009:157-195; 338362).

Therefore, the process of forgiveness which the TRC worked with in terms of selected individuals had already *begun,* but only begun, since its meaning and completion lies in the fulfilment of social justice. The reconciliation we ascribe to the TRC began here, on behalf of the nation, with the inclusion of yesterday's victims, yesterday's perpetrators and yesterday's beneficiaries. This is what the shift from victim's justice to survivor's justice means (Mamdani 2010:7). The creation of a common future is hereby not just the result of cold, calculated real politik (there was no clear victor), but of a willingness to take the risk of inclusive solidarity in order to make possible the reconciliation the TRC could have vested with further meaning.

Exchanging amnesty for political reform – or theologically speaking, revenge for forgiveness – is reflected also in the central place the writing of the new Constitution claimed in those negotiations at Kempton Park. Mamdani criticises the South African Constitution because of its private property clause which, he argues, obfuscates the truth regarding the violations of property rights black people suffered under apartheid and enabled the TRC to ignore violations of property rights when "most group violence under apartheid constituted extra economic coercion, in other words, it was against both person and property" (2010:8).[6] Again Mamdani has a point.

Recognising that, my argument is different. The Constitution as a whole, in its humanising intent, needs to be seen not so much as a conclusion to negotiations, but as the framework for genuine, continuing political reform. It is intended as the foundation of an on-going process at the heart of South Africa's transformation project, a commitment to the furthering of justice to which all South Africa's people, as survivors of the apartheid tragedy, are held. The legislation that created the TRC constituted the legal framework, which itself fell within the mandate for on-going, systemic justice given by the Constitution. What Kempton Park achieved was what the TRC should have taken forward: the prioritisation of political justice over criminal justice meant to give preference to the demands of the living over those of the dead in a demand for social justice.

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6 "When the TRC made public its tally of victims of human rights violations as a little over 20,000, it was telling the public that it did not consider victims of pass laws, that is, all blacks in South Africa, or of forced removals, their numbers running in the millions, as victims of human rights violations" Mamdani (2010:8).

GIVING PREFERENCE TO THE LIVING

For those parts of Africa torn apart by internal political conflict – from Ivory Coast to Liberia, to Sudan and Kenya and from Zimbabwe to Congo – the great lesson is to remember what happened at Kempton Park. Precisely because its recommendations were not mandatory, the TRC had the opportunity to explore the future beyond Kempton Park, the step after political justice. The TRC could not make law, but it could push forward social justice as a social project to lay the basis for social reconciliation, to expand the notion of justice so as to make reconciliation durable (Mamdani 2010:9). The TRC failed in what is "the greatest challenge South Africa faces today" (Mamdani 2010:10). In other words, unlike Nüremberg, the TRC had the opportunity to give preference to the demands of the living over those of the dead by insisting on social justice. Instead of moving forward with regard to social justice, the TRC moved backward toward Nüremberg. Defenders of the TRC would argue that what South Africa chose in the TRC was exactly the opposite of Nüremberg. This is done, in any case, by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Chair of the TRC and arguably one of the best to explain the work of the TRC. The Nüremberg option was not really a viable option at all, Tutu writes in his insightful and hugely influential book, *No Future without Forgiveness* (1999:24). Nüremberg imposed victor's justice, a term Mamdani also uses. In South Africa, neither side could impose victor's justice because neither side won the decisive victory that would have enabled it to do so. Like others, Tutu sees as decisive the fact that

> the security forces of the apartheid regime would not have supported the negotiated settlement which made possible the "miracle" of our relatively peaceful transition from oppression to democracy had they known that at the end of the negotiations they would have faced the full wrath of the law as alleged perpetrators. They still controlled the guns and had the capacity to sabotage the whole process. If we had insisted on trials, "there would have been no democratic South Africa" (Tutu 1999:25).

Tutu sees other "cogent and important reasons" as well. Nüremberg style criminal trials "would have placed an unbearable burden on an already strained judicial system" (1999:27). Disturbing details from such cases aired "for an unconscionably long time would be distressing to many and disruptive of our fragile peace and stability" (1999:27). This concern apart, Tutu returns to the overriding political and security consideration: "We could very well have had retributive justice, and had a South Africa lying in ashes – a truly Pyrrhic victory if ever there was one" (1999:27).

Tutu then mentions another argument, one also raised by the then Deputy Minister of Justice, Johnny de Lange, in the first debates surrounding the TRC and the outcomes of its work. It seems to have been an important consideration for those involved, namely the uncertainties faced in our courts at the beginning of our transition in the 1990s (cf. De Lange in Villa-Vicencio and Verwoerd 2000:14-31; Boesak 2005:171-173).[7] Discussing first the difficulties of presenting evidence in court to be proved "beyond reasonable doubt", Tutu then gets to the heart of the matter. First, there was the admission that much of the evidence in terms of documentation had been destroyed (1999:27; cf. Boesak 2005:191). Second, there was the question of the mendacity of those charged with human rights abuses:

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7 De Lange mentions two cases that failed in court because of the reasons he and Archbishop Tutu expound upon, namely that of former Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan, and apartheid scientist, Dr Wouter Basson.

> We discovered in the course of the Commission's investigations that the supporters of apartheid were ready to lie at the drop of a hat. This applied to cabinet ministers and commissioners of police right down to rank-and-file supporters [They perjured themselves] brazenly and with considerable conviction (Tutu 1999:27-28).

Besides that, there was the important consideration that the majority of judges were still white,

> sharing the apprehensions and prejudices of their white compatriots, secure in enjoying the privileges that the injustices of apartheid provided them with so lavishly and therefore inclined to believe that all opposition to that status quo was Communist inspired (Tutu 1999:28).

We do not find any consideration of insights like those offered by Mamdani reflected in Tutu's arguments surrounding the rejection of the Nüremberg option. While this does have consequences for where the TRC ended up, this does not mean that they were ready to "let bygones be bygones" (Tutu 1999:27-28). That would have amounted to what Tutu calls "national amnesia". "Accepting that notion would have victimised the victims of apartheid a second time around. It would have meant denying their experience, a vital part of their identity" (1999:32). However, through the TRC, "they would be empowered to tell their stories, and allowed to remember and in this public recounting their individuality and inalienable humanity would be acknowledged" (1999:32-33). Truth would be found in these stories, a truth different from the forensic, factual truth, verifiable and documentable. Not just the social truth, that is, the truth of experience that is established through interaction, discussion and debate, but the personal truth Tutu describes with the words of the late Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Ishmail Mahomed, "the truth of wounded memories" (1999:33). Tutu uses this expression several times since it is intimately related to what, for him, lay at the heart of the work of the TRC, namely ubuntu, a concept we shall return to in greater detail.

The TRC was, of course, concerned about justice. The Archbishop devotes one whole chapter titled What About Justice?, to it (Tutu 1999:47-60). The argument is a discussion on retributive justice – "in which an impersonal state hands down punishment with little consideration for the victims and hardly any for the perpetrator" (1999:51) – versus the justice the TRC preferred, namely restorative justice for reasons already mentioned above. For the TRC these were the only forms of justice they considered. Restorative justice, writes legal expert Mike Batley,

> is a theory of justice that emphasises repairing the harm caused or revealed by criminal behaviour, transforming the traditional relationship between communities and their governments in responding to crime (Batley 2010:21).

Firmly embedded in criminology and victimology, restorative justice is based on three principles. First, it requires the aim of restoring those who have been injured. Second, those most directly involved and affected by crime should have the opportunity to participate fully in the process of response, and third, government's role is to preserve a just public order and the community's role to build and maintain a just peace (Batley 2010:22). Apology, changed behaviour, sincerity and restitution – the payment of a sum of money by the offender "to compensate the victim for the financial losses caused by the crime" (2010:22) – are all essential elements of successful restorative justice. However, Batley too believes that "the spirit of ubuntu" drives the process (2010:22).

It is understandable that, in its emphasis on victims, perpetrators and its request for reparations for those victims, the TRC felt the need to identify its concept of justice as restorative justice. "I contend that there is another kind of justice" (Tutu 1999:51). Such is also the view of De Lange (Villa-Vicencio and Verwoerd 2000:14-31). De Lange forcefully makes the point that the idea of a TRC did not arise from any law or from the Constitution; it is the result of "our morality as a people who want to heal our nation, and restore the faith of those in our country and the international community in our common future" (De Lange 2000:18). Archbishop Tutu claims that this understanding of restorative justice is the "traditional understanding of African jurisprudence", in which

> the central concern is not retribution or punishment, but in the spirit of *ubuntu*, the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships. This kind of justice seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be integrated into the community he or she has inured by his or her offence. This is a far more personal approach. Thus we would claim that that justice, restorative justice, is being served when efforts are being made to work for healing, for forgiveness and for reconciliation (Tutu 1999:51-52).

Tutu again and again returns to *ubuntu* as the foundational element in the TRC's work and links it to forgiveness and healing, justice and reconciliation, as well as amnesty and reparations: "Thus our recommendation to the President and parliament provided that a sum of money reasonably significant in amount would be paid to those designated as victims" even though it should be acknowledged that it was really meant to be symbolic rather than substantial (1999:57). Ubuntu is not just a (black) African trait; it is the gift of all South Africa's people (1999:117, 221-223) and at times even universal (1999:213).

However, the question remains: Is restorative justice adequate for what was required of the TRC? Is it really "the doing of the little righteousness" as we understand it? Restorative justice is a concept enjoined to the criminal justice system, it works with individuals and their restoration and their reintegration rather than with systemic social change. It is limited to criminal justice and personal responses to a crime and explicitly steers away from systemic socioeconomic justice, which is the main problem I have identified in the work of the TRC in this essay and elsewhere (Boesak 2005:171-212). True reconciliation means not just the healing of broken relationships (however important that may be) or even reparations – assuming the government is willing to pay for it (which this government was not and the TRC did not ask reparations from the perpetrators). Reconciliation in its deepest sense is transformation – of the individual, the community and the systems of society (economic and political) in order for justice to effect genuine restoration: of integrity, of human dignity and of human contentment, which makes reconciliation as the expression of compassionate justice and love not only possible but durable (Boesak 2008:633-654).

Our contention is not only that the TRC's only choice was not just between retributive and restorative justice, revenge and forgiveness, but following Mamdani, it was incumbent upon the TRC to advance the gains made at Kempton Park, to move from victim's justice to survivor's justice and from the foundation of political justice to social justice. For Christians, social justice is also the indispensable biblical demand and, inasmuch as the TRC vested itself with an explicitly Christian understanding of reconciliation, that demand is unavoidable and irrevocable (Tutu 1999:86; Smit 2007:325-342; Boesak 2005:171-212).

I am speaking here of the justice *required* by the Lord that deals directly with iniquitous decrees and oppressive statues and practices. As Wolterstorff says, it is primary and rectifying justice, the overturning of injustice and the bringing of justice. This is to be done as Yahweh's and Jesus' cause, especially towards the ones at the bottom, the lowly and the downtrodden whose daily condition is one of injustice (Wolterstorff 2008:75ff.).

The TRC could have called for *distributive* justice, and it would have produced a better result than the mere juxtaposition of vengeful punishment and restorative justice. In this we follow Hebrew Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann who asserts:

> The intention of Mosaic justice is to redistribute social goods and social power; thus it is distributive justice. This justice recognises that social goods and social power are unequally and destructively distributed in Israel's world (and derivatively in any social context), and that the wellbeing of the community requires that social goods and power to some extent be given by those who have too much, for the sake of those who do not have enough (1997:736-737).

Tutu's direct call upon Jesus at the TRC would also have made it natural for the TRC to heed the New Testament not only in its call for forgiveness, but also in its call for radical justice, despite what Wolterstorff calls its "dejusticising" (Wolterstorff 2008:96-108) and Richard Horsley its "depoliticising" (Horsley 2003) by many. "If there is forgiveness in the New Testament", says Wolterstorff, "there has to be justice in the New Testament" (2008:109): Jesus is "the One who brings justice", is the conclusion of his utterly convincing exposition (2008:115).

The spirit of ubuntu

But what about *ubuntu*? The word has figured prominently in and since the work of the TRC. (Smit 2007:340) The latter was driven by "the spirit of *ubuntu*", as Archbishop Tutu states, and it was the compelling force behind the desire to find forgiveness in extraordinarily painful, almost impossible moments. Tutu speaks glowingly about *ubuntu* and its meaning, and he is not the only one (Lesiba Teffo in Makgoba 1999:146-169).

Not everyone sees it this way. Richard Wilson recalls how, in the amnesty process, the word *ubuntu* was used to persuade the victims of apartheid to once again make the sacrifices, something which "was never demanded of the perpetrators" (Graybill 2002:35; Boesak 2005:186). Convinced that *ubuntu* was used as a sort of emotional blackmail, Wilson rejects the term as "a current invention" (Graybill 2002:33; Boesak 2005:198).

I will not say that. *Ubuntu* is doubtless an enormously powerful philosophy and as a "concept of brotherhood [sic] and unity for survival" it does "empower people to love and respect each other" (Teffo 1999:164). It is indeed everything that Desmond Tutu claims, and in 1976 I already concluded my dissertation with a call upon *ubuntu* as "gospel truth" (Boesak 1984:152). However, the question now is whether *ubuntu* is an adequate concept for our situation, and for all its humanising aspects. Does it *enable* us to bring about the justice Christians are called to as required by the Lord?

The concept of *ubuntu* might doubtless have inspired some to forgive. But did it enable the doing of systemic justice and the undoing of systemic injustice? Regrettably, the answer is "no". *Ubuntu* led to a recommendation to the government to pay reparations and a call on the business community to play a *voluntary* role in compensating black people

for the disadvantages of apartheid. But clearly, as Sampie Terreblanche correctly argues, the exploitation of blacks did not happen voluntarily. "It was compulsory and systemic", embedded in a network of compulsory legislation and justified by ideologies "that were propagated as self-evident truths". To expect big business to compensate *voluntarily* and *to the necessary degree* for injustices done over a century is both "idealistic and naïve" (Terreblanche 2000:268). Even though the ANC claims *ubuntu* as philosophical possession, it did not feel morally or politically compelled by it to do what was right.

Ubuntu is based on the recognition of human worth and the interconnectedness of all persons, but it has scarcely offered an imperative for the restoration of worth and human integrity of women, and certainly not for homosexual persons, for example. It assumes an interdependent humanity, but it does not speak of the systemic inequalities that today prevail in the relationships, systemic, personal and communal, of women and men, rich and poor, threatening or obliterating human dignity in South Africa. It appeals to assumptions of solidarity but it does not speak of rights and wrongs, of oppression and liberation. Justice may be implied, but it is not demanded. Nowhere is *ubuntu* used to critique and challenge the fact that our society is organised in a way that deliberately places some (the wealthy and privileged elite) at the top and others (the impoverished masses) at the bottom. Doing justice means that one does not only recognise that the other is human, but that the other is not trampled upon, purposely placed and kept at the bottom.

Again it is Nicholas Wolterstorff who offers an extremely valuable insight in this regard. It is an insight crucial to our understanding of justice, of rights and wrongs, and of the bringing of justice to the wronged. "Metaphors common in present day discourse", he writes, "are those of *the margin* and *the outside*" (Wolterstorff 2008:123-124). Some people are in the centre, some on the circumference, and some are on the outside. However, Biblical writers worked instead with the image of up and down. Some are at the top of the social hierarchy and some are at the bottom. They are at the bottom not because of their own fault; they are there because they are downtrodden. Those at the top "trample the heads of the poor into the dust of the earth" (Amos 2:7).

> When centre and *circumference* are one's basic metaphors, the undoing of justice will be described as *including* the outsiders. When *up* and *down* are one's basic metaphors, the undoing of injustice will be described as *lifting up* those at the bottom. The poor do not have to be included in the social order; they have always been there, usually indispensable to its functioning. They have to be lifted up (2008:123).

The aim, it seems to me, is not charity or even solidarity, but equality:

> God raises the poor from the dust,
>
> And lifts the needy from the ash heap
>
> To make them sit with princes (Ps. 113:7).

This is also true of the New Testament, Wolterstorff argues. A striking feature of the New Testament writings and of Jesus' preaching is the frequency with which the up-and-down metaphor, so common in the writings of the Old Testament, is employed to say something that the Old Testament writers at most hint at. "The rectification of injustice requires not only the *lifting up* of the low ones but *casting down* the high ones. The coming of justice requires social inversion" (Wolterstorff 2008:123).

Ubuntu knows no such call. It is a wonderful concept that calls upon values without which human community is not really possible, but justice is irreplaceable. *Ubuntu* needs the imperative to the doing of justice and the undoing of injustice that is so pervasive in the Bible, the imperative towards the radical overturning of the unjust social order so that justice is done. For the doing of even the little righteousness we need the full power of the conviction that justice is Yahweh's cause, as it is the cause of Jesus; that the pursuit of justice for the lowly and the downtrodden, the weak and the wronged is our enduring calling: "Justice and only justice you shall pursue" (Deut. 16:18-20).

Beyond Kempton Park and the TRC this remains our responsibility. Not on our own, as Dirkie Smit reminds us, but "alongside suffering and hopeless people", not "with good words alone" or as "weary sceptics", but doing what we must do "even at the risk of making mistakes", helping those who suffer "by strengthening their courage not to be content with the corruption and evil of the world but even within this horizon to look ahead and not back" (Smit 2007:371).

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Diversity in unity – Voices from the past, the focus on Belhar and the on-going quest for unity

"When the reconciliation in Christ becomes visible it will be a sermon that echoes around the world"

P. F. Theron (Die Kerkbode, 23 June 1982)

ABSTRACT

This contribution focuses on the on-going ecclesiological quest by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) family to become a visible, living and practicing *diversity in unity*. It highlights remarkably clear and foundational theological contributions with regard to this matter, by trustworthy voices from inside (e.g. individuals like Botha, Durand, Jonker as well as by several church meetings and synods) and outside (e.g. theologians like J Calvin and K Barth) the DRC Family, in opposition to wrong ecclesiological convictions and practice. In relation to this the core focus of the Confession of Belhar on the church as visible and as *diversity in unity*, is emphasised as foundational to the character of the church of Christ. Guiding perspectives on this fundamental truth are also drawn from important contributions by Dirkie Smit, in particular from his thoughts on the ecclesiology in the Confession of Belhar.

THEOLOGICAL VOICES PRECEDING BELHAR

Over the past fifty years, the quest for the *one visible church* of Christ received continuous attention within the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) family[2] in South Africa. At times this quest dominated church debates and practices. In the midst of serious discord, trustworthy voices kept calling the church *back to its roots and its foundation in Jesus Christ.*

Dirkie Smit's contributions gave and continue to give credible guidance in the international discourse on (for example 2008a and b; 2010a) and the practice of church unity within the DRC family in particular (for example 1992; 2010b). He was intimately involved in the birth of the Belhar Confession in 1982. This confession's vivid and self-evident focus on lived church unity

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2 The four racially/culturally separated DRC denominations/Churches in South Africa in 1960 were the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC– – for whites); Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC – for coloureds); Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA – for blacks) and the Reformed Church in Africa for Indians).

continues to challenge the fragmented DRC family in South Africa and the church worldwide.[3]

What follows broadly reminds of the nature of the theological discourse that preceded the birth and informs the focus of Belhar, and that this focus should be maintained today.

Discerning contributions before Belhar's adoption in 1986[4] came from individual voices,[4] church conferences, associations[5] and synods[6] These called attention to the theological truth that the church as the body of Jesus Christ is fundamentally to be understood as diversity in unity,[7] comprising of people who naturally have obvious differences, represent diverse cultures, may not prefer each other's company, yet form the one visible, reconciled body (Eph. 2) that confesses and lives the truth that "Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:10-11) and that He reigns over this church and over all else (Eph. 1:20-23).

In the early 1960s, three respected voices from different contexts, David Botha, Jaap Durand and Willie Jonker,[8] emphasised this truth and its implications for the DRC family's ecclesiology

3 Belhar was formally adopted by the Protestant Church of Belgium in 2001 and the Reformed Church of America in 2010. Its is currently under consideration for adoption in 2012 by the Christian Reformed Church of North America and the Presbyterian Church of the USA.

4 Some public voices in the quest for visible church unity in South Africa before Belhar's formal adoption in 1986, besides those mentioned in this article, included Beyers Naudé, Nico Smith, Ben Marais, John de Gruchy, Johan Heyns, Allan Boesak, Bernard Lategan, Adrio König, Bernard Combrinck, Douglas Bax, Willem Nicol, Willem Vorster, G. J. Swart, O'Brien Geldenhuys, Klippies Kritzinger, Willem Saayman, Ettiene de Villiers, Johann Kinghorn, Richard Stevens, A. B. du Toit, Lex van Wyk, Hannes Adonis, Piet Meiring, Lukas Mabusela, Henri Lederle, Chris Loff, Phil Robinson, Daan Cloete, Chris Botha, Jan Mettler, J. W. Hofmeyr, Andrew Esterhuizen, Nico Botha, Gerrie Lubbe and the 123 signatories to The Open Letter of June 1982.

5 For example, the strong plea for visible church unity at the 1979 ecumenical South African Christian Leadership Assembly (SACLA) meeting in Pretoria; the 1981 ABRECSA (Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in Southern Africa) Charter (De Gruchy, 1983); the DRC family workshop on What is Mission? in Bellville during April 1986 (cf. Robinson and Botha, 1986).

6 For example, the serious theological reflections and decisions on visible church unity at the 1975 General Synod of the DRCA, the DRMC synods of 1978 and 1982, the 1983 DRC Western Cape Synod.

7 The enlightening publication in the 1950s by W. A. Visser 't Hooft, then General Secretary of WCC, Tot Eenheid Geroepen (Called to Unity) stressed that unity in Christ calls for its visible expression in common faith, sharing in the sacraments, common ministry and life in community in every place where the church is planted. It does not call for uniformity since the New Testament church was characterised by an almost bewildering diversity of ministries and they rejoiced in the variety of spiritual gifts (1958:109-110). The WCC Assembly of 1961 stated that "the unity which God promises and to which He calls his church is a unity of Christians 'made visible as all in each place who are baptised into Jesus Christ … are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread'" (Braaten 2003:11).

8 D. P. Botha's book, which reflected on the position and development of the members of the DRMC in particular and so called coloured people in general, was published in 1960. He was pastor in four DRMC congregations (19481980), the actuarius (19621974) and moderator (19741982) of the DRMC, and editor of Die Ligdraer (the official mouth piece of the DRMC) (19791990). Jaap Durand's doctoral dissertation was published in 1961. Durand was pastor in two Xhosaspeaking congregations of the DRCA, was appointed Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of the Western Cape in 1973 and its Vice Chancellor from 1981 to 1994. Willie Jonker's Mission Regulations of the DRC of Transvaal was published in June 1962. He was pastor in two DRC congregations, actuarius of the DRC Northern Transvaal (19611963), and Professor of Systematic Theology at Stellenbosch University from 1971 until 1992. Dirkie Smit interacted closely with all three: Botha tutored him in the practice of congregational ministry in the Bellville DRMC (1975); Smit was an undergraduate and doctoral student of Jonker's

and missiology. Their perspectives fundamentally challenged the official position of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC),[9] as well as apartheid ideology and practice. This stirred intense debate, caused uneasiness, conversion for some and essentially contributed to the birth of Belhar.

In 1960, *David Botha*[10] pleaded on sociological and theological grounds that the white and so called coloured sections of society should be regarded as one people. Botha's view as pastor and church leader on the nature and visible embodiment of the church is particularly relevant. His theological reflections, experiences in congregations and perspective on the relationship between white and coloured people in broader society, led him to oppose the reigning theological convictions and motivation for separation within church and society. He called for one synodic structure in the DRC family and for open membership across the colour line where people resided and worked within the same geographical context. He also argued strongly against colour prejudice amongst white people, resisted the push for physical separation in favour of contact amongst the different groups and races in the church and in society, proposed a new demarcation of presbyteries and regional synods where colour prejudice would no longer prevail and strongly rejected what he called "foolish, blind, irrational class prejudice within the church" (1960:152-157).

(19731979); and he became Durand's colleague at UWC (19812000) and co-authored the Belhar Confession with Durand, Gustav Bam, Izak Mentor and Allan Boesak (1982).

9 See, for example, the report of the ad hoc committee for race relations, appointed by the former Federal Council of white Dutch Reformed Churches in SA: *The DR Churches in SA and the Problem of Race Relations* (1956). The report describes the belief of the DRC at the time that unity "is to be found in the very nature of the Church of Christ." However, the report also states that "[i]t is not found in the institutionalised or organised Church, which appears in numerous different and often conflicting forms" (7). In its "Doctrinal Approach" the report states that "because of the depraved and finite nature of people, the ecclesia of the New Testament is still imperfectly manifested, realised on earth." The context (for example, racial contrasts and tensions in South Africa) clearly overrides sound theological principles on unity. The synods could, therefore, declare: "In its essence the Church is the one mystical body of Christ before God in its spiritual reality this unity must be stressed as strongly as possible the unity of the Church remains the Christian ideal. Further (paragraph 3): "This, however, does not mean that the one true Church cannot be embodied in separate independent Churches, which in truth confess the Christ of Holy Scripture as their Lord and Saviour (paragraph 5)." Finally, they stated that "the founding and development of independent indigenous churches for the purpose of evangelizing the non-white races of South Africa, was both necessary and in accordance with our understanding of the nature of the Church of the Lord Jesus on earth" (paragraph 7). In the "Declaration of Principles" (paragraph 4) the report used Genesis 11:69 and Acts 17:26 as reference to God's graciousness by which greater diversity was decreed "to restrict the expansion of mankind in its apostasy and insubordination to Him" and "to check the effect of sin" in this way. Paragraph 7 then claimed that "[t]he natural diversity and the different spheres of influence and relationships of authority which God has ordained, are in no way broken down by this unity in Christ, but rather restored and sanctified."See also publications by J. D. Vorster, F. J. M. Potgieter and others during the 1970s. In the 1978 publication on *Pluriformity and Unity,* Vorster wrote: "Nowhere in Scripture is the visible revelation of the unity stated as characteristic of the essence of the Church. It belongs to the wellbeing and not to the being of the Church" (Vorster 1978:78). Later he concurs with T. N. Hanekom, onetime Professor of Church History and Church Law at Stellenbosch: "Let every Church keep its own form, government and authority." Vorster concluded that church pluriformity is acceptable according to Reformed polity and practice, and correct in principle where one finds great ethnic differences (1978:85, 86). The story of the growing opposition to these theological convictions and practices that resulted in the state of confession and the birth of Belhar (1982) is told in Botha and Naudé, 2010.

10 This was also the year of the Sharpville killings, Langa unrest and Cottesloe Church Consultation

With regard to the need for adjustment on the terrain of the church Botha argued

> that "the complete absence of ethnological and cultural distinctiveness of the "Coloureds" made the apartheid formula and even the Tambaram formula for indigenous churches, in distinction of white churches, never applicable to them."

In conclusion, Botha stated that "[a]ll reasons advanced for separation can be unmasked as rationalization. This kind of prejudice is sinful and the church itself will be guilty of sin if it does not combat it with all its power" (1960:157).[11]

Jaap Durand also challenged the reigning theological convictions of the time. In 1961, in his doctoral dissertation he claimed that "*kerugmatik* exigencies" (prerequisites) necessitated an indigenous development of the church in the mission field – not only for the internal life of the church, but also for its concomitant missionary witness. However, Durand insisted, such an indigenous development, taking the particular mission context and distinct needs into account, should never lead to a breach of the church's *visible unity*. The call is for one denomination within which there is room for diversity (Durand 1961:260). In his dissertation and articles he wrote on the ecumenical church (cf. Van Wijk 1964 Durand theologically emphasized the focus of the Reformed fathers (Calvin in particular, as well as Articles 27 to 29 of the Belgic Confession) on the unity of the church as anchored in Christ himself, and which does not exist in the visible church alone but has a clear bearing on the "visible church so that each one of us is united in brotherly unanimity, united [*saamverbind*] together with all the children of God." Because the catholicity and unity of the church is a given in Christ, Durand claimed, we should strive and wrestle to make it visible (in Van Wijk 1964:34-39). Durand stated that wherever the church may be, there the biblical demand for the unity of the church simultaneously applies. The disunity of the church undermines its defense against the diversity of powers that it faces (Van Wijk 1964:83-84).

In 1961, *Willie Jonker* heralded that a people (*volk*) should not structure the church.[12] He thus opposed the regulation (Article 3) of the Transvaal DRC according to which only white people were allowed to be members of the DRC and, as actuaries, Jonker omitted it from the synod's church orderly regulations (1998:53,54).

Jonker also identified clear discriminatory tendencies in the synod's regulations on mission. His consequent 1962 publication in this regard pleaded on theological grounds for visible church unity. Jonker stressed that we may never become complacent about the existing disunity of the church, let alone defend disunity or encourage the church to abandon its pursuit of visible unity of the body of Christ.

According to Jonker, the New Testament knows only *one* church. When the plural form for church is used, it indicates the various local congregations in which the one church of Christ is revealed. Although each congregation locally constitutes the church in its totality, these congregations are not separate from each other but are in the closest possible association.

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11 In the preface to the book, leading Afrikaans author N. P. van Wyk Louw declared: "the brown people are our people and they belong with us" (1960:v). Botha and Louw's perspectives received widespread support in society but also solicited strong opposition in political circles. According to the publisher, reaction came from incumbent Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd himself who, in opposition to Botha and Louw's perspectives, promised not to deviate from the apartheid path (Rousseau 1993:14).

12 Jonker later explicitly declared that his own ecclesiology in the 195060s could not be aligned with apartheid (1998:43).

The essential unity that the one, catholic, Christian church already possesses in Christ should be revealed in a relationship encompassing churches in all locations and countries (1962:25).

"The manifestation of the multitude of churches that stand over and against each other is a sinful dissension [*sondige verskeurdheid*]", Jonker stated (1962:28). He continued his plea that

"[w]e may not rest, before the different churches of whom we cannot say that they represent the false church, also visibly show their unity. All that is still church should, in obedience to the Word of God, be united. This will not be happening spontaneously. We should wrestle to come to agreement with each other in the light of the Word. But this alone will be true ecumenicity that the question of truth will be put in all seriousness and that the unity of the whole body of Christ will be earnestly sought. Only in doing so can a responsible and common witness be rendered in response to the false church, in whichever shape it may reveal itself (Article 29, Belgic Confession)" (1962:28).

Jonker claimed that "there should only be one church of Jesus Christ in the world." National borders, nation (*volk*), language and cultural differences should not divide the church of Jesus Christ (1962:29).

Jonker also emphasised the necessity for indigenisation in order to penetrate all the layers of peoples' and societies' thinking and practices. But he was also clear about what that could not mean: "After all had been said, we must however maintain that it should not mean that a separate church should come into being for each people [volk]." Jonker was clear that "the diversity of nations must be revealed within the one communion [*verband*] of the church of Christ on earth" (1962:30-31).

"This other thing also is to be ranked among the chief evils of our time, viz., that the churches are so divided, that human fellowship is scarcely now in repute amongst us, far less that Christian intercourse which all make a profession of, but few sincerely practice Thus is it that the members of the body lie bleeding. So much does this concern me, that, if I could be of any service, I would not grudge to even cross ten seas, if need be on account of it (in Vischer 2000:29)."[13]

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13 Voices from 1981 and 1982 (the year of the birth of Belhar) indicated the same, for example: The ABRECSA Charter (1981) stated: "The unity of the Church must visibly be manifest in the one people of God. The indivisibility of the body of Christ demands that the barriers of race, culture, ethnicity, language and sex be transcended" (in De Gruchy 1983:161, point 1.1.e); the doctoral dissertation of Hannes Adonis, pastor in the DRMC on the Cape Flats (later Professor of Church History and Church Law at UWC and Stellenbosch), analysed the DRC's mission policy of 1933 and emphasised the incorrect use of diversity as a principle to structure community in church and society (Adonis 1982:200ff). With his paper of April 1986 (1986:163-165), Adonis assisted colleagues to grasp the unfortunate consequences of this policy and to eventually confess the DRC family's guilt with regard to the disunity of the church (cf. Robinson and Botha 1986:62-86). In his article on the context of the so called Open Letter (Bosch, König and Nicol 1982:33-52), David Bosch stated that the quest for visible unity has to do with mission. If the carriers of the gospel are untrustworthy, then the gospel they preach becomes suspect. However, if their daily conduct radiates love, forgiveness and reconciliation, the world outside the church is drawn to Christ by the magnetism of their witness (1982:52). Bosch concluded with what Flip Theron (later Professor of Systematic Theology at Stellenbosch University) wrote in *Die Kerkbode* (the official mouthpiece of the DRC) of 23 June 1982: "When the reconciliation in Christ becomes visible among us, it will be a sermon that echoes around the world."

Calvin's passionate and consistent commitment to the unity of the body of Christ was lived out within the reality of an already fragmented church. In the midst of division, he acknowledged the *one Lord of the one Church,* stressing repeatedly that Christ's body is one, that there is no justification for a divided church, and that schisms within churches are a scandal (WARC, 2007).

Calvin's willingness to mediate controversial matters such as the Lord's Supper, and his tireless efforts to build bridges at every level of church life, still stand as a contemporary challenge to this day for churches to understand the causes of continuing separation and, in accordance with Scripture, to strive towards visible unity by engaging in concrete ecumenical efforts, all for the sake of the gospel's credibility in the world, and the fidelity of the church's life and mission (WARC, 2007).[14]

Karl Barth reiterates Calvin's perspectives, gives guidance regarding the nature of the unity of the church, and stresses that its disunity ought to be rejected (1974, *CD* 4/1:675-677 – On the Being of the Community). For Barth many churches imply many Lords, many Spirits, many Gods. He claims:

> "There is no question about it: to the degree that Christendom exists in Churches which are really different and opposed to each other, to the degree she is denying in practice what she acknowledges in theory, the unity and uniqueness of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost … [Therefore] whatever good reasons there may be for the beginning of such schisms, whatever serious obstacles there may be to ending them, whatever interpretations and extenuations may be made of them, nothing alters the fact that every schism is as such a dark riddle, a scandal."

In Barth's opinion the whole of Christendom ought at least be one in this: that we can think of it only as a constant subject of repentance, and not on any of our parts a repentance to be expected from others, but one in which we are willing to meet others, cost what it may.

> "Anyone who is prepared to come to terms with schism in the Church, being at ease with it, tranquil about it, may be a good loyal believer in some sense that belongs to his [sic] particular denomination – a good Roman or Calvinist or Orthodox or Baptist – but he must not think that he can possibly be a good Christian. He has not honestly and seriously believed and known and confessed the *una ecclesia* [one church]. For the *una ecclesia* cannot exist if there is a second or third side by side or opposed to it. It cannot exist in opposition to another church. It cannot be one among many."

Barth stresses that the New Testament knows nothing of the plurality we know of in the church today. In view of the being of the community as the body of Christ it is – ontologically – quite impossible, he argues; it is possible only as sin is possible. Thus Barth is clear that we should not deduce this plurality of churches,

> "as if though the contradictions are necessities from the *una ecclesia,* as though this Church had to be divided into the churches of the East and the West, the Church of the West into Romanist and the Evangelical, the Evangelical Church into the Lutheran and Reformed and Anglican, as though there was no trouble, no disorder …"[15]

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14 Cf. also the WARC 2000 publication by Vischer, *Pia Conspiratio, Calvin's Legacy and the Divisions of the Reformed Churches Today*.

15 Cf. CD 4/1, *"upbuilding of the community",* perspective on the confession: *credo unam ecclesiam in the*

BELHAR'S FOCUS ON DISUNITY IN UNITY

Despite the authoritative theological voices in South Africa to the contrary, the lack of visible unity was evident at the beginning of the 1980s. Within the established separate Dutch Reformed Churches, denominational branches for different races and cultures were firmly believed to be theologically sound doctrine and church practice.[16]

The prophetic calls for ecclesiological conversion were not heeded. Nor were the passionate pleas for visible church unity by the national synods of the DRCA (1975) and the DRMC (1978) attended to by the DRC.[17] A growing disunity and estrangement amongst the DRC family of churches and its members in South Africa was the unfortunate result.

In South African society between the late 1970s and early 1990s, the political polarisation between race groups became unmanageable. Peace and calm disappeared, communities organised protest actions and the government effectively lost control. On the borders the South African Defence Force was waging war and domestically a low level civil war developed.

With the DRC family caught up in these worsening conditions and while the church was struggling to find fundamental, biblical guidance to address the reigning false doctrine on unity, the Belhar Confession was born. The DRMC General Synod of October 1982 basically confessed that the church[18] could no longer contradict the gospel with its order, its life and its witness (Smit, 2010b).

Belhar is a remarkable ecclesiological confession (Botha and Naudé 2010:176), at heart it is a confession about the unity of the church (Smit 2010a, par. 6). In 1982, the DRMC was convinced that on the issue of unity no differences of opinion should exist because the heart of the gospel clearly teaches such unity. The opposite – disunity between fellow believers – was rejected as an error, "a false doctrine, which misleads many, without them realizing it" (Smit 2010b).

Belhar confesses three things about unity?[19] First, that the church is already one, called from the entire human family into unity, as a gift, within the powerful bond of the Holy Spirit; one with our brothers and sisters, irrespective of who or where they are. We cannot choose or refuse our brothers and sisters, we receive them. We are invisibly and spiritually one; only one church, one body of Christ, one people of God, one "building of the Spirit". We believe and confess this *gift* of unity, the *reality* of this unity, this *bond* of the Spirit.

Second, this *spiritual unity must be visibly lived and practised.* The reconciliation in Christ must be recognisable in the church – man and woman, slave and free no longer count. The unity is a gift but also a calling (an obligation) and must be pursued, sought, and must constantly be built up. Christ binds us together as a visible community of faith. Reconciled with God and with one another, we are given the opportunity to mutually serve and enrich one another

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face of scandal of disunity.

16 Cf. J. D. Vorster 1978. Contributors to the latter work were F. J. Botha, F. J. M. Potgieter, E.P.J. Kleynhans, C. I. van Heerden, D. S. Snyman, J. H. Roos, A. P. Treurnicht and S. J. Eloff.

17 The DRC rather continued its theology of separation in its policy document of 1974, *Ras, Volk en Nasie. Volkereverhoudinge in die Lig van die Skrif* (Race, People and Nation. Race Relations in Light of Scripture).

18 Belhar's birth and its context are recorded in Botha and Naudé 2010:37-72.

19 Smit summarised the confession's focus on unity in three points at the URCSA Cape Synod on 27 September 2010 (Smit 2010b). f also Botha and Naudé 2010:61-63.

with our variety of gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, languages and cultures. This was not, of course, a novel idea. The Heidelberg Catechism underlines this unity of the faithful and teaches – in Q. and A. 54 and 55 – that we are called to use our gifts for the wellbeing and benefit of one another.

Everything that threatens this living unity must be resisted and has no place in the church. All division, enmity and hate amongst people and groups are sins and, therefore, already conquered in Christ. The unity must become visible *so that the world may believe,* that is the simple point, so that the world may see that the unity in the church transcends all personal, natural and cultural differences and divisions, so that the world may believe in the gospel of the love of God (Jn. 17:20-23).

Third, regarding *the way* unity should become visible: What does visible unity look like? What are we striving for? What do we long for and work for? What do we pray for and what do we dream of? Belhar responds to this question with a threefold confession. The visible unity a) includes, not excludes, a rich and wondrous variety and diversity, b) can take form only in freedom and not under constraint and pressure, coercion and force, c) is diversity and freedom "within the one visible people of God" – *this* is what we confess, pray and work for.

Belhar rejects any teaching that uses diversity or sinful division among people in a manner that hinders or disrupts visible and effective church unity. The view should be condemned that believers may share the same confession while being organised in different ways in different churches because of the existence of diversity and the absence of reconciliation. Finally, Belhar rejects any teaching that refuses to declare it sinful not to pursue the visible unity of the church as a precious gift.

The quest continues

Smit stated before the URCSA Cape Synod in 2010 that "[p]recisely this visible unity was at stake then [in 1982 and before – JGB], as it still is today". He emphasised that

"[m]any confess the invisible and spiritual unity but deny that it needs to become visible, living and practical. We deny it with our words, with our actions, with our omissions. We confess with the tongue, but do we truly oppose everything that threatens the visible unity?"

This, Smit maintained, is "the challenging question everywhere in the worldwide church today" (Smit 2010b).

It is true that some strategic, hope giving interactions and structural unification took place in and around the DRC family with regard to the practice of visible diversity in unity. Since 1982 Belhar became a yardstick in the structural church reunification process between the members of the DRC family. Occasionally hope giving decisions were taken by some DRC synods with regard to church unity.[20]

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20 One example is the following decision taken by the DRC Western/Southern Cape Synod in 1987 (Acts 161: point 2): "Synod is in favour of one church relation (denomination) for the DR Church family. One church relation is formed when separate congregations with the same confession and church polity are grouped together in broader church gatherings to give effect to essential church unity. Such a church relation may be structured in various ways" [my translation – JGB]. Since this decision was taken, several DRC General Synods (between 1990 and 2007) resolved to pursue visible church unity with sister

Laudable and credible (yet partial) unification did occur: in the 1994 reunification of the DRMC and DRCA to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa in the light of Belhar's call for diversity in unity; in the establishment of the United Synodic Commission for Witness (CFW) of the DRC family in the Cape region in 1991; in the joint congregational ministries of the DRC family in the Western Cape from 2002 to 2010; in the unification of the diaconal/ service ministries of the DRC family in the Cape region since 2006; in the national United Ministry for Service and Witness (UMSW) of the DRC family of churches in the RSA and Namibia through a process that started in the 1990s and that was concluded in 2008; in the establishing of the united presbyteries of Wesland, Stellenbosch and Caledon Presbyteries; in the joint efforts regarding theological training at Stellenbosch, Pretoria and Bloemfontein; in joint projects in which members of the DRC family combine their efforts annually to develop tools for use in congregations, for example, the Lectionary for preaching, liturgical guidance, Bible study and group interaction, as well as guidelines for the Week of Prayer and Pentecost (Botha and Naudé 2010:73-93; 156-164).

However, the separate churches within the DRC family in South Africa have still not been fully united into the one, visible church of Jesus Christ for which he prayed and gave his life, which the gospel proclaims and Belhar confesses. The quest continues for the credible, visible unity to which we are called in Scripture, which is more than agreeing and declaring together that we are one, which also includes a process of open worship, of life together, of the healing of memories, of continuous praying for this unity, of journeying together, of together seeking compassionate justice [21]

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churches in the RCA and Namibia (cf. Botha and Naudé 2010: chapters 5, 7 and 8).
21 Cf. the probing papers by Scherle (2010) on "how unity is deepened" and Smit (2010a) in response to the question on "the kind of unity we want (need) and should pursue today.

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KEY WORDS
Ecclesiological quest
One, reconciled, visible body
One communion
Diversity in unity
Belhar Confession
The world believe

TREFWOORDE
Ekklesiologiese soeke
Een, versoende, sigbare liggaam
Een gemeenskap
Diversiteit in gemeenskap
Belhar Belydenis
Dat die wêreld mag glo

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DJS as "populist" theologian – On Dirkie Smit's newspaper column

ABSTRACT

Dirkie Smit's weekly newspaper column, written under the pseudonym DJS, is understood as constituting an important part of his academic theological literature. One of the characteristic theological perspectives found in these columns is the problematizing of any clear distinction between "church theology" and "public theology". A further typical element of these columns is that forms of interpretation in which both "points of departure" as well as "hermeneutical horizons" appear, but these do not function in any contrasting way. Amazement and hope are themes often found in the columns. The column's inherited title, "Geestelike Waardes" [Spiritual Values], can even be interpreted in those written by Smit as referring to the often-made distinction between "spiritual" and world in the ways he breaks through this distinction. Finally, the contrast of "public" and "popularistic" is analysed with reference to these columns.

INTRODUCTION

A study of Dirkie Smit's theology that considers only his long list of scholarly publications will be incomplete. A characteristic of his theological work is also the commitment and energy with which he puts his academic knowledge and insight at the service of a broader circle than only that of fellow scholars in his field. Just how important and indispensable he finds this aspect of his work is attested to by the fact that – despite his very full programme as an internationally respected scholar and his duties as a teacher and supervisor – he almost never declines an invitation to lead a church service, offer courses to congregations, provide further education to pastors, get involved with ecumenical initiatives and serve on synodical committees and other church bodies. He is, moreover, the author or co-author of countless essays, sermons and sermon frameworks, analyses of biblical writings, accessible works on theological themes and official church documents like discussion papers, reports and public statements (cf. Vosloo 2007:398-399).

A special place in this more than merely academic oeuvre is occupied by Smit's weekly column, Geestelike Waardes (Spiritual Values), in the Afrikaans daily Die Burger. Under the pseudonym DJS, Smit has been responsible for this column uninterruptedly for almost 15 years – since the death of his predecessor, the Old Testament scholar Ferdinand Deist.[2] What makes the

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1 †

2 Deist's predecessor was another Stellenbosch (systematic) theologian, Willie Jonker (Smit's doctoral supervisor who also became his father-in-law), who was responsible for the column from 1974 to 1992. Before this, since the early 1950s, the Stellenbosch New Testament scholar Jac Müller was responsible for the column under the pseudonym Soeker (Searcher) (Van der Westhuizen 1996; Smit, personal communication).

column unique in comparison to his other writings is the extent to which it also addresses readers outside or on the margins of the church. During my stint as editor of *Die Burger's* book page, several authors, literary scholars and journalists without any church affiliation shared with me their appreciation for both the style and content of Smit's column. Given the quality, extent and multidimensional nature of this part of Smit's work, one hopes that it will, at some stage, become the subject of thorough scholarly research (for example, in a doctoral thesis) from a theological, literary and/or media studies perspective. In this article, however, I can only highlight briefly some striking characteristics of Smit's newspaper column as theology.

"ECCLESIAL" OR "PUBLIC" THEOLOGY?

What kind of theology does one find in Smit's column? In systematic theological circles a colleague's position within the discipline is sometimes roughly (and always unfairly) indicated in terms of two contemporary trends that might be called "ecclesial theology" and "public theology" respectively. The former recalls, on the one hand, Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics (Barth 2004), with which some "ecclesial" theologians consciously identify, but on the other hand, more negatively, also the Kairos Document's rejection of so-called "church theology" as a theology that, in attempting to remain politically neutral, actually helps maintain the status quo (Kairos Theologians 1986) – an interpretation that no "ecclesial" theologian will apply to him- or herself. Theologians often associated with "ecclesial" theology[3] believe that theology should primarily serve the church – for instance by unravelling the internal coherence and implications of church doctrine, unlocking the "grammar" of the language of faith (cf. Lindbeck 1984) and continually reminding the church of its deepest origin and calling.

By contrast, "public" theologians[4] consciously seek to address a broader audience; deal with issues that society as a whole, rather than Christians only, are concerned with; speak a language that is also comprehensible outside the church; and participate actively in public debates and processes in order to serve the common good. Whereas many "ecclesial" theologians lean strongly on Barth, the modern church father of many (but by no means all) "public" theologians is perhaps Paul Tillich with his search for "correlation" between faith and (a broad concept of) culture (cf. esp. Tillich 1951:59-65).

Smit's theology can hardly be mapped in terms of this opposition, partly because he tends to question the uncritical way in which concepts such as "church" and "public" are often employed in theological discussions. As far as ecclesiology is concerned he often reminds us, among other things, that the church exists not only as denominations, but in many forms, which include local congregations, worshipping communities, the ecumenical church, individual believers, and voluntary action groups, organisations and initiatives (cf. Smit 2002:243ff.). From this perspective one could argue that, in Smit's newspaper column, even when questions of faith are not explicitly raised, the church is nevertheless speaking. Furthermore, if Smit's understanding of the church is correct, then no clear boundary can be drawn between church and context, since these two realities, though distinguishable, are inextricably intertwined so that the Christian audience is part of the broader audience. That is to say, even as a "public" theologian addressing a "general" audience in a "secular" daily, Smit practises "ecclesial" theology.

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3 Such as Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank and Bram van de Beek.
4 Such as William Storrer, Keith Clements, John de Gruchy or Heinrich Bedford-Strohm.

The question of what "public" means is also addressed by Smit in a fashion that raises questions about the instinctive use of this term in theological discourse and the uncritical way in which theologians sometimes take up the ideal of "public" relevance and involvement (cf. for example, Smit 2007). In connection to this he, inter alia, points to the fact that a distinguishable public sphere, linked to the romanticism (whether nostalgic or idealistic) of power free public discourse characterised by rationality, truth and truthfulness, is a late modern phenomenon, and that the assumptions and values on which the dominant discourse on the "public" rests are both historically-sociologically and theologically questionable. In others words, as an "ecclesial" theologian who highlights forgotten and suppressed implications of the language of faith, Smit also functions as a "public" theologian asking critical questions about widely accepted assumptions and expectations concerning public life.

Smit's critical insights into the concepts "church" and "public" are not only useful for characterising his role as a columnist but are also addressed in the column itself. A constantly recurring theme in his column – sometimes in conversation with the Afrikaans author and poet N.P. van Wyk Louw – is precisely the various ways in which language and communication function in the interactions between people and the shared lives of communities. In the column Oop Gesprek (Open Discussion) (Smit 2005:270-271[5]), for instance, he sketches Louw's seductive analysis of the ideal of an open discussion (cf. Louw 1987:415ff.), but also evokes the experience of frustration and disappointment in this regard:

> Ironically, the truth of Van Wyk Louw's words is also highlighted by our negative experiences, by our failure to communicate truthfully, by confusion in our talking and living with one another, and by our persistence in the ways of misunderstanding, mutual estrangement and violence … Jürgen Habermas, the founder of discourse ethics, writes … with much concern and disappointment about the future. If even dialogue does not help, he writes, if in fact it does not even occur, what then remains? … Of course, family therapists know this even better …[6]

Against this background, so accurately and movingly sketched in a view words, the reader suspects that the concluding sentence must be a double edged sword: "The mere willingness to talk and listen is itself already a form of love."[7]

In the column Oor Woorde en Dade en Feeste en Dinge (On Words and Deeds and Feasts and Things), published during the annual Woordfees (Word Fest) in Stellenbosch, Smit also addresses the destructive potential of words, but now as one aspect of a variety of possible speech acts, and in the almost eschatological perspective – admittedly somewhat melancholically – of the longing for a true feast of words ("Our words … which, thanks to our

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5 A number of the columns have been published in book form (see Smit 2005 and Smit 2009). Where one of those columns is referred to in this article the source reference is to the book in question. The original dates of publication of the columns are unfortunately not mentioned in the books. Some columns that have not (yet) appeared in book form are available online (sometimes incomplete) on Die Burger's website and/or on the discussion page of Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Theology, Sol Iustitiae.

6 "Die waarheid van Van Wyk Louw se woorde word ironies genoeg ook bevestig deur ons negatiewe belewenisse, deur ons mislukking tot ware gesprek, deur ons by-mekaar-verby-praat-en-leef, en deur ons voortgang op paaie van misverstand, onderlinge vervreemding en geweld … Jürgen Habermas, grondlegger van die diskoersetiek, skryf … met groot besorgdheid en ontnugtering oor die toekoms. As selfs gesprek nie help nie, wonder hy, as dit trouens nie eens plaasvind nie, wat bly dán nog oor? … Gesinsberaders weet dit natuurlik nog beter …" [all English translations are my own – GB].

7 "Bloot die bereidheid tot praat en luister is self al 'n vorm van liefde."

gift of the word, could have been a feast of words …").[8] His opening words on the prologue to John's Gospel ("In the beginning was the Word … What might that mean?")[9] serve more as background to his reflections than as basis for his argument. From the biblical text Smit moves to a general reflection on language and meaning:

> That's the problem with words. They have such complex meanings, evoke so many associations – even in a single language – that when they are further translated the semantic fields of the words we grope for simply never correspond sufficiently. The new words we employ do not say everything we wanted to say, and say things we did not mean to say – without us being able to prevent it …[10]

When Smit then also ends with a reference to the Bible (James 3:1-12), it is done in such a manner that it need not necessarily be understood theologically, but does raise questions to which, who knows, the Bible might perhaps suggest answers:

> Our words destroy relationships, put curses on others, label and humiliate the "thems" who are not like "us". Our words are full of evil, they poison relationships. Our words render life – which, thanks to our gift of the word, could have been a feast of words – a hell on earth for many, says [James]. And asks how this can be?[11]

In light of what has been argued and illustrated thus far, the use of the term "public theology" as a characterisation of Smit's work as a columnist should not only be welcomed, but also qualified and approached with strong reservations. There is no question of an idealisation of the public sphere. Later in this article I suggest another characterisation that, by way of contrast, might bring about the necessary qualification.

"POINTS OF CONTACT" AND "HERMENEUTICAL HORIZONS"

As the examples just quoted illustrate, Smit often uses seemingly general, non- ecclesial and non-theological language in his columns to implicitly suggest certain theological insights in a manner which sometimes probably escapes his non-churchgoing (and perhaps also many church-going) readers. The purpose is not to mislead in the sense of "smuggling" faith convictions into seemingly "secular" analyses (cf. Smith 2010). Any such suspicion is ruled out by the fact that the column is entitled Geestelike Waardes and contains many contributions in which traditional faith language is indeed used. What Smit succeeds in – and probably also aims to achieve – with his "hidden" theological references is to bring to the fore aspects of present-day life – not only the cracks and dark corners, but also the magnificent light – that, to be sure, do not require a Christian faith perspective in order to be recognised, but nevertheless are placed in a new perspective for "those who have eyes to see".

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8 "Ons woorde … wat danksy ons gawe-van-die-woord 'n woordféés kon wees …"

9 "In die begin was die Woord … Wat sou dit kon beteken?"

10 "Dis … die ding met woorde. Hulle het sulke komplekse betekenisse, roep sovele assosiasies op – alreeds in één taal – dat as hulle vérder ver-taal word die velde van betekenis van die woorde wat ons soek net nooit lekker ooreenstem nie. Die nuwe woorde wat ons inspan sê nie alles wat ons wóú sê nie, en hulle sê dinge wat ons nié wou sê nie – sonder dat ons dit kan verhelp …"

11 "Ons woorde verwoes verhoudinge, bring vloek oor ander, etiketteer en verneder die 'hulle's' wat nie soos 'ons' is nie. Ons woorde is vol kwaad, vergiftig verhoudinge. Ons woorde maak die lewe – wat danksy ons gawe-van-die-woord 'n woordféés kon wees – vir vele tot hel op aarde, sê [Jakobus]. En vra hoe dit kan wees?"

It may be that many fellow theologians regard Smit as a Barthian to the quick, but of DJS one cannot but conclude that he occasionally (in a very un-Barthian way) tends more in the direction of Tillich's quest for points of contact with Christian faith in common human experiences and impressions! One might even suspect that in this way he takes on, cautiously and subtly, something of Friedrich Schleiermacher's quest to make Christian faith plausible, or at least comprehensible, to its "cultured despisers" (Schleiermacher 1996). DJS an apologist? A mediating theologian?

Another theological perspective from which this approach in his column can be considered is Anthony Thiselton's use of the horizon metaphor from Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical thought (Thiselton 2007). For Thiselton, systematic theology, or as he calls it: "the hermeneutics of doctrine", involves identifying the hermeneutical horizon(s) from which a specific Christian doctrine must be clarified (177ff.). My use of the word "must" has to do with Thiselton's somewhat prescriptive understanding of what counts as appropriate horizons. By contrast, in Smit's column (as in his theology in general), this prescriptive element appears to be absent. The column rather gives the impression of an exploratory yet expectant and receptive search for previously unexploited hermeneutical horizons – a special kind of *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding).

In Smit's column yet another dimension, which is less evident in Thiselton's theological approach, can be discerned, namely, the fact that hermeneutical horizons work in two directions. When a common human experience or an experience typical of life in a particular context, is employed as a horizon from which to clarify an aspect of the Christian faith, it also has the opposite result, namely that the life context in which the horizon has its origin is seen in a new light. This characteristic of hermeneutical horizons emerges strongly in Gadamer's original use of the term "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer 2004:xxxi, 217, 305-06, 337, 341, 367, 390, 533, 578 – italics added), and is often strikingly illustrated in Smit's column. In many cases the question whether Smit uses a contemporary experience to elucidate the faith or rather faith perspectives to elucidate the context can only be answered with: "both at the same time."

One example is the column Wie is nie Siek van al die Geweld nie? (Who is not Sick of all the Violence?) (Smit 2010). Like a good poem it starts with an everyday, recognisable experience or way of speaking, but ends with estrangement from that everydayness, a reversal, which suggests something unexpected, even disturbing:

> But who doesn't feel this way – sick, tired, exhausted with reports of crime, rape, murder? … Indeed, we live in a culture full of violence. It is unnecessary even to tell these stories any longer. Direct violence. Physical violence. Horrific violence. Only politicians can still want to deny this … Surely, in a normal society people need not live imprisoned like this – both in real prisons and in houses, neighbourhoods and streets that feel like prisons? There are simply too many of us in prisons today. It's enough to make one sick.

> But it's even worse. For, hidden in our cultures of violence, says the conflict expert Johan Galtung, is a cultural violence … Our convictions, ideas, opinions justify the inequalities – so that we cannot even see the systemic violence! We are never frightened by it, never wish to talk about it … Even our gods help us justify this world … No, our cultural traditions can themselves be violent, can be prisons … We are always complaining about a culture full of violence, but hardly recognise the culture of violence. Why? Perhaps because cultural violence justifies it in our eyes? Yes we are sick of violence. Perhaps even

more sick than we may think.[12]

Are the experiences of violence and Smit's deepening illustration of how we are all intertwined with them used here to throw light (again, for those with eyes to see) on the nature of sin and the powers, or is it rather that these Christian motifs (only suggestively, to be sure) help us understand the violence in our society anew? Which aspect is being interpreted and which constitutes the hermeneutical horizon from which the interpretation is done?

WONDER AND HOPE

As mentioned earlier, not only the "darkness", but also the "marvellous light" is dealt with in Smit's columns. He writes, among other things, of the beauty of nature, the miracle of love and liberating words or deeds. As far as the latter is concerned many of the columns take the form of a celebration or remembrance of the extraordinary lives and work of certain individuals. While the dark sides of human existence are usually also mentioned in these personal eulogies, the dominant note is nevertheless mostly one of gratitude and hope, of a light that can be neither fathomed nor overcome by the darkness. In the New Year's column In 'n Neutedop (In a Nutshell) (Smit 2005:11-12), dedicated to theologian Denise Ackermann on the occasion of the publication of her book After the Locusts (Ackermann 2003), Smit writes:

A happy new year! This we wish one another. And often also: May it be a year of great things for you!

At the end of [Ackermann's] book follows an afterword to her grandson … it is as if the heart of the book beats here. She reflects on … Julian of Norwich's words: Everything that is, is contained in a hazelnut – small and insignificant as it may seem. Why? Because God created the nut and loves it. That is, after-all, why it exists. In the nut, as in all small and inconspicuous, all ordinary and unremarkable, things … is hidden the mystery of life, since it shares in God's eternal love. That is life, as it were, in a nutshell. That is, therefore, her wish for her grandson: that he will always stand in awe before the seemingly insignificant; that he will always keep noticing the mystery of simple things; that he will keep discerning God's love in everyday things; that he will appreciate the greatness of small things. Now isn't that something to wish one another …? A happy new year, and may it be a year of small things for us![13]

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12 "Maar wie voel nie óók so nie – siek, sat, móég vir berigte oor misdaad, aanranding, moord? … / Vir seker, ons lewe in 'n kultuur vól geweld. Dis onnodig om dié stories nog te vertel. Direkte geweld. Fisieke geweld. Erge geweld. Dis net politici wat dit nog kan wil ontken … Só hoef mense vir seker nie in tronke opgesluit te leef in 'n normale gemeenskap nie – sowel régte tronke, asook huise, buurte en strate wat vóél soos tronke? Daar is eenvoudig te veel van ons in tronke, vandag. Dis om van siek te wees. / Maar dis nóg erger. Want ónder ons kultuur vol geweld skuil 'n kultuur ván geweld, sê geleerdes. Onder die direkte skuil indirekte geweld – strukture, sisteme … Sonder dat iemand 'n hand teen hulle oplig, het talle byna geen kans op geluk, toekoms, lewe nie … Van die wieg af bestem vir swaarkry … Vir vele is die lewe sélf 'n tronk. / Maar dis nóg erger. Want onder ons kulture ván geweld, sê die konflikkenner Johan Galtung, skuil kulturéle geweld … Ons oortuigings, idees, menings regvérdig die ongelykhede – sodat ons die sistemiese geweld nie eens kan sien nie! Nooit dáároor skrik of (wil) praat nie … Selfs ons gode help dié wêreld goedpraat … Nee, ons kulturele tradisies sélf kan gewelddadig wees, trónke … / Ons kla aldag oor die kultuur vól geweld, maar herken beswaarlik die kultuur ván geweld. Hoekom? Dalk omdat kulturele geweld dit in ons oë regverdig? Ja, ons is siek van geweld. Dalk selfs sieker as wat ons mag dink."

13 "Voorspoedige nuwe jaar! wens ons mekaar toe. En dikwels ook: Mag dit vir julle 'n jaar van groot dinge

And listen to what DJS says in Die Wag van Advent (The Waiting of Advent) (Smit 2009:431-32):

> The life of faith is a life of longing, of looking forward, dreaming, persevering – and waiting … thinking of Advent. Every year these four weeks bring a time of longing, of looking forward, dreaming and waiting. Advent is exercise-in-longing … It is exercise-for-the-church-in-the-posture-of-waiting. And how we need this exercise! Do we still even know what it is to long, look forward, dream – and wait? … In our age of immediate fulfilment, of instant everything, of consumption and saturation and the immediate-satisfaction-of-remote-control? … It is rather tragic. For not only faith, but also being human and happiness, yes even love, is kept alive by longing, looking forward – and waiting …[14]

Consider also a column like Vreugde (Joy) (Smit 2009:97-98):

> Is it not strange that we need to be, yes, are commanded to be, full of joy? Somewhat paradoxical that, in the Bible, we are ordered to be cheerful? One would think that this type of thing comes naturally? …
>
> It is indeed necessary, for many of us have a gift for resentment! We have a knack for grumbling, we cherish incessant complaints, we remain perpetually burdened and bitter. We delight in reproach, in torment and rancour. Many of us truly have difficulty with respect for life …[15]

Texts like these make clear how wonder and hope in Smit's understanding of life and the gospel never take the form of "false consciousness" (Engels 1893), of a denial or forgetfulness of bewilderment and despair. The so-called "theology of hope" (see Moltmann 1993) arises precisely out of the experience of forsakenness, but also overcomes it. In Leonard Cohen's words (Cohen 1992): "There's a crack, a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." Hope never tries to soften or sidestep the reality of evil and suffering (Smit 2003):

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wees! … / Aan die einde van [Ackermann se] boek volg 'n naskrif vir haar kleinseun … dis asof die hart van die boek hier klop. Sy peins oor … Juliana van Norwich se woorde: Alles wat is, sit opgesluit in 'n haselneut – hoe klein en gering ook al. Waarom? Omdat God die neut gemaak het en liefhet. Daarom is dit immers dáár. / In die neut, soos in alle kleine en onopvallende, alle gewone en vanselfsprekende dinge … skuil die geheimenis van die lewe, omdat dit deel in die geheimenis van Gods ewige liefde. / Daarom is dít haar wens vir haar kleinseun: dat hy hom steeds sal bly verwonder aan die oënskynlik onbeduidende; dat hy die geheimenis van die eenvoudige sal bly bespeur; dat hy Gods liefde in die alledaagse sal bly raaksien; dat hy waardering sal hê vir die grootsheid van die kleine. / Nou dís mos 'n wens vir iemand anders …? Voorspoedige nuwe jaar, en mag dit vir ons 'n jaar wees van kleine dinge!" Dis die lewe, as 't ware in 'n neutedop. /

14 "Die lewe van geloof is 'n lewe van verlange, van uitsien, droom, volhou en wág … Of dink aan Advent. Dié vier weke bring jaarliks 'n tyd van verlange, van uitsien en droom en wág. Advent is 'n oefeningsessie-in-die-verlange … / En hoe nodig het ons tog nie dié oefening nie! Want wat wéét ons eintlik nog van verlang, uitsien, droom en wág? In ons tye van onmiddellike vervulling, van kits-alles, van konsumpsie en versadiging en oorvloed en die terstondse bevrediging-van-remote-control? / Wat alles maar tragies is. Want nie net geloof nie, maar ook mens-wees en geluk, ja selfs liefde lééf van verlange, uitsien – en wág.

15 "Dit is darem tog vreemd dat dit nodig is dat ons, ja, selfs gebiéd word om vol vreugde te wees, nè? 'n Bietjie paradoksaal dat ons in die Bybel bevéél moet word om vrolik te wees? 'n Mens sou immers dog dat so iets vanself sou kom? … / Dit ís nodig, want vele van ons is begaafd met gegriefdheid! Ons het 'n talent vir pruttel, ons koester ewige klagtes, ons bly blywend beswaard en bitter. Ons verlustig ons in verwyte, in wroeg en wrewel. Vele van ons sukkel omtrént met respek vir die lewe …"

It remains remarkable how the gospels repeatedly portray women as Jesus' witnesses … Now witness literally means martyr. The early witnesses were martyrs, who witnessed with their own suffering to their connection with Jesus. And – remarkably – also in this sense countless women through the ages remain true witnesses, sharers in his suffering, also in and thanks to the church. They continue to endure, they tolerate, like Him – remarkable bearers of his spirit and his compassion. And thus often also the real bearers of the church![16]

What Gerhard von Rad says in his Old Testament theology (Von Rad 2001:ch. D5) with reference to the Book of Proverbs can also be applied to DJS: The search for and discovery of wisdom, of growing (yet fallible) insight into the paradoxical mystery of life, goes hand in hand with grateful wonder over God's creation of and providential care for the world. There is a proper type of curiosity for believers – even though it is not always clear what it consists in … (Smit 2009: 49):

Over the years people have known that there is curiosity and curiosity. A conscious distinction was made between "idle curiosity" on the one hand, and a "thirst for knowledge" on the other, *curiositas* and *studiositas.* The one destroys life, the other serves it. … In foolish self-destruction people want to try out everything for themselves, and do not believe those who warn them against hot stoves and against drugs. But out of equally foolish self-satisfaction others trust only in what they already know and already can, and do not long to discover, to learn, to grow, yes, even to fly.

So, is curiosity virtue or vice? Good or evil? Why would you like to know? Why do you ask?[17]

Christian thinkers need not add a sprinkling of Christianity to everything, but can express their faith by simply celebrating and enjoying the fragile magnificence of being human. A theologian like Barth is an inspiration in this regard (Smit 2009:97):

Respect for life – thus ponders Karl Barth, … includes joy. Our calling to have respect for life, deference to God's wondrous gifts, surely also includes that we shall be cheerful. Be people who … stand in wonder before the good, are easily joyful; people who each day notice anew the mysteries of creation, in gratitude and joy.[18]

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16 "Dit bly net merkwaardig hoe die Evangelies vroue uitbeeld as getuies van Jesus … Nou beteken getuie letterlik martelaar. Die vroeë getuies was martelare, wat met hul eie lyding getuig het van hul verbondenheid aan Jesus. En – merkwaardig – ook in dié sin bly tallose vroue deur die eeue ware getuies, deelgenote in sy lyding, ook in en danksy die kerk wat sy Naam dra. Hulle bly verduur, hulle verdra, soos Hy – merkwaardige draers van sy gees en sy deernis. En so, dikwels ook die eintlike draers van die kerk!"

17 "Deur die jare het mense geweet daar is nuuskierigheid én nuuskierigheid. Doelbewus is daar 'n onderskeid gemaak tussen 'ydele nuuskierigheid' aan die een kant en 'weetgierigheid' aan die ander, curiositas en studiositas. Die een verwoes die lewe, die ander dien dit … In dwase selfvernietiging wil mense alles self beproef en glo hulle nie as ander hulle waarsku teen warm plate en teen dwelms nie. Maar uit ewe dwase selftevredenheid rus ander weer net in wat hulle reeds weet en reeds kan, en hunker hulle nie om te ontdek, te leer, te groei, ja, selfs te kan vlieg nie. / Dus: Is nuuskierigheid deug of ondeug? Goed of kwaad? Hoekom wil jy weet? Hoekom vra jy?"

18 "Respek vir die lewe – só peins Karl Barth, … sluit blydskap in. Ons roeping om eerbied vir die lewe te hê, ontsag vir God se wonderbare gawes, sluit sekerlik ook in dat ons vrolik sal wees. Mense sal wees wat … hulle verwonder oor die goeie, hulle gou verbly; mense wat dankbaar en met vreugde die geheimenisse van die skepping elke dag opnuut raaksien …"

Joie de vivre is also characteristic of Smit as a person and a theologian, and is evident in his column. Like the biblical teacher of wisdom he stands in awe before life without always expressing that awe in explicitly theological terms. Humour is an integral part of such reflections (Smit 2011):

> The problem with humour – as with regret – is that it often comes too late. Think of Ben Maclennan's Apartheid: The Lighter Side. Nothing but news reports from back then. What politicians said, officials did, spokespersons spoke publicly – painfully absurd after the fact. Yet it appears only in 1990. We need such self-ridicule in the midst of the kairos, also right now, not one day.[19]

Spiritual values?

As mentioned earlier, there are also columns in which Smit deals more explicitly with faith convictions and theological concepts – especially when the column's theme is inspired by the liturgical calendar. These pieces probably relate most directly to what most readers will expect in a column entitled Geestelike Waardes. However, Smit inherited this title of his column and it is unlikely that he would have chosen it. In conventional usage "spiritual" has too much the connotation of inner, non-bodily, other-worldly – "a resting-place along the way" rather than a journey on a winding road. The latter, which David Bosch (2001) called a "spirituality of the road", comes closer to the "spirit" of Smit's theology: faith has to do with the present and future of this world, this life.

That Smit sees it in this way is often clear from his columns. Take the column "Heilig" (Holy) (Smit 2009:15-17): "The art of living is to discover the exceptional in the ordinary, the eternal in the everyday … to learn to discern true holiness."

Nor would "values" have been Smit's chosen title. He is quite critical of a liberal theology that, in the spirit of Immanuel Kant, wants to relate faith above all to values and morality. Worse still, the combination of "values" with "spiritual" suggests a dualistic value system, as if faith has to do with the "things above" rather than the "things below". In fact, the author of Colossians uses these phrases ironically, in order to show that those who are concerned with so-called elevated things, like contact with heavenly beings, are actually busy with all too human things, things below, whereas the "things above", the things of God, have to do precisely with worldly matters, for instance, how men and women, and masters and slaves should treat one another. The things below are the things above!

> This is also the secret of the Christian gospel – and the offence of it. The Word became flesh and lived among us … God has made a home among us, in our time, so that we may see his glory … God's shapes among us do not really impress us. We would have expected his presence so differently! …
>
> … Surely God should look different, come differently … more recognisable, more Godly, more holy … as we would expect Him to be … If we want to see Christ, says Luther, we should not yearn for the heavens, but look around us. Not look for Him there, for He is to

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19 "Die ding met humor – soos met spyt – is dat dit dikwels te laat kom. Dink aan Ben Maclennan se Apartheid: The Lighter Side. Bloot nuusberigte van tóé. Wat politici gesê, amptenare gedoen, joernaliste geskryf, woordvoerders die publiek gevoer het – ná die tyd pynlik belaglik. Dog dit verskyn eers in 1990. Ons kort dié self-spot reg ín die kairos, ook nóú, nie eendag nie."

be found here …[20]

But perhaps it is a good thing that DJS' column bears a title that Smit would not have chosen himself. Precisely the stereotyped expectations of the kind of thoughts and emphases to be found in a column on "spiritual values" create an opportunity for the sort of reversals and surprises so characteristic of Smit's columns (and of his theology in general).

Thus he tells the story of one Mrs. Shapiro from Brookline, Massachusetts, who took to the Himalayas in search of a holy man who lived on one of the most inaccessible peaks. After many toils and privations, among them a stay of several days in a cold cave with little to eat, she is at long last given permission to see the holy man: "And indeed, there he sits, the holy man. Mrs. Shapiro approaches him without further ado and says: 'Marvin, come home now for once!' Now isn't that a real sort of saint? That Mrs. Shapiro?"[21]

If this is what "spiritual values" means, then Smit's column may bear that name!

"Public or "populist"?

In conclusion, once more: Is DJS a "public" theologian? In the sense in which Thiselton, among others, speaks of the "public" nature of the church and its witness in the New Testament (Thiselton 2007:21, 24, 41 46-49, 53, 55, 106, 178, 243-244, 246-252, 320-325, 556-558), certainly. DJS does not hide the Christian message under a bushel and is interested precisely in points of contact and resonances between Christian faith and everyday life, both on the wide canvass of "society" and in the smaller, though equally important, picture of the joys and heartaches of unknown individuals. In his academic and other theological writings, Smit often makes a plea for a church that speaks out audibly on issues of the day and concerns itself with such issues (Smit 2008b; Koopman and Smit 2007). This is even inevitable given his understanding of the different forms of the church, for if ordinary believers in their daily lives are also the church, then "involvement" with the challenges and possibilities of life, shared with neighbours, fellow citizens and others, is unavoidable.

Yet enough has already been said about Smit's question marks concerning the theological use of the term "public" to make it less than obvious to call him, without qualification, a "public" theologian – despite the fact that he is a leading figure in present-day "public theology". This label will probably not be easily cast aside for some time to come. However, precisely for that reason it might well be worthwhile to also consider other characterisations of Smit's theology – the more improbable the better.

I want to suggest that Smit, especially also as columnist, can be called a "populist" theologian. This will probably not only surprise Smit's fellow scholars, colleagues and friends, but will

20 "Die kuns van die lewe is om die buitengewone in die gewone te ontdek, die ewige in die alledaagse … Om ware heiligheid te leer herken. / Dis ook die geheimenis van die Christelike evangelie – en die aanstoot daarvan. Die Woord het vlees geword en onder ons kom woon … God het onder ons kom huis opsit, in ons tyd, sodat ons sy heerlikheid aanskou … / God se gestaltes onder ons beïndruk ons nie regtig nie. Ons sou sy teenwoordigheid eintlik so anders verwag! … / … God behoort darem ánders te lyk, ánders te kom … meer herkenbaar, Goddeliker, heiliger … soos óns sou verwag Hy moet wees … / As ons Christus wil sien, sê Luther, moet ons nie hemelwaarts hunker nie, maar rondom ons kyk. Hom nie dáár gaan soek nie, want Hy is hiér te vinde …"
21 "En daar sit die heilige inderdaad. Mevrou Shapiro stap summier nader, en sê: 'Marvin, kom nou 'n slag huis toe!' Nou, dáár is nou vir jou 'n regte soort heilige, of hoe? Dié mevrou Shapiro?"

also make Smit himself fall off his chair. After all, the word "populist" suggests a concern for popularity, "playing to the gallery", and might as such suggest a type of theology that seeks to "market" the gospel, soften the *scandalon* of the cross, "give the people what they ask for". That is certainly not Smit's aim! Least of all in his column. Jesus himself was, after all, no populist rabbi in that sense of the word either – as the cross overwhelmingly shows.

However, I borrow my reference to "populist theology" from Tony Jones, who, in his foreword to Philip Clayton's book *Transforming Christian Theology for Church and Society* (2010:viii), stresses the need for such a theology:

> If there is to be a salvation of mainline Christianity, it will be theology. Indeed, it will be populist theology. I'm going to repeat that: *the salvation of progressive Christianity will be populist theology* [italics in original].

He then praises Clayton as a practitioner of such theology and contrasts his "populist" approach with that of many other theologians: "they are for the most part completely uninterested in promulgating their ideas over the high walls of the academy (gasp!) by posting something on Facebook."

It can certainly not be said of Clayton that he tries to sell an easily digestible theology. What can truly be said of him is that, like Smit, he produces not only academic work, but also puts his impressive academic knowledge and insight in the service of the populous. This he does, inter alia, by means of a lively blog in which he enters into discussion with "ordinary" (also non-Christian) people, and through publications such as the book just mentioned, which are accessible to a broad church audience. Smit does the same with his varied oeuvre, and especially in his newspaper column – something that cannot be said of all "public" theologians.

Perhaps the initial shock of the word "populist" can be softened by linking it to the πολλοί (polloi), the "crowds" to which the gospels refer so often (cf. Brand 2010). Although Jesus was continually in discussion with other rabbis, other teachers, his real audience was the crowds, the πολλοί. His ability to address them, to find particularly for them, "old and new things" from Scripture – with stories, witty sayings and concrete acts of care and compassion – was probably part of what made him "unpopular" among the religious elite. In this sense of "populist" Jesus was most certainly a "populist", and Jones is right to suggest that we are today in great need of good "populist" theologians like Dirkie Smit.

Conclusion

The aim of this article is that the excerpts from the Geestelike Waardes column discussed here, and the elements of "ecclesial", "public", and "populist" theology highlighted in it, will awaken enough enthusiasm and curiosity among others to exhume and unravel further the theological wealth in this part of Smit's oeuvre. I hope that I have succeeded in this and that, in addition, something has shone through of a former journalist and current colleague's great appreciation for Smit as a theological columnist. May he continue for many years to come!

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KEY WORDS
Dirkie Smit
Column / Rubriek
Church and Public Theology / Kerklike- en Publieke Teologie
Points of departure and Hermeneutical Horizons / Vertrekpunte en Hermeneutiese Horisonne
Populism / Populisme

SLEUTELWOORDE
Dirkie Smit
Rubriek
Kerklike- en Publieke Teologie
Vertrekpunte en Hermeneutiese Horisonne
Populisme

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Systematic reflections upon the Christ images in some modern Western films

ABSTRACT

All of the images applied to Jesus in the New Testament have as their context the religious world of that time. So, there was a vivid interaction between gospel and culture. Especially in Western culture, however, that seems not anymore the case. This lack of interaction might be one of the main crises of Western theology. Could modern Jesus films fill in this gap and offer new, useful images? Partly, they do indeed. Referring to films like *Babette's Feast, A Short Film About Love* and *Breaking the Waves* is shown that filmmakers often have more tools at their disposal to express the meaning of Jesus Christ in Western culture than theologians have.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s a large number of exciting, exegetical studies were published on Jesus images in the New Testament. All of these have Western, academic theology as background. British New Testament scholar James Dunn is about to publish the third volume of state of the art results in this field in his series *Christianity in the Making*. The first two volumes appeared in 2003 and 2009. These momentous works clearly show the interaction between the Mediterranean religious world and the Jesus imagination of New Testament authors. All of the images applied to Jesus have as their context the religious, or what we call pagan, world of that time (Ohlig 1986:554-661). Nowadays one can observe exactly the same happening in the non-Western world. Contextual religious concepts are applied to Jesus.

In this application process one can often trace a two-sided transformation. At the moment contextual concepts are applied to Jesus, they are transformed by Jesus. The power of the "remembered Jesus" (Dunn) is often so strong that our concepts clearly only partly and insufficiently cover his impact. Therefore, New Testament concepts like lord, king, priest, prophet, healer, rabbi, et cetera can only be applied to Jesus by analogy – that means according to a classic definition of analogy, namely on the basis of a similarity in the midst of a still greater dissimilarity. That is, however, only the one side of the coin. The flip side is that these concepts leave their traces upon Jesus as well as they, in turn, colour the remembrance of Jesus. They add something new to him. In a certain sense they "transform" him. In this way it is a two-sided process. Elsewhere I called this two-sided process a process of "double transformation" (Brinkman 2009:17-23).

Remarkably, however, this historical process in New Testament times and the current process in the non-Western world do not match similar current developments in the Western world. When I ask my students to name some potential new Jesus images they often do not respond.

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When I, then, slightly challengingly refer to images like ombudsman, lawyer or help desk officer, they smile shyly and feel uneasy about being forced into such an unfamiliar name-giving process.

What could be the cause of this reluctance? Some would say that it is because the name-giving process had been accomplished, if not already in the New Testament, then definitely in the history of the church. Others might add that the names given in early Christianity remain satisfactory. Names such as advocate, mediator, substitute, saviour, judge, exorcist, et cetera, incorporate real meanings and some words, such as healer, prophet and exorcist, are even spectacularly revitalized, especially in Pentecostal circles. So, do we really need new names? The main thesis of this contribution is that we do. Of course, old names such as advocate, mediator, substitute and saviour are not deplete of meaning in contemporary Western culture. However, their original meaning is often so far removed from daily use that they at least need a continuous and thorough reinterpretation. Could the pious invention of new names offer an alternative?

In my opinion this question touches on of one of the main and most serious crises in Western theology, namely its lack of vivid and spontaneous contact with contemporary Western culture. Western Christologies are not used to account for their interaction with Western culture. Of course, idealism, romanticism and existentialism left their traces, but these are barely explicit (Schwarz 2005). And, the closer we come to our own time, the more explicit dealings with the philosophical and cultural context are lacking. Would that have something to do with the still existing, implicit, universal pretensions of Western theology?

If one is allowed to consider artistic expressions as relatively faithful antennas of what is happening in a specific culture, one can award them the same pride of place as philosophy had in the time of the church fathers. I am fully aware of the complexity of this relation because one of the most prominent characteristics of contemporary Western culture is that there are not only no dominant philosophies, but also no dominant artistic expressions anymore. As for the recent past, however, one may say that, in the second part of the twentieth century, films constituted the most culturally influential artistic expressions. Its "lan-guage" became the lingua franca of that part of the century. Among them Jesus films enjoyed enormous popularity: *Ben Hur* (1959), *King of Kings* (1961), *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (1964), *The Greatest Story ever Told* (1965), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), *Jesus of Montreal* (1989) and *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). All of these attracted audiences numbering several millions.

As to the quest for new images, however, the harvest of these films is relatively poor. They often do not deliver an original contribution to the process of giving meaning. Therefore, I am inclined to look in another direction, namely to that of the so-called hidden Christ images in modern Western films. In this contribution I shall briefly refer to four of them: Gabriel Axel's *Babette's Feast* (1987), Kieslowski's *A Short Film about Love* (1988) and *Decalogue Six* (1988-1989), and Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996).

I intend to look for the above-mentioned phenomenon of "double transformation" in these films. In what sense do these movies influence (transform) our images of Jesus? Do they introduce new images? That will be my first question. It concerns the fact that the medium colours the message. However, the message colours the medium as well. That will be my second point and it concerns the other element of two-sided transformation. Translated into

the language of the film, one may then ask in what sense the filmmaker introduces a "foreign", transcendental element by which his Christ figure changes (transforms) that which one would expect. I am indeed inclined to presume that there is a compelling mysterious force within the creative human imagination that shapes fictional characters and dramatic plots in the image and likeness of the central personage and central events in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Apparently there is a transformative power in the Christ figure engineering subtextual (see below) Christian construction (Kozlovic 2004:nos. 6-7). This implies that rather than unilaterally using the New Testament story to interpret cinematic Christ figures, the stories in these films can also be employed to interpret the New Testament Jesus. That would indeed be the "reverse of the hermeneutical flow" (Kreitzer 1993).

Jesus and Christ figures

It is common among film critics to distinguish between Jesus and Christ images (Reinhartz 2009:420-439). For most of us the term "Jesus movies" calls to mind biblical epics that lavishly depict Jesus' life from birth to death (for example, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*) or dramatise a particular period of his life (for example, *The Passion of the Christ*). Like other biographical films (so-called biopics), they make explicit use of primary sources (the Gospels). In claiming fidelity to Scripture, most Jesus movies also claim to be true to the historical events of Jesus' life. In spite of this pretension, most of these films, however, move far beyond the constraints of history in the strict sense. They include scenes, dialogues, characters and subplots that have no foundation in the canonical Gospels. Thus, these Jesus movies always express a paradox: they claim to be authentic, scriptural and historical, but undermine this claim by their own creativity (Reinhartz 2007:252-255).

From a narrative point of view, Jesus movies face two almost insurmountable difficulties: a key person whose divine character is extremely difficult to convey and a plot that is actually already known to all viewers before they have seen the film. However, for audiences without any detailed foreknowledge and without a prior faith commitment to a specific Christology, the ability of a film to engender a powerful spiritual response may well be in an inverse relationship to its fidelity to Scripture and tradition. It certainly is the films that strayed the furthest from a literal depiction of the Gospels (for example, *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *The Passion of the Christ*) that have resulted in the most powerful public reaction (Reinhartz 2009:429).

Even more numerous than the Jesus movies are the so-called Christ figure films. Whereas Jesus figures are representations of Jesus himself, Christ figures are fictional characters that resemble Jesus in some significant way. Among critics the personal name of Jesus is often used just for the Jesus figure. The title "Christ" is used for those who are seen to reflect his mission (Malone 1997:59-60). By their very nature, Jesus figures are easier to detect. Christ figures are built into a different kind of film, are frequently ignored by critics and are often left unappreciated by film fans. Conversely, believers sometimes want to see Christ figures where none credibly exist. They are often inclined to "baptise" films (Kozlovic 2004:nos. 1-16). In this way the Christ figure is often a contested figure, because he (or she) is not portrayed directly but represented symbolically or at times allegorically. This kind of film is used to deal with religious themes in a "secular wrapper" (Ellis 2003:304).

This secular wrapper is sometimes called the "subtext". A filmic narrative often has a dual nature: an overt plot as well as a covert storyline of varying complexity that is comparable to

the metaphorical or symbolic within literature. The narrative and the infra-narrative (the text and the subtext) are not two separate entities – there is after all only one film – but rather two concentric circles with the infra-narrative within the narrative. Through this narratological arrangement, secular films can engage in religious storytelling about biblical characters, ideas and themes without appearing religious. Therefore, the "Christic" resemblance needs not always be significant and substantial. It will sometimes be difficult to accurately distinguish between reading into the text what does not exist in it and the legitimate observer's construct – similar to the legitimate reader's construct as justified in so-called reader response theories. "Response" refers here to the creative and responsible reception by the competent reader who is able to read the "code" of the text in order to come to a certain "match" between what the author probably intends and what the reader understands (Thiselton 1992:495-503 and 515-523). So, the reference to reader response theories quite differs from a reference to mere subjectivism.

There is often no clear watershed between intended and not intended Christ figures. This lack of clarity not only has to do with the above-mentioned potential tension between the intention of the film maker and the interpretation of the audience, but also with the impossibility of delineating exactly in advance the basic structural characteristics of the cinematic Christ figure. Such a delineation would suggest that we already have a complete Christology in mind, while the purpose of many Christ films is precisely the opposite, namely to explore how the biblical Christ figure and the cinematic Christ figure shed light on each other. There is no such entity as an objective cinematic Christ figure (Deacy 2006:no. 10). Although some characteristics are indispensable in one's own Christ image – for example, (a) his ethic attitude, (b) his willing and vicarious self-sacrifice, (c) his survival (resurrection) and (d) his dual human-divine (like us and yet not like us) character – not every good Christ film needs to include all of these (in the same way as not every good sermon needs to mention all these characteristics). A simple checklist, therefore, does not work. Being one-sided can in certain circumstances and at certain times be more revealing than being complete. Meanwhile, it remains an open question what dynamic takes place in the viewing audience as they experience the protagonists of these films and are invited to make their identifications and distinctions between the Christ figure and the transcendent reality it points to, the Christ (re)figured (Baugh 1997:235).

Four films

Babette's Feast is based on a story published in 1950 and written by the Danish author Karen Blixen (pseudonym Isak Dinesen), who was also the author of the novel *Out of Africa* (1937) that decades later became famous because of the film based on it (1985). The story tells of the mysterious conversion experience of members of a small Danish, Lutheran community occasioned by the activity of a French female refugee Babette, a victim of the tragic events of the Paris commune (1871). Babette becomes the cook in the house of the two daughters of the founder of the community, a Lutheran pastor. In Paris she used to be a famous, professional cook. After the death of the founder, the community fell into decay. Resentment, fear and guilt threaten to destroy it. On the occasion of the centenary of the birth of the founder Babette, who won a lottery in France, prepares a meal for the remaining ten members of the community and two guests, Mrs. Löwenhielm and her nephew, the general and former lover of Martina, one of the two daughters. Twelve persons in total enjoy the meal and two, the coachman and the kitchen boy, share the same meal in the kitchen. Babette, who herself is not sharing the meal, spent all her money on this feast. During the meal the members of the community, at first terrified of spiritual tragedy (foretold in Martina's dream), are determined not to express

their appreciation, but then miraculously rediscover forgiveness, peace and hope. The speech by General Löwenhielm in particular, puts the meal in a religious context. Referring to the words of Psalm 85 (that love and faithfulness will meet together and righteousness and peace will kiss each other), he speaks of God's abundant grace in terminology that reminds of Kierkegaard's talk about fear and trembling. The food was the visible sign of the abundance that they had dared not believe in: How could God ever forgive their sins? (Schuler 1997:no. 5)

It is clear that the film has an explicit religious setting but without any explicit reference to Babette as a Christ figure. She looks like the "knight of faith" that Kierkegaard never met (Schuler 1997:no. 6) when, in *Fear and Trembling,* he deals with the problem of identifying a true person of faith, since the signs are hidden in the heart. Yet, the Christ references are uncontested among the critics. Babette's arrival as a refugee can be characterised as a Christological kenosis. She had lost everything – her husband, her son and all her possessions. Her hidden existence acquires aspects of a Christological incarnation (Baugh 1997:137-145). Her meal reminds of the Last Supper. It's a thanksgiving that evokes words of confession and even absolution from the guests. In the person of Babette and in the effect of her sacrifice, Christological and soteriological motifs are revealed. Her "death" is her arrival as a refugee in Denmark. Her "resurrection" is her meal (Chatelion Counet 2009:204-208).

A Short Film About Love and *Decalogue Six* are two versions of the same film – one for television (55 minutes) and one for cinema (90 minutes) – that form part of a greater project on the Ten Commandments. The main protagonists are middle- and upper-middle class men and women and their normal daily lives in which they work, love, die, forgive, deny or discover God, et cetera. *A Short Film about Love* is about the "impossible" love between a voyeuristic, sexually frustrated, young man and a promiscuous woman ten years older than him. Strictly interpreted as concerning the Sixth Commandment, it shows the hell on earth that people who violate this commandment create for themselves and for others. On this level the film is far from embodying anything close to a Christ figure. However, there is apparently also another level of interpretation.

The two protagonists, Tomek and Magda, are not just a voyeur and a promiscuous woman respectively. Tomek reveals himself as a voyeur. He accepts responsibility for his actions. The film contains three shedding-of-blood actions involving Tomek. In all instances it has the character of a sacrificial gesture intended to change the tragic situation of his beloved who is incapable of loving and of being loved. Crucial is the telephone call in which she states: "You know more about love than I do. Love exists. You have shown me the way … Do you hear me?" It sounds like a confession of sin. Tomek's suffering (sacrificial "death") brought about a radical change, a conversion, in Magda's life. Tomek's interventions can be interpreted as a metaphor of the mysterious invitation of divine grace to conversion, to the encounter with God in Christ. The important role of glass and lenses in this film mirrors the way we see God and God sees us. Against the backdrop of the meaning of milk in Eastern European iconography, Tomek's daily volunteer job of delivering milk to his neighbours can obtain a spiritual meaning. Milk is not just a symbol of physical nutrition but also of spiritual nutrition. At the end of the film Magda is prevented from touching the bandaged wrist of Tomek, who attempted suicide. Although Tomek comes closer and closer to her, she (Magda – Mary Magdalene) is not allowed to come too close to him.

In the shorter television version (*Dialogue Six*) Kieslowski omits Magda's effort to touch Tomek's wrist. He also omits one of three scenes where blood is shed. Everything becomes even more

implicit but the allusions and metaphors are the same. The meaning seems to remain that Tomek (Christ) calls Magda (Mary Magdalene) to another level of relationship.

> Tomek is acting like the Christ of John 20, who tells Mary Magdalene not to hold onto him as she may have done before the Resurrection … He is calling her to mature spirituality, to live fully the liberating love he is offering her (Baugh 1997:183-84).

Breaking the Waves is the story of Bess, a deeply religious young Scottish woman who falls in love with Jan, an outsider who works on an oil rig off the coast. After a short period of wedded and sexual bliss, Jan returns to life at sea. The forlorn Bess beseeches God to return her love. She believes in the power of prayer. Jan has a terrible accident and returns home paralysed and ill. Because of her prayers, Bess feels guilty and her community insists that it is her duty to care for Jan. Whether due to his love, his illness or drugs, he pleads with Bess to take other lovers and to tell him of her exploits in order to help him live and heal. It is obvious that Bess finds this repugnant. Nevertheless, she becomes convinced that this will keep him alive and so she submits to his request. As Bess spirals down this path, she is eventually killed by the increasing levels of sexual violence that comes with her prostitution. After her death Jan makes a miraculous recovery. He and his friends rob Bess's body from the church's clutches and bury her at sea. This act is signalled by the ringing of the church bells. It, therefore, seems as if Bess indeed "saved" Jan at the cost of her own life and that God has sanctified this act of sacrifice. Hence, in the epilogue, at the coroner's inquest Bess is called a "good" person by her doctor who earlier diagnosed her as "neurotic" and "psychotic". Bess' goodness can be considered the general message of the film. Von Trier declared in several interviews that it was his main intention to illustrate that "goodness exists" (Von Trier 1997:2).

Bess' self-sacrifice is a forced and only later an internalised self-sacrifice. Although this film is fiercely criticised by feminists (and not only by them!), some female critics emphasise that it affirms the dominant feminist theological vision of a this-worldly redemption, rather than an eschatological disembodied reunion with God in the realms of heaven (Solano 2004:no. 19). Remarkably, however, this earthly redemption concerns here only Jan and not Bess! Jan is the symbol of the resurrection and Bess the symbol of the crucifixion. With her self-sacrifice she deserves a place in heaven. In this film one also finds an implicit reference to Kierkegaard. Bess' faith resembles the way Kierkegaard interprets Abraham's faith in relation to his preparedness to offer his only son Isaac. Her sacrifice also defies our common understanding of good and evil (Bekkenkamp 1998:153).

Systematic reflections

Babette's Feast can be labelled an instructive example of Eucharistic Christology. In its connection of word and sacrament (by means of the table speech of General Löwenhielm) it gives meaning to daily life. It is a clear indication of the earthly character of Eucharistic salvation as an anticipation of the coming kingdom. Confession of guilt and absolution, and concern for the needy and poor are brought together around an abundant meal. It reminds of the eschatological meals and messianic banquets of the Old and New Testament (cf. Is. 25:6-8 and Mt. 22:1-14). It shows that creation and sacrament can be neither equated nor separated. They do not simply overlap. In the sacrament a new light falls on creation, namely the light of forgiveness and renewal (Brinkman 1999:66, 70). As an interpretation of the meaning of the Lord's Supper, *Babette's Feast* can be seen as one of the most impressive imaginations of the Last Supper in the history of art. It points to the soteriological, ethical and communal aspects of sound Christology (Marsh 1997:207-218 and Wright 1997:nos. 14-21).

Babette's Feast corrects an exclusively spiritual and individualistic approach to the Lord's Supper. The incentive to this correction is threefold: (1) The initiative comes from an outsider who appeared on a stormy night with flashes of lightning across the sky; (2) the extraordinary and abundant character of the food is compared with the infinite character of God's grace; and (3) the main motif of the cook is her desire to be a "heavenly" artist – she thus has a "high" vocation. The film links a Kierkegaardian idea of the infinite character of grace with an, in these Lutheran circles, underdeveloped idea of sanctification. The congregation is "lifted up" to a more "holistic" idea of salvation while any romanticism is excluded in an outspoken concern for the needy and poor and a clear awareness of the need of forgiveness. In Babette the classic Lutheran Christological idea of a *deus absconditus* obtains a new female personification.

Kieslowski's *A Short Film About Love* and *Decalogue Six* have a far more concealed religious setting than *Babette's Feast*. However, much more clearly than the latter, these films elaborate on the personal breakthrough experience evoked by the gospel. Love is still possible in the urban desert of Stowki, the part of Warsaw where Tomek and Magda live. There is still hope for the place where they live, the "Condominium Earth". The sudden, mysterious shattering of glass "from above" represents the unexpected change in Magda's attitude when confronted with the unavoidable presence of Tomek. The Christ of Kieslowski, however, is really a "hidden", untouchable, barely recognisable Christ. His gospel is concealed in the paradoxes and ambiguities of human existence. Their own free will is respected and their trivial decisions are not condemned but are confronted with other options.

In Kieslowski's films revelation is not set apart. It concerns just another lens. Therefore, all kinds of glass play a crucial role in his films. He confronts us with the space left to eye-opening experiences in the often depressive setting of an extended suburb. Here Christ truly is a hidden Christ. He has to be discovered, revealed. It belongs to Kieslowski's filmic strategy to reveal to us the presence of this Christ at the borders of our decisions. He repeatedly shows us that Tomek and Magda's decisions not to transgress certain borders change their lives and open them up to experiences thus far unknown to them. Although his films have an outspoken "earthly" character, it is obvious that the changes always occur at the moment Tomek and Magda are prepared to listen to something or someone from elsewhere.

The same openness is characteristic of *Breaking the Waves*. However, here it has a remarkably stronger transcendental character. In her prayers Bess is continuously in contact with God. Slowly but surely she becomes aware of her divine calling. According to our moral standards, it seems to be a calling beyond good and evil. The death of Bess, her self-sacrifice, is presented as the precondition for the recovery of Jan, for his resurrection, and gets a vicarious character. Does Bess, however, eventually survive her self-sacrifice? The final scenes in the film suggest her glorification. It is obvious that Von Trier puts Bess' choices in strong opposition to the choices of her congregation. It is the opposition between "love for the word and the law" and "love for another human being". In her choice for the latter, Bess shows her "goodness". But it is clear that it is a contested goodness, misunderstood by many. Her goodness can be interpreted as unconditional love. In this film love is associated simultaneously with sexual and spiritual experiences – not unlike that found in mystic circles in church history.

All four of these films stress the earthly character of salvation. It turns out that the medium (film) is inclined to emphasise the incarnational character of the message. But the message also colours the medium. The message opens up the merely immanent character of human existence. Babette comes from elsewhere and has a higher, heavenly calling; Tomek turns

out to be "untouchable" for Magda; and Bess' earthly interpretation of her calling takes her to heaven. Therefore, the incarnational aspect is not opposed to the heavenly aspect; the latter presupposes the former. Without heaven no incarnation. Although these films do not produce spectacular new images, the option for a female Christ figure (Babette and Bess) and the emphasis upon self-sacrifice are remarkable. The choice for a female Christ figure is an indication of an earthly, bodily interpretation of salvation, which in neither films happens to the detriment of a clear awareness of sin and the need of self-sacrifice. In all these films, self-sacrifice is connected with a higher calling (Babette and Bess) or with an untouchable character (Tomek). It alludes, amidst all the ambiguities and trivialities of human life, to "another" destination. Therefore, I find it difficult to classify these films anywhere according to the classic scheme of an Alexandrian approach "from above" or an Antiochene approach "from below". The adequacy of this scheme can be criticised, not only on historical grounds, but also on the basis of the content of films of this kind. Therefore, this scheme cannot that easily be applied to modern Christ films as some suggest (Deacy 1999:325-37 and 2001:78-89). Apparently the film maker often has more tools at his disposal to imagine convincingly the Chalcedonian paradox of the interconnectedness of the divine and the human than the writer and the narrator often have.

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KEY WORDS
Two-sided transformation
Hidden Christ
Jesus films
Western culture
Female Christ

TREFWOORDE
Tweekantige transformasie
Verborge Christus
Jesus-films
Westerse kultuur
Vroulike Christus

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The church we could be – What churches can learn from Calvin's congregational theology

ABSTRACT

This article deals with Calvin's understanding of congregations, their vital role in the unfolding of the Kingdom, and their ministry and structures.

It argues, firstly, that not enough attention is given to Calvin's congregational ecclesiology. Thinking about the life and the role of the congregation in Geneva was a central issue in the life and theology of John Calvin. He was not in the first place a professional theologian or teacher, but was the pastor of Geneva. His whole theology should be seen within its rootedness in his pastoral commitment and responsibilities.

It further argues that Calvin's acceptance of the call to Geneva probably had to do with his deep conviction that Christianity is not just a philosophy but that it can and should be practiced in life. This belief that the Gospel of Jesus Christ must and can be embodied in the lives of Christian communities (and through them in the world) was a basic tenet of Calvin's theology.

In the rest of the article attention is given to the way Calvin tried to accomplish this goal. It deals with his strong focus on God and the Gospel in the life of the congregation, on the ongoing ministry of the Ascended Christ through the Holy Spirit, on his understanding of our human ministry in obedience to Christ, and on the reformation and building of the congregation according to the word of God.

The last paragraph calls attention to Calvin's deep commitment to the unity of the church as a vital mark of the church of Jesus Christ.

Dirkie Smit's theological life and work has been marked by his interest in and commitment to the church.[2] Not only has he written several articles about the church, but his whole theology could be described as theology from and for the church. He took his calling as a minister and later as a teacher or doctor of the church very seriously. Earlier in his career Dirkie once told me that almost all his formal writing had been done in response to requests from the church.

As a practical theologian I have always valued this strong emphasis on the church. Not only because we had a knowledgeable and trusted guide in Dirkie Smit, but also because ecclesiology has been neglected in the past by some systematic theologians.

There is another reason why Dirkie's work on the church is held in such high esteem by practical theologians and pastors: He has an active interest in the congregational form of the church

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2 Possibly the best summary of Dirkie's views can be found in an essay published in Burger and Nell (2002: 243-58).

and understands more about the practical life of and ministry in congregations than most academics. When it comes to congregations, the truth of the gospel does not only concern the narratives we tell and the doctrines we teach, but also a number of processes we use and the practices we follow. Dirkie Smit has a good grasp on and interest in these practices and processes, and is a wise and attentive conversation partner on such matters.

This article focuses on John Calvin's understanding of congregations and congregational ministry. Calvin has always been a major influence in Dirkie's work, but has become even more so during the past fifteen years. We know that Calvin was a pastor for most of his theological life. He did his scholarly work not for academia in the first place, but for the church, for pastors, congregations and congregants. Congregations and ministry were not only important themes in his writing; it helped shape his theology. Of all the Reformers, Calvin arguably had the most explicit ecclesiology. He spent more time than the others reflecting on the life of the church and even on the form of the church.

Before continuing, an important preliminary remark has to be made: Calvin's view of the church was never stagnant, but developed and grew. It is, for instance, widely acknowledged that Martin Bucer had a major impact on his thinking about the church in general and congregations in particular (cf. Van't Spijker 2009:51-67 for a good, brief overview of Calvin's time in Strasbourg). The distinction Calvin made between the visible and the invisible church serves as a good example of his changing views. In the beginning of his career one finds a strong emphasis on the reality of the invisible church. However, in the decades that followed, the emphasis on the visible church became stronger and stronger (Van't Spijker 1990:51,152; Hesselink 1997:157). This implies, for instance, that while Calvin initially defended a distinction between the visible and invisible church, it was not a vital part of his matured ecclesiology.

Within the limited framework of this article it will obviously be impossible to discuss Calvin's congregational theology in full.[3] The specific question chosen to be reflected on here is, rather, what present day congregations that want to be faithful to the gospel can learn from Calvin's congregational ecclesiology. With this in mind, five central views will be briefly outlined and discussed.

THE RELATIVE UNIMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH

One can only begin to fully comprehend the importance and meaning of the church if one recognises its position relative to God, the gospel and the kingdom. This was also an issue at the heart of the Reformation. The Reformation was primarily a movement protesting against a church that focused too much on itself, that saw itself as the designated substitute for God on earth and effectively taught people to live with and before the church rather than with and before God. The concept of coram Deo played a vital role in the theology of the Reformers (cf. Bakker's 1956 study on Luther). The essence of this concept is that we are not merely invited to live with the church or the priests (though they can help us immensely), but that we are invited by the gospel to an intimate life with God.

In Luther's theology this emphasis was very clear. His resistance against a "strong" well-structured church that took itself too seriously may help to explain why Luther did not pay that much attention to the development of an ecclesiology. While Calvin deviated from Luther

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3 The better publications on Calvin's ecclesiology include Milner (1970), Van't Spijker (1990 and 2009), Hesselink (1997), Haight (2005), Partee (2005) and Faber (2009).

in this respect and viewed the development of an ecclesiology a worthwhile pursuit, he never forsook this original point of view of the Reformation. It is clearly reflected in the placement of the church in Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion. He deals with it in Book Four, the last part of the Institutes, where it is referred to as "the external means by which God invites us into the society of Christ and holds us therein" (Inst. IV.I.1 heading). It can even be argued that Book Four should be seen as an addendum to the first three books and thus not as an intrinsic part of Calvin's theology proper. However, this may probably be taking the argument too far (Van't Spijker 1990:158). Calvin's argument in Book Four – that we believe the church and not "in" the church (Inst. IV.I.2) – confirms this understanding of the church.

Taking a cue from the structure of the Institutes, one could argue that the church should not exist to sustain itself, but to exalt God (Book One), to serve the kingdom of Christ (Book Two) and to reflect the work of the Holy Spirit embodying Christ's gifts in our lives (Book Three). Whether this was intentional or not, I believe that these three issues were at the heart of Calvin's theology. This point reflects a deep truth in his theology that does not require any extended argument. If we want to build the church and further the coming of the kingdom, the focus of our preaching and conversations in the church should be on these three themes and not in the first place on formal congregational concerns.

This primary focus on the Trinity and its work also sheds light on a more debatable point in Calvin's theology. In Reformed theology there has always been some difference of opinion on the specific order in which the loci connected to pneumatology should be discussed. Most theologians tend to follow Calvin's order and discuss the work of the Spirit in the lives of individuals prior to its work in the church. There are, however, a number of theologians – notably Hendrikus Berkhof and Abraham Kuyper – who choose to reverse this order. This is not a minor issue and it has been argued that such a reversal has implications for a church's operative ecclesiology. As will be seen in the next paragraph, Calvin's decision on this point should not be interpreted as a disregard of the importance of the church, but rather suggests a prioritisation of our relationship with God. Van't Spijker sees this as one of Calvin's deepest convictions. According to Van't Spijker, we are not assured in our faith by belonging to a church, but by being part of the body of Christ.[4]

This outward focus of the church is confirmed by Milner in his extensive study on Calvin's doctrine of the church. According to Milner, God's primary intention with the church was the restoration of order in the world (Milner 1970:194-196). Charles Partee summarises this as follows:

For Calvin the church is God's answer to the world's disorder. Although he did not use "missional" language, it is clear that Calvin knew that the intention was that the church's life and work should be directed towards the world outside (Partee 2008:259).

This is indeed one of the most important lessons that congregations may learn from Calvin today. Since Calvin's time many studies have shown that institutions have a life of their own and have a tendency to direct their energy inward to sustain them. Many churches and congregations have succumbed to this temptation. Sheldon Sorge explains that the present malaise in mainline churches in the West is to a large extent related to this misunderstanding of the purpose of a church. He maintains that "the church comes to exist as an end in itself It

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4 "[N]iet, ik behoor tot de kerk en ben derhalve lid van Christus. Maar: ik ben een lidmaat van Christus en derhalve behoor ik tot de kerk" (1990:146,150).

becomes so wrapped up in concern that it continues to exist that the question of why it exists is forgotten. Its chief mission becomes its preservation." This, however, cannot succeed since "[a] church that defines itself more by polity than by theology is sure to become exactly what it is trying to avoid: it will be increasingly fragmented and diffuse, until it eventually dissolves" (Sorge 2005:151,152).

The first lesson to learn from Calvin is that congregations should not make the church, its ministries or even its growth their centre of attention, but should focus on God, on Christ and on the work of the Spirit. My work at BUVTON[5] taught me that God and the gospel of Christ need to be at the heart of any meaningful congregational reform. This realisation is supported by Sorge's assertion that "being connectional" (a model followed by many mega churches) "flattens" the theology and the language of the church. "[This] terminology creates a world of ecclesial actuality that bears no inherent [clear] reference to God " (Sorge 2005:151).

The vital role of the church

However important the above statement is, it immediately needs to be stated in a more nuanced way. That the church should not be the centre of attention does not mean that the church is not fundamentally important in Calvin's theology – Calvin reflected and wrote more extensively on the church than any of the Reformers of his day. The whole of Book Four (volume wise almost 40% of the Institutes) is dedicated to reflections on the church. To that must be added Calvin's reflections on the church in his other writings – especially in his commentaries. There is, for instance, currently much interest in his remarks on the church in his Corinthian commentaries (Faber 2009:122).

Calvin did not only write extensively on the church; there is also a remarkable mindfulness, subtlety, maturity and moderation in his views on the church and congregational life. He always endeavoured to balance faithfulness to Scripture with a strong local and contextual awareness and this rare mix has sparked creative and fresh insights and recommendations (Faber 2009:123).

This commitment to what we today call "robust practical theological reflection" is not in the first place deeply connected to his thoughts on the church, but to the way he thought about God, the gospel and theology. This important statement needs to be substantiated with three explanatory remarks:

• First, we must always remember that the Reformation was not in the first place an academic pursuit, but a movement directed at fundamental renewal in the churches of the time. Reflection and theology – and eventually scholarly work – played an important part in this process, but the focus was always on what was happening in the church. This certainly applied to Luther and the first generation of reformers, but it was no different for Calvin.

• Second, we also need to remind ourselves that since 1536, Calvin's primary work and concern he (was only 27 at the time) was his work as pastor of Geneva. It is true that he also served a wider cause, but even that wider cause was to a large extent, in his mind, also ecclesial (see, for example, his endeavours concerning the unity of the church). Calvin wrote the Institutes to assist congregants in their daily reading and interpretation

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5 Buro vir Voortgesette Teologiese Onderrig (Bureau for Continued Theological Training).

of the Bible. In his commentaries one can also see the central place pastoral and ecclesial questions occupied in his mind.

• Third, Calvin's commitment to take theology to the church should be understood on a deeper level. It was far more than a matter of a natural inclination or an aptitude for practical matters; it was integral to the way Calvin thought about the gospel. For Calvin the dearest truth and the greatest marvel of the gospel was the fact that it could be enfleshed in real life. In his understanding, the gospel not only concerned ideas and concepts or a new way of thinking about life; it was (S)omething that could become a reality in life that could be practised and embodied in real life. That was probably his greatest challenge when he eventually accepted the invitation to work in Geneva. This move indicated that he ultimately believed that the gospel could and should be practiced and exemplified in the church. In his Johannes Calvin's Theology – Eine Einfürung, Georg Plasger (2008:107) reflects this view well in the title of his chapter on Calvin's ecclesiology "Die von Gott erwählte und zu gestaltende Kirche". The election of God has to be embodied in the life of the congregation. That this perspective indeed played a major role in Calvin's thought on the gospel is confirmed by the statement he made towards the end of his life that, when he came to Geneva, there was only preaching in and no reform of the church (Van't Spijker 1990:144). The former, to Calvin's mind, could never be enough. The truth of gospel can and should be reflected in the life of the church.

Many commentators will agree with the statement of John Hesselink that Calvin held a high doctrine of the church (Hesselink 1997:154). Some of Calvin's statements on the church in Inst. IV.I.14 sound almost Roman Catholic! He called the church "our mother" and agreed with Cyprian that there can be no real salvation outside the church. We cannot have God as our Father without having the church as our mother. In his commentary on Isaiah 34:24 Calvin wrote:

Apart from the body of Christ and the fellowship of the godly, there can be no hope of reconciliation with God. It follows those strangers who separate themselves from the church have nothing left for them than to rot amidst their curse.

In spite of the way he ordered the loci in his pneumatology, Calvin could in no way be associated with the prevailing low ecclesiology that we find in evangelical churches and even in many Reformed and Presbyterian congregations. This – in my opinion – is one of the most urgent issues that Reformed churches need to address. There seems to be a drift in Reformed and Presbyterian churches towards a lower ecclesiology, one where the individual almost always comes before the group. This confused prioritisation can be linked with an even worse "narrative", namely the notion that the transformation of individuals is the work of the Spirit, but the founding (and, therefore, the ownership!) of congregations is merely a human endeavour. This – I believe – is ultimately the basis of most evangelical ecclesiologies and has contributed to struggles towards church unity.

Ministry in the church: God's ministry and our ministry

In Calvin's writings on the church he places a strong emphasis on ministry. This shows that he views what is done (that is, ministry) in the church as more fundamental than the way in which the church is structured or organised.

Calvin's most revolutionary ecclesiological point of view may indeed be his conviction that Jesus Christ, working through the Holy Spirit, is the primary Minister in the church. No one wrote more clearly and convincingly about this on-going ministry of Christ. For Calvin there clearly are two phases in the work of Jesus Christ: The first phase was Jesus' earthly life and ministry – from his incarnation to his death and resurrection. This phase of his work was reported in the narratives of the four Gospels. The second phase started with Jesus' ascension and was based on his enthronement and the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. This second phase of Christ's work was reported in Acts and in the rest of the New Testament. Calvin strongly emphasised the continuing work of Christ and highlighted that Christ is Himself involved in this work. Towards the end of Book Two of the Institutes (*Inst*. II.XV), when Calvin speaks of Jesus as our Prophet, Priest and King, this does not refer to Jesus' earthly work but to his on-going work after his ascension. Although He could no longer be seen by ordinary human eyes, it does not make this part of Jesus' work less real or important.

In this second phase the church and believers are included in God's work – we hear that the Spirit was poured out on human beings and filled them. Although Calvin believed that Christ used human offices and agents for this work, he never compromised the Christological reality of this cooperative ministry. Without losing either the Christological or the human sides, the two were joined in a mysterious way in and through the work of the Spirit.

For Calvin the ascension formed the basis of this second part of Jesus' ministry on our behalf. Jesus' ascension was not merely a return to heavenly rest after a completed mission, but the beginning of a new involvement with our salvation. Jesus reigns over church and world as King and will bring history to a good conclusion; as Priest he not only pleads for us with the Father, but in his divinity He remains with us every step of our way here on earth (Mt 28:20; Eph 4:10); and as our Prophet, Jesus is revealing God's on-going work to us, teaching us God's will and, through the Spirit, He is constantly transforming us more and more into his own image.

That God's agency in the world – through Christ and the Spirit – is indeed a reality was also clearly reflected in Calvin's strong views on the centrality of prayer. Towards the end of Book Three (*Inst*. III.XX) he wrote a lengthy exposition on prayer, "which is the chief exercise of faith and by which we daily receive God's benefits". It is evident from this chapter that, for Calvin, the church was wholly dependent not only on God's gracious gifts, but also on his God's on-going care and his on-going ministry amongst us and in the world. The best we can do is to acknowledge our dependence and plead with God to continue and to conclude his work.

If it is abundantly clear that God's on-going agency amongst us is not merely a way of speaking, but indeed a kind of unique historical reality, we can briefly discuss the role and ministry of believers and the human offices.

Calvin's strong emphasis on Christ's ministry and the work of the Spirit did not prevent him from also accentuating the importance of human ministries. He dealt with it from early on in his exposition on the church. Although there "are many reasons why God prefers to do his work through humans" rather than angels, Calvin did not elaborate on them all (*Inst*. IV. III. 1). One of the reasons was the fact that God "does not dwell amongst us in a visible presence". He explains this in a way that helps us see the delicate balance:

[W]e have said that He uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and honour, but only that through their mouths He may do his own work – just as a workman uses a tool to his work (*Inst*. IV.III.1).

Although pastors should always be aware of their total dependence on God and should never try to be more than what they are or try to hide their inefficiencies, they play a vital role in God's economy. They are "the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body" (Inst. IV.III.2). Calvin had been known to use emphatic language to describe the pivotal role envisioned for the officers of the church:

> [F]or neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food or drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth (Inst. IV.III.2).

There was another reason for this strong language. It did not only have to do with a high view of the office, but was also motivated by Calvin's views on the importance of human faith and obedience for the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation. Compared to Luther, Calvin was more mindful of how a too strong emphasis on Christ's work as the "Author and Perfecter of our faith" might diminish the role of faith and even obedience and sanctification. This is also the reason why Calvin made a small addition to Luther's classic description of the means of grace. Luther described the regular and valid "preaching of the Word God" as the primary means of grace. Calvin agreed with Luther, but he added "and hearing" after the word "preaching". The intention was clear: Our task is not completed when we have preached the Word; the Word should be taken seriously, pondered upon and should inspire our decisions and actions. Therefore, Christ's ministry through the Spirit and our human ministry were not viewed as conflicting or exclusive in any way. Through the Spirit a mysterious cooperation emerges between these two ministries.

The deep, mysterious and intricate unity between the ministry of Jesus and our ministry was central in Calvin's understanding of the characteristics of the true Church. Preaching and the sacraments were seen as the primary means of grace not because of instrumental reasons, because there was something unique in words or in bread and wine itself that could change people's lives. They were designated and instituted by Christ as the means by which he chose to be present and through which he chose to come to the church! The deeper question does not concern the subtle, secretive, miraculous workings of preaching and the sacraments, but the question of how and where the Lord Jesus Christ chose to be present and working after his ascension! The secret behind the ministry of the Word and sacrament does not in the first place concern what and how we do it, but rather that Christ is present and working in and through them.

Re-forming and building the congregation according to the Word of God

Calvin almost always had local congregations in mind when he wrote and reflected on the church. His shift in emphasis from the invisible church to concrete visible congregations was related to this growing interest in and concern with real life congregations. In fact, the re-formation according to the Word of God of his congregation in Geneva was probably often at the centre of Calvin's reflections and deliberations about the church. After his return from Strasbourg his plans for congregations was foremost in his thoughts.

This section aims to give a brief overview of Calvin's congregational ecclesiology. How did Calvin think about congregations, their ministry, their structure and their reform? The focus is on five components or levels of Calvin's view.

First, we need to acknowledge Calvin's explicit commitment to orientate his thoughts on the congregation according to Holy Scripture (cf. Wendel 2000:302). He believed that Rome's mistake was to introduce ministries and ways of doing that had no biblical basis. So strictly did Calvin adhere to this principle that he sometimes seemed to apply it in an almost too simplistic way. In practice Calvin was more open and pragmatic and wisely acknowledged that these were new times and new situations (cf. Van't Spijker's remarks in this regard 1990:157).

Similar to Luther, Calvin believed that God builds his church primarily through the Word and sacraments. At times Luther added more means of grace and Bucer – and the later Reformed tradition – added church discipline as a third means. However, Calvin consistently recognised only Word and sacrament as the two basic means of grace. Much has been written on this theme – not all of it helpful. There are three factors that we need to keep in mind if we want the right understanding of Calvin's point of view.

The first factor was referred to in the previous paragraph, namely Calvin's emphasis on the special place of preaching and sacrament. This has to be understood against the backdrop of the more fundamental question of Christ's presence and agency. Word and sacrament are central means because they were chosen and instituted by Christ as ways to experience his real presence.

Second, we should see the focus on Word and sacrament as a reference to the congregation's worship service as the primary place of encounter with the living Christ. The most important experience of Christ in the life of the congregation was not in the church structures, institution or the offices, but in the weekly meeting between the congregation and its Lord in the worship service.

Third (and that also brings us to next perspective), we can and must not underestimate the role of the offices in the ministry of Word and sacrament. Calvin was always rightly cautious not to make the efficiency of the means dependent on the performance (or even status) of the offices. However, this downplaying of the importance of the offices must be understood as a reaction against the situation in the Roman church where everything depended on the higher offices. I do believe that in Calvin's operative ecclesial theology the offices and the reality of leadership played a critically important role – although this may not always be evident unless one views his formal theological writings in context.

We should also remember that the main complaint of the Reformers against the Roman Catholic understanding of the offices was related to the excessive power of the priest and especially that of the hierarchical order. Calvin assigned a prominent role to the offices. One of his most significant contributions to congregational theology was his recovery of the four offices found in Scripture and in the early church. Because we have been following Calvin's tradition for centuries, we tend to overlook the revolutionary implications of this at that time.

Fourth, Calvin not only restored the four offices but also understood that, for the sake of efficiency, next to the offices, institutions were required. Some regard this as Calvin's most important contribution and sees his genius as a talent for institutional thinking. It is remarkable that he could envision an institution to structure and organise the work of each of the offices – and in such detail. Alongside the deacons Calvin proposed the diaconal ministries; the work of the elders was structured by way of the consistory meetings; the pastors were organised to form the so called Company of Pastors, the forerunner of the presbytery; and the teaching ministry was formed into the Academy.

Finally, one should attend to the role of the Spirit in the embodiment of the gospel in the congregation. The Spirit not only gives the church the power for its work, but also guides it with wisdom in choosing how to approach this work. Although Calvin was highly committed to the authority of Scripture, he was not what we today would call "fundamentalist". There always existed a certain freedom when it came to the embodiment of the gospel in new situations. This had to do with the combination of Word and Spirit which Calvinist churches must take care not to lose because this combination remains the surest way towards responsible reform and renewal. Historically, Reformed churches tended to be too rigid in their attempts to renew congregations and they have often not taken the Spirit as seriously as they should have. Today many congregations show greater openness to listen to the Spirit. This should be commended – as long as we remember that this should be accompanied by an even deeper process of listening to Scripture and tradition!

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

Of all the Reformers Calvin arguably had the deepest commitment to the unity of the church and in this he remains an inspiration to modern day Reformed and Presbyterian churches. His role in the discussions on Holy Communion and his famous letter to Bishop Cranmer bears testimony to this commitment. In light of this it is ironic that Calvinist churches today are amongst the most divided Christian groups in the world.

The problem seems to be that in many of our churches unity is seen as important but not central. It is part of the wellbeing of the church but not part of its being and fundamental identity. Such a view can never be associated with Calvin. Because the church's life came from Christ Himself, the unity of the body is non-negotiable. This is clear in Calvin's writings:

All the elect are so united in Christ that as they are dependent on one Head, they also grow together in one body, being joined and knit together as are the limbs of one body. They are made truly one since they live together in one hope, faith and love and in the same Spirit of God (*Inst.* VI.I.2).

Calvin emphasised the importance of the unity of the body: "For no hope of future inheritance remains to us unless we have been united with all other members under Christ, our Head" (*Inst.* IV.I.2). It is remarkable that Calvin, reputed to have been very strict regarding doctrine, was very open when it came to honouring and appreciating the faith of other Christians. He pleaded for unity in the central doctrines of the faith, but did not think, for example, that differences of a practical nature should stand in the way of unity. This is yet another indication of gravity of this issue for him.

It is not clear why many Evangelical and Calvinist churches, that would like to see themselves as part of the Reformed tradition, fail to reflect the commitment of the great reformer to the unity of the church. The reason for this needs urgent investigation and reflection. A low ecclesiology (which ultimately means that the church is our creation and property) is probably part of the problem. We need to see the connection between Christ and his body more clearly. However, there might be an additional problem: Ellwood (2009:91-94) sees a connection between these problems and Calvin's views on authority in the church, which he believes was well intended but inadequate and naive in practice. Perhaps the time has come for a deep and thorough process of reflection on Calvin's fundamental ecclesiology, his views on unity and the expression of unity in the Reformed tradition, and how all of these relate to the question of final authority in the church.

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KEY WORDS
Calvin
Ecclesiology
Congregation
Embodied gospel
Unity

TREFWOORDE
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Ekklesiologie
Gemeente
Beliggaamde evangelie

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Galatians 2:15-21 and the Belhar Confession (1986) in dialogue

ABSTRACT

This article brings Gal 2: 15-21 into dialogue with the Confession of Belhar (1986). It starts off with the issue of the formation of confessions in Early Christianity and asks whether there could be a confession basic to or in the making in the Galatians passage. The Confession of Belhar (1986) is structured around three concepts, namely, unity, reconciliation and justice within the South African context of the churches disunity with all its social consequences. Galatians reflects a critical and decisive period in the history of the Early Christianity as it struggles with the issue of justification. In this pericope Paul focuses on Justification by faith, but supports it with other concepts like grace, equality/unity and freedom. While these sets of concepts do not correspond with one another, they both reflect a crucial period of transformation in the history of the church.

The issue of justification in Galatians 2:15-21 forms the focus of this article. In this passage Paul counters justification by the works of the law with justification by faith. The passage is also read in dialogue with the Belhar Confession (1986). Analogously, this confession stands antithetical to the theological justification of apartheid. It is generally recognised that Dirkie Smit has made a significant contribution to the Confession.[2]

Text-technical and literary analysis

The majority of scholars are of the opinion that not all of Galatians 2:15-21 is a verbatim rendering of Paul's strong criticism of Peter and Barnabas regarding their conduct in Antioch. That 2:14b, which serves as an introduction, is direct speech is not disputed. However, what follows appears to be more of a pre meditated formulation than a spontaneous reaction. This raises questions about the origin and character of these verses: Could it be an extract from an existing statement, perhaps drawn up after the Jerusalem meeting as a response to an issue that seems to have become a major problem in many of the Christian communities at the time?[3] Or is it a carefully composed summary of Paul's reprimand drawn up by Paul himself, perhaps in consultation with his fellow

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2 Dirkie Smit was on the drafting commission of the confession appointed by the Dutch Reformed Church Synod of 1982.

3 Acts 15 indicates that the place of the law within early Christianity was such a controversial issue that it necessitated the meeting of the church leadership in Jerusalem. Jerusalem features much in the Letter to Galatians (1:1718; 2:1; 4:25-26) and it could mean that the meeting was forward in Paul's mind when he wrote it. Paul also deals with the issue quite extensively in Rom. 35 and also in 2 Cor. 3:4-18 (cf. 2 Cor. 4:13; 5:7). Gal. 2:1-10 suggests some general agreement reached at the Jerusalem meeting because, when Paul met with those who were regarded as the pillars in the church, they did not dispute or correct him.

workers (1:2), to be used in a broader context in order to address a problem that threatened the church in its infancy?

New Testament authors regularly quoted the primitive Christian tradition that was primarily orally transmitted traditions to support their messages. By using certain text critical techniques and literary analyses, it has become possible to identify some of these traditional creeds, confessions, hymns, statements, et cetera. Some typical characteristics that could suggest the presence of such underlying traditional material from early Christian texts have been identified. Cullmann's initial work (1949) regarding this is well known. More expanded and thorough is the work of Neufeld.[4] Applying some of the features that he and others had identified, the possibility that a statement of a confessional nature could be the foundation of Galatians 2:15-21 will be explored.

After a linguistic study to determine criteria to detect the homologia in early Christian literature, Neufeld applied these to the Pauline corpus. Some of the criteria include "the homologein-homologia word group". He found that

> [O]ther verbs of a kerugmatic, didactic, or confessional nature also provide certain clues pointing to the homologia. In addition, syntactical considerations may be indicative of formulary material, such as the use of *oti*, the double accusative, and the infinitive to express a statement which is quoted directly or indirectly. In other passages a participial construction or the use of relative clauses may introduce "creedal" material. The total evidence which is thus revealed in the letters must be evaluated in an effort to precipitate the form or forms which rightly may be called the Pauline *homologia* (Neufield 1963:42).

Neufeld then identifies forms of *homologia* in Paul, and after some detail analyses of specific Pauline texts, concludes:

> [T]he letters of Paul contain basically three forms or patterns which appear to be related to the primitive *homologia:* the simple formula, *Kurios Isous,* the two article formula which refers to Jesus as Lord and God as Father, and an antithetical pattern, appearing in several forms, in which a contrast is drawn between the earthly career of Jesus and the new position granted him in the resurrection. The evidence clearly indicates that the basic *homologia* in the Pauline epistles is the simple formula *Kurios Isous.* The precise relationship of the two article formula and the antithetical pattern to this *homologia* is less certain (1963:51).

If one now considers these clues or indicators with regard to Galatians 2:15-21 in order to determine whether it has any features of an early confession,[5] the following is of interest:

- The use of *oti* as an indication of a possible "quotation" from another source is absent.

- The word *homologia* does not appear but the word *pistis* – which, according to Neufeld (1963:32), is related to it and suggests a body of faith – does. It is probably the most central concept in the pericope, appearing both as a noun and a verb (2:16, 20; cf. 1:23).

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4 Neufeld, however, does not identify Gal. 2:15-21 as a possible early Christian confession.

5 Gal. 4:4 ("God set his own Son, born of a woman, born under the law", et cetera.) indicates that Paul was not ignorant of formulary patterns.

- "*Jesus is Lord*" in this formula form does not appear as such within this particular passage. However, Paul uses it at the beginning (1:3) and end (6:14, 18) of the Letter thereby indicating his acceptance of it as a basic confession from tradition. He does use the titles *Jesus Christ* and *Christ Jesus* in the 2:16 and many times more in the Letter. Interestingly, Paul frequently uses the adjective *Christ* as a proper noun independent of *Jesus* inside (2:16, 17, 20, and 21) and outside of the passage that could point to a traditional formula to emphasise that Jesus is the only Christ.[6] These uses together suggest that Paul was not only conscious of but also made use of the Christological titles from tradition in the Letter and in the passage.

- Similarly, Jesus Christ and Son of God also appear in the statement – not in a formulary combination, but separately. Jesus Christ was already discussed above. The titles Son of God (2:20) and God do appear (2:19, 21) – also many times elsewhere. They are not used in an antithetical manner to describe the earthly and heavenly positions of Jesus, but separately. However, the resurrection of Jesus is expressed in 1:1, and the earthly. In 4:4 with regard to the incarnate Son of God. This indicates Paul's dependence on both.

- Paul does use a different form of the earthly/heavenly antithetical pattern in this statement when he focuses on the crucifixion of Jesus, using it in a way that it includes his resurrection. This also comes to expression in the life of the believer (2:20). On the cross the latter dies with the (earthly) Jesus and then lives with the (resurrected) Christ who lives in him or her (cf. 4:19).

- Striking is the binary pattern in the passage, as indicated by, among others: i) Jews by birth/Gentiles as sinners (2:15); ii) works of the law/faith in Christ (2:16); iii) building up/pulling down (2:18); iv) died for the law/live for God (2:19); and v) my life/the life which Christ lives in me (2:20). This pattern is consistent with the rest of the Letter. It shows that this thought pattern is characteristic of Paul. They function to draw very clear boundaries (cf. Neyrey 1990:190-191).

Characteristic of the apartheid policy was not only that it wanted to draw geographical boundaries as expressed in the Homelands and Group Areas Acts, but in doing so, it also wanted to create separation along racial, social and religious lines, even amongst Christians. These boundaries were symbolic and caused mental and spiritual alienation amongst people, focusing not on what people had in common but on what separated them.

- Similarly striking is the accumulation of prepositions in the passage, such as: "by birth" (2:15); "by the works of the law, through faith in/of Christ Jesus" (2:16); "in/on Christ", "against the law" (2:17); "through the law to the law", "for God" (2:19); "with Christ", "by faith in the Son of God", "for me" (2:20); "of God", "by law", "for nothing" (2:20). With Paul the use of these prepositions always has a particular significance in that they incorporate the believer into the totality of Christ's work of salvation, in particular into his death and resurrection. This adds to the confessional possibility of this section.

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6 Neufeld (1963:3441) discusses the "Confessions of Faith in Judaism" and argues that "the confession which served more precisely as Judaism's homologia was the Shema"(35). It was recited in the temple and the synagogue by the congregation as a whole. It was used over and against the Gentile polytheistic religions to emphasise Judaism's monotheism. Perhaps this kind of thinking could have influenced Paul in his emphasis on Jesus being the (only) Christ. Also in this regard Dunn (1993:41): "[T]he complete identification of Jesus as the 'Christ' of Jewish hope lies beyond and must certainly have been the reason for it becoming a second identifying name for Jesus."

Betz (1979:26-28), in his famous commentary based on a rhetorical reading of Galatians, makes some interesting remarks in this regard. In his introduction to the commentary, he deals with "Traditions and Doctrinal Presuppositions" and indicates that Paul used them to build his argument. With regard to Galatians 2:15-21, these presuppositions include: i) references to Christ (2:20); ii) Christological titles (2:20); iii) doctrinal material from Jewish Christianity such as the doctrine of justification by faith (2:1516); iv) the citation of an anti-Pauline polemic (2:17); v) doctrinal material from Paul's own theology including Pharisaic doctrines once held and now rejected, for example, the doctrine of justification (2:21c); vi) Paul's definition of his gospel, including the doctrine of justification by faith (2:15-16); definitions of Christian existence such as freedom from the Torah (2:19a), a life in faith (2:20b); guidelines for Christian existence in the future, for example, rebuttal against opponents (2:17-18, 21). Paul also includes a number of abbreviations or expressions of theological doctrines that probably have their origins in oral transmission of Paul's theology. These include: "out of the works of the law" (2:16); "through the law" (2:19, 21); "through the faith" (2:16); "out of faith" (2:16); "in faith" (2:20); "in the flesh" (2:20); "in Christ" (2:17); and "gave himself over" (2:20). While all these do not necessarily argue for a single source that Paul quoted, its collective presence in this passage does show that he depended much on traditional and doctrinal presuppositions for its composition.

Structurally the passage consists of two sections indicated by the use of the pronouns, the plural "we" and the singular "I", respectively. The "we" section is found in 2:15-17, and the "I" section in 2:18-21. Within each section the use of both the "we" and the "I" differs. Sometimes it is used emphatically ("we", 2:15; "I", 2:20) and at other times rhetorically ("we", 2:17; "I", 2:18). In the "we" section the passage starts with a statement about a perception that probably existed (v. 19) amongst Jews in general to which the "we" in verse 16, seemingly referring to Christians, is a response. It then continues with a rhetorical question to which the "I" section (1821) is now the response. The rhetorical "I" in 1819 probably alludes to Jewish Christians, while the emphatic "I" in 21 seems to express Paul's personal conviction.[7] The use of both these pronouns adds to the confessional character of the passage.[8]

From these more technical and linguistic aspects of the passage it may be concluded that the passage

• does not seem to be a verbatim reflection of the reaction started by Paul in verse 14b but rather a compact statement about the issue under discussion;

• does not in total seem to be an extract or quotation from an existing document from Christian tradition; rather,

• it probably is a composition based on early Christian and Pauline traditions

• and doctrines drew up by Paul perhaps in consultation with his fellow workers as a response to a persistent problem that was experienced in primitive Christianity with regard to content of the faith in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, while it cannot be identified as a confession in the true sense, the passage's

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7 For a detailed discussion of the structure cf. Grossouw 1974:99.

8 Both formats appear in formal confessions. The first person singular usually emphasises personal conviction, for example, the Apostle's Creed, while the first personal plural underlines the universal acceptance, for example, the Heidelberg Catechism.

structural compactness and meaningful, mature theological argument gives it a confessional character (Betz 1979:114)[9]. It is primarily a composition by Paul, a cluster of his convictions built upon and resting on long established and traditionally coined truths. It reflects the contours of a confession but may best be described as a propositional statement or a creedal type of theological reflection.

There is a difference between creeds and confessions formulated in and outside of the New Testament. The former served as the foundation stones of primitive Christianity, shaping the unfolding Jesus movement and these were canonised as part of Scripture. Those formulated outside of Scripture were really responses to it in situations of crisis that threatened the faith of the church. Although confessions also originated in post New Testament times – for example, the Apostle's Creed – a real proliferation of confessions occurred during and after the Reformation. In more recent times another spurt of confessions appeared as the processes of democratisation and liberation developed across the world, throwing up many issues that the church had to respond to.

The Belhar Confession (1986) is such a confession of recent times. It originated in a context in which racism was legitimised by a political ideology and sanctioned by Scripture. Belhar came from the DRMC. It stands in the Reformed tradition, which also takes its basic point of departure from justification by faith. This church has three traditional confessions, all focused on specific issues that were faith threatening around the time of the Reformation. The issue of racism is not explicitly addressed by these three since it was not the focus at the time of their formulation. However, Belhar does, as it was the burning issue of its time.

Theological significance

The passage is presented as integral part of the content of Galatians. Although it is embedded in the Letter and cannot be dealt with in total isolation from it, it has a distinct identity and function. As the central affirmation of the Letter, it forms the hinge around which the Letter was structured, and marks the transition between its two major sections. The historical autobiographical section (1:1 to 2:21), contains a build-up of events that took place prior to and including the incident in Antioch, all of which had a bearing on developments in Galatia. It brings the section to a culminant close. At the same time, this passage serves as an introduction to the next section (3:16:18). It forms the theoretical doctrinal basis for its analysis and exposition. In this section, Paul gives Scriptural support to his stance in 2:15-21 and spells out the implications of his gospel. It is Paul's résumé about the truth of the gospel, as he puts it (2:5), which he then contextualises, unpacks and elaborates on (cf. Betz 1979:114).

Belhar is accompanied by a separate letter which is presented as of equal importance as the Confession itself. It gives the background and context in which the confession originated and some hermeneutical indicators of how it should be read (cf. Cloete & Smit, (Eds) 1984).

In the broader context of the passage (1:62:14), Paul argues that the only source of his ministry is God's revelation to him, without consultation of any "flesh and blood" (1:16). It seems that his Damascus experience included a) his conversion, b) his calling and authorisation as apostle,

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9 In Betz's rhetorical analysis of the Letter this passage is called the proposition, which is usually placed between the narratio and the probatio. Here "[t]he propositio is extremely concise and consists largely of dogmatic abbreviations, that is, formulaic summaries of doctrines" (1979:114).

c) his mission to the Gentiles and d) the content of what he was to proclaim. Galatians 2:15-21 could also be seen as a reflection of the content of that revelation – to Paul the truth of the gospel. It has previously been argued that what appears to be is a verbatim rebuke of Peter and Barnabas by Paul with regard to their behaviour in Antioch on closure scrutiny suggests an intense engagement with and deep thought on the incident. Paul's other letters support the idea of serious reflection on the issue for a broader purpose.[10] The rhetorical use of "we" in 2:17 also indicates that Paul no longer had only Peter and Barnabas in view but a much broader audience – even the universal audience of believers.

The structure of the passage is dense and complex. It concerns a dispute between two Christian groups and is constituted by the arguments of Paul's opponents in Galatia and his responses to them. Apologetic and polemic elements are all integrated and presented in a discussion or so called diatribe style.[11] Structurally the passage can be subdivided into

• verses 15-16 which emphatically states that justification is by faith in Christ and not by works of the law. Verse 15 contains the thesis regarding the general perception of Jews about themselves and about the Gentiles which is defeated in verse 16's quotation from Psalm 143:2.

• Verses 17-18 rhetorically sketch, in a hypothetical manner, the disputed areas. In verse 17 Paul indicates the consequence when faith in Christ is used in combination with the works of the law. According to verse 18, It boils down to building up again what has already been broken down. This makes one a transgressor. This logic could also have the consequence that Christ be declared a servant of sin. As far as Paul is concerned, through his faith in Christ, he has died for the law to live for God.

• Verses 19-20, presented in the emphatic "I" style, are presented as a personal testimony by Paul about some of the theological issues under discussion. He now introduces another binary combination, faith and flesh, to spell out what it means for him to live, justified by faith but still in the age of the flesh: It is a life of faith in the crucified Christ who, as the Son of God, gave himself in love for us.

• Verse 21 concludes the pericope in rhetorical "I" style. Here Paul seems to deny a particular accusation against him with regard to God's grace. He evaluates the two positions on justification again, particularly against the background of the death of Christ on the cross. To Paul the crucifixion is the demonstration of God's grace.

The obvious, central theme of the statement – and, for that matter, of the Letter – is justification by faith. To Paul this is the truth of the gospel (2:5, 15)[12], as supported by his other writings. "Justification" is a term that comes from the Pharisaic religious context in which Paul grew up. This system required that one had to meet certain Jewish legal obligations (works of the law) in order be justification by God. Paul, by his own testimony (Phil. 3:56), was a zealous and exemplary exponent of this view (Acts 9:12). However, in the light of his Christ

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10 This does not mean that Galatians has to be read in a very abstract and theoretical manner. According to Beker (1980:28), Paul made use of "contextual interpretation". By this Beker means "that the intent and thrust of Paul's thought is inseparable from the specific situation that evokes it."

11 Betz (1979:114) comments as follows: "This passage is a summary of the doctrine of justification by faith. It is thoroughly Pauline, but Paul's claim that he shares this doctrine with Jewish Christians should be taken seriously."

12 Confessions and creeds always indicate decisive moments in the history of the church, that is, crisis situations that demand taking a position because the truth of the gospel is at stake.

experience and God's revelation to him, Paul came to acknowledge the futility of the system. Given Paul's own agonising struggle with the issue after his Damascus experience, he surely had some understanding for the struggle of the Jewish Christians. However, it was clear to him that a radical break was the only way forward.

The impression seems that Paul turned against the law completely. However, his new position of faith created a new framework for him. He now saw things from a more apocalyptic perspective: there are two dispensations, two worlds and two covenants, namely the old and the new. The old world, which still prevails in some measure, is evil (1:4). We are still slaves of this old world and we entertain its first principles (4:3), including the works of the law. When crucified with Christ, the old world is also crucified for us. Once freed from it (3:13), the "new creation" (6:15), the "Israel of God" (6:16), the "kingdom of God" (5:21) has dawned for us.

In this new context there is also a new understanding of the law as the law of love. In one sense this understanding is not totally new – it was already given to Israel in Leviticus 19:18. This means that Paul's understanding is in continuity with the intention of the Torah. In another sense, Paul probably also wanted to indicate that his understanding of the law is in accordance with Jesus' teaching regarding the law. That is why it can be called the law of Christ (6:2) with a focus on relationships of love and reconciliation as embodied in the life of Christ. These relationships go beyond the narrow and particularistic interests of Israel. It finds expression in "works of love" (5:6), and in "carrying one another's burdens" (6:2). It also means allowing the Spirit of Christ to develop a value system and love virtues not in a legalistic way, but as its fruit (5:22). Therefore, the law was not given to merit righteousness but rather to live righteously.

To those commissioned to draft Belhar it was not merely an intellectual exercise. They were commissioned also because the theological justification of separate development was an existential issue to them. Some, like Paul, grew up with and were educated in the teachings of the doctrines of the ideology of apartheid and its theological justification. Others could have been so conditioned that they may have become blind to the deep rooted discriminatory character and racial prejudices of the ideology. It is clear that Belhar came into being after a long history of spiritual agony both within the church and on the side of the drafters. The latter not only articulated what the church struggled with and the country suffered under, but in Belhar they expressed their own convictions and their solidarity with those who were the first victims. To them it also meant a radical shift.

Deeper structural level

While justification by faith is the central theme of the passage, there are some concepts in it and in the broader context of the Letter that function at a deeper structural level that inform the central theme and bring out its various dimensions and facets. These half hidden concepts give profound meaning to "Paul's gospel" of justification by faith.

1. Justification by faith and grace. Grace brackets the historical autobiographical part 1:6 and 2:21) as well as the whole Letter (1:6 and 6:18). It also marks its strategic moments, for example, 2:21 and 5:4.

In 1:6 and 2:21 Paul focuses on God's calling, both to the Galatians and to him personally. As these callings were the result of God's grace, not heeding them meant rejecting God's grace and rendering Jesus' resurrection meaningless. In 5:4 Paul points out that to want to add

works of the law to faith in Christ actually means severing the relationship with Christ and falling from grace. Paul's typical benediction (6:18) breathes the expectation that the Galatians would return to embrace God's grace once more to faith in Christ actually means severing the relationship with Christ and falling from grace. Paul's typical benediction (6:18) breathes the expectation that the Galatians would return to embrace God's grace once more.

This indicates that underlying the statement in 2:15-21 as well as in the whole Letter is the concept of grace. By it, Paul means the unconditioned, undeserved all inclusive act of justification and salvation by God through Jesus Christ, his Son. The story of God's grace is told in the story of Jesus Christ.[13] He is the embodiment of God's grace. Therefore, it is a concept that stands in apposition to justification by faith and in opposition to justification by works of the law.[14] It is clear that faith and grace are two sides of the same coin: both are gifts of God.

Belhar is structured around three concepts: unity, reconciliation and righteousness. Grace is not one of its central concepts, nor is it even mentioned in Belhar. However, there is no doubt that Belhar also takes as its point of departure God's grace as expressed in the story of Christ. Its first article clearly states: "We believe in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects, and cares for his Church by his Word and his Spirit, as he has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end." The Confession speaks of unity of the church as a "gift", of the church as "the possession of God" and it ends with the oldest traditional confession, "Jesus is Lord". These are all indications that consciousness of God's grace as told in the story of Jesus Christ serves as an a priori to the reading and understanding of Belhar.

2. Justification by faith and equality/unity. Paul starts his statement with probably the contemporary Jewish viewpoint about themselves in relation to the Gentiles: "We ourselves are Jews by birth, not Gentiles and sinners" (2:15). This statement expresses the Jewish understanding of the basic difference between Jews and Gentiles as contained in their law. Because they have been entrusted with the law, they regard their position as already justified and that of Gentiles as sinners by definition. Some Jewish Christians now wanted to carry over into the Christian community this understanding by making the law obligatory for Gentile Christians. They found that faith in Jesus Christ is insufficient for justification and wanted to complement it by the works of the law. Given the broader political context in which Jews found themselves, a position of oppressed inferiority, there were clear socio religious and nationalistic motifs of proselytising by Jewish Christians, as suggested by the demand for circumcision.[15] Against the background of the Antioch incident, it also has undertones of racism.[16] In other words, Jewish Christians, for reasons of Jewish self-interest, wanted to carry over this basic human inequality contained in the law into the Christian faith.

Paul challenges this inherent inequality by stating that no person will be justified by the

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13 Hays (1983:56, 21) has argued that "the framework of Paul's thought is constituted neither by a system of doctrines nor by his personal experience but by a 'sacred story', a narrative structure and that the story provides the foundational substructure upon which Paul's argumentation is constructed, and that without awareness of the story the theological discourse of Galatians is unintelligible."

14 Bruce (1982:80) states: "Grace and law are mutually exclusive as means of justification (cf. 5:4)."

15 Circumcisions, dietary prescriptions, et cetera, were primarily identity markers for the Jews.

16 Dunn (1993:78): "It was precisely this sense of distinctiveness and thus also of set apartness which obviously lay behind the attitude of the James group … In typical Jewish thought to do the works of the law would mean maintaining a social life as far as practically possible apart from the Gentiles."

works of the law. He argues for the essential equality of both Jews and Gentiles at two levels: All are sinners and all can be justified, but only by faith in Christ. To Paul justification by faith is the great equaliser and sole condition for all humanity to be saved.

In most of chapter 3, Paul justifies his position with reference to the Torah – probably to counter the Old Testament use by his opponents. He does so by discussing the law in its relationship to the covenant with Abraham. To him the most significant aspect of that covenant is God's promise given to Abraham (Genesis 15) that the latter's descendants (seed) will be as many as the sand of the sea and the stars in heaven. This was to Paul an indication that the Gentiles were included in the promise. Abraham accepted that promise by an act of faith and on the basis of that faith he was declared righteous and became the father of all believers. Two things become clear: First, justification by faith has its roots in the faith acceptance of God's promise by Abraham. Second, the equality of all people is expressed in the promise.

Circumcision was given afterwards merely as a sign and identity marker (Genesis 17), as was the law, which was given to Israel 430 years later together with the special calling to sustain the promise. The law was to serve as a pedagogue to educate towards the fulfilment of the promise. However, Israel abused the law in order to serve their exclusivist national interests and racial sentiments. Instead of maintaining the faith character of the promise they gave it a works character via the law and used the latter as an identity marker for themselves. This meant that for a non-Jew, justification could only be reached by becoming a Jew.

Paul presents Abraham's unhesitant embrace of God's promise as an example of faith in action. But to Paul there is also a deeper fulfilment of the promise as expressed in the singular use of the word "seed" (3:16). This saw its fulfilment in Christ. Depending on the latter, there is further fulfilment of the promise as expressed in the plural use of the word (seed) (3:29). This fulfilment refers to all those, irrespective of their race, who follow Abraham's example by simply believing. However, their faith now is in Jesus Christ through whom they also become children of God. Because all of this is related to the original intention of the promise to Abraham, they can also be regarded as children of Abraham and heirs of the promise.

Subsequently, Paul spells out the extent of all of this: Justification by faith has socio ethnic, socioeconomic and gender related consequences (3:26-29). All discrimination, oppression and inequality are exposed and should be abolished. This justification emphasises the liberating and equalizing effect of faith in Jesus Christ on all spheres of life and it states emphatically that all people are one in Christ. Starting from the premise that all humanity is equal in sin, Paul declares that through justification by faith all humanity is one and should, therefore, become what it is in Christ.

With this passage Paul wanted to address the fundamental inequality that prevailed in his society, and that was justified by the religious practices of the time. The exposure and uprooting of these evils could only happen through justification by faith in Christ.

Both Paul and Belhar take justification by faith as their points of departure. Both accepted church unity but Belhar fights the mystical interpretation of the church that seeks to avoid any cultural and racial integration. Paul fights the idea of different ways of justification for different cultures. Belhar argues that once justification by faith has been achieved, racial and cultural separation in the church become irrelevant. Paul rejects the extension of the Jewish prejudices and racial attitudes towards Gentiles into the church, while Belhar explicitly and implicitly rejects any doctrines that "absolutise either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people and the

forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour". It also rejects "any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel."

3. Justification by faith and freedom. The concept of freedom is also merely implied in the passage. In 2:4 Paul talks about "our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus". In context it refers to the faith situation of Paul and Titus but it surely applies to all who are in Christ. Behind the concept of freedom is the slave/free person imagery, which features extensively in the Letter. In 3:13 it alludes to the ransom paid to free a slave. The law is a curse that hangs over us and from which we have to be freed. It features as the background to 3:24-25 with regard to the pedagogue, who is really a slave responsible for the child's education. In 3:28 it is indicated as one of the barriers that need to be broken down.

Faith and freedom is also the dominant theme in the allegory in Galatians 4:20-5:15. (cf. 2:17). The two sons of Abraham represent the roots of the freeing promise versus that of the enslaving law. They are the sons of Hagar, the slave woman, symbolising the law, and the other son born of the free woman Sarah, symbolising faith. These two women also represent two covenants. Mount Sinai, the place where the law was given to Moses, bore slave children. By implication, the other covenant came into being through the promise to Abraham who, by Sarah, was the father of a free child. This made Isaac a child of the promise and, by implication, Ishmael a child of the law. The allegory is then extended to Jerusalem. Jerusalem of that time is related to Sinai, representing the law. The other Jerusalem is free and, like a mother, embraces all those who are born in faith. It is clear that for Paul the law has an enslaving character while faith in Christ has a liberating character.

Paul takes the issue of enslavement versus freedom further by reminding the Galatians of their own socio religious background before he brought them the gospel. They were also enslaved by the gods they worshipped, and by the principalities by which they lived. To Paul their situation at the time seemed analogous to the worksoftheflawsituation of the Jews (cf. Patte 1983:72). The gospel of faith in Jesus Christ brought the Galatians freedom. By adding the works of the law to their faith they would have reverted to their original enslaved state.

The significance of justification by faith for Paul is that it brings freedom. It is an all-inclusive freedom from all kinds of idolatrous graceless powers or other manifestations of enslavement.

The concept of freedom is again not one of the concepts around which Belhar was drafted. Belhar does emphasise that church unity "can be established only in freedom and not under constraint". It also uses the concept when it deals with the issue of justice and peace among people. It states that God "frees the prisoner". Paragraph 4 of the Accompanying Letter argues that Belhar is a proclamation "against a false doctrine and an ideological distortion which threatens the gospel itself in our church and in our country." It continues:

> "We do not doubt the Christian faith of many such people, their sincerity, honour, integrity, and good intentions and their in many ways estimable practice and conduct. However, it is precisely because we know the power of deception that we know that we are not liberated by the s eriousness, sincerity, or intensity of our certainties, but only by the truth in the Son. Our church and our land have an intense need of such liberation."

This describes the background against which Belhar was born, namely one of oppression and

enslavement, where the political dispensation was upheld by laws that were oppressive and discriminatory toward the majority of people of the country. It is also clear that Belhar yearns for an all- inclusive freedom. In paragraph 4 the Accompanying Letter (cf. Cloete & Smit, (Eds) 1984) *concludes:*

> "We pray that our brothers and sisters throughout the Dutch Reformed church family, but also outside it, will want to make this new beginning with us, so that we can be free together and together may walk the road of reconciliation and justice."

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the basic thrust of this passage seems to be the issue of transformation. By introducing the works of the law as additional requirement for justification to that of faith in Christ, Paul's opponents were in fact promoting change. In the light of the Christ event they were prepared to make adjustments to the existing Jewish scheme of salvation, but also to maintain its basic structure. They limited themselves to the improvement of the existing structure.

However, in Paul's understanding, the gospel intended to bring about total transformation. This meant abandoning all human effort to obtain justification and embracing in faith the justification graciously offered by God through Jesus Christ. From this position, fundamental changes could now be made in the life of the person and in society by the transforming power of the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit transforms the character of the person according to that of Christ and the Spirit transforms the church according to the qualities of equality, unity and freedom. This passage is Paul's confession and testimony to the world that the fundamental change in his own life was brought about by faith in Christ and not his doing of the works of the law.

The process of the transformation of the South African society officially started in 1994 but the discourse on it had started long before that – for example, with the contributions made by the Kairos Document and the Belhar Confession. While the latter contributed to the process of transformation in the society, it is intended to bring unity within the Dutch Reformed family. In this respect it has sadly not made significant progress. One would have expected these churches to form the vanguard of the process of transformation. Sadly, they seem to play exactly the opposite role.

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KEY WORDS
Galatians 2:15-21
Confession of Belhar
Justification by Faith
Transformation
Church Unity

TREFWOORDE
Galasiërs 2:15-21
Belydenis van Belhar
Regverdiging deur die geloofs
Transformasie
Kerkeenheid

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On Jesus Christ as Mediator of creation

ABSTRACT

This contribution offers reflection on two of Dirkie Smit's conversation partners, namely Herman Bavinck and Karl Barth. It notes that both are deeply Trinitarian theologians, but also that such a Trinitarian approach has to address a number of underlying difficulties with respect to the work of the Father, son and Holy Spirit. On this basis the distinct positions of Bavinck and Barth on the relationship between Christ and creation is explored. Both would confirm that Jesus Christ is the "Mediator of creation" but adopt different approaches in this regard. Such underlying differences are explored and highlighted with the help of GC Berkouwer's attempt to mediate between these approaches. The essay concludes with the observation that Smit's emphasis on the centrality of the resurrection may suggest a critical correction to discourse on "Christ and creation".

ON LONG-DISTANCE CONVERSATION PARTNERS

One of the striking features of South African Reformed theology is the way in which scholars have adopted long-standing, long-distance conversation partners. The aim of adopting such conversation partners is not merely to contribute to scholarship on, for example, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Barth or Bonhoeffer. Instead, the life and work of these long-distance conversation partners are employed as lenses or as sets of conceptual tools through which the challenges of the South African context may be addressed.

This feature may well be an ambiguous function of our colonial legacy, since the conversation partners typically come from the Netherlands and Germany, while a few others come from England and the United States of America. One's dominant conversation partners are indicated not only in the titles of articles or books, but in the bibliographies and footnotes of such contributions. Not surprisingly, adopting such conversation partners is highly contested. Amidst the church's struggle against apartheid the names of "Kuyper" and "Barth" suggested a world of difference. In liberation theology the term "primary interlocutors" is used to challenge theologies orientated exclusively towards European concerns. Many have emphasised the need for doing theology in conversation with the poor and the oppressed (not "for" them), instead of with the "cultured despisers of religion", albeit that conceptual tools derived from Europe (for example, from Marx) are still adopted for that purpose. Either way, the footnotes of theological works published in South Africa reveal worlds of difference in terms of conversation partners and theological orientation.

These observations are relevant with respect to Dirkie Smit's life and work in several ways. First, he has clearly also adopted such long-term conversation partners (see below). Second, compared to Smit's teachers of theology he had demonstrated an astonishing ability to widen the range of conversation partners beyond a narrow Dutch or German orientation without discarding them. I have heard him say that South African theologians read more widely (taking note of more diverse sources) than is the case in most, if not all, other contexts. Third, his fondness of footnotes is indicative of his ability to read and integrate a gigantic corpus of

literature. This is typically the nature of his contributions, namely to offer an overview of entire theological discourses while restraining himself in offering constructive contributions. In this way Smit offers heuristic service to those around him by helping to place the positions of others (including generous references to his own students and colleagues) within a map of the terrain. Finally, his work is always highly contextual. Smit responds to invitations by seeking to take the questions that are raised seriously, in order to listen to the articulated needs and to help uncover the underlying assumptions. His oeuvre is, therefore, distinctly South African even when engaged in surveys of North Atlantic literature.

In this contribution I will explore Smit's choice of dominant conversation partners. It is no secret that he time and again returns to John Calvin and especially to Karl Barth for guidance. It is also not difficult to gauge what attracts him to Barth. First, Barth was able to respond to the theological crises associated with World War I and II. Smit sensed that this was the kind of theology that was needed in order to respond to challenges posed by apartheid and apartheid theology, and later by globalization. Second, Barth's confessional approach to theological reflection helped to guide him in his life-time work as co-author and main interpreter of the Belhar Confession. As my colleague Christo Lombard once astutely observed in a course on South African theologies offered at UWC, Dirkie Smit's work may be captured in two words: "embodied confession" – as a form of situated discourse. Third, Barth's deeply Trinitarian approach to theological reflection satisfied his desire to remain true to Nicene Christianity in his own work. Fourth, Barth's ability to keep theological reflection in balance with ethical responsibility, ecclesial praxis and a cheerful sense of piety remains crucial. Here was a theologian who maintained the primacy of the church as one of the "publics" for theological reflection, while also being deeply engaged in various spheres of society and the academy. Finally, Smit recognised through Willie Jonker, his teacher, supervisor, and father-in-law, how liberating Barth's theology could be for South African Reformed theology that was trapped in a sterile form of Reformed orthodoxy, if not fundamentalism. Dirkie Smit's postgraduate theses (his earliest writings) focused on three very different conversation partners, namely Jürgen Habermas (on dialogue), Herman Bavinck (on truth and verification) and Karl Rahner (on theology as anthropology). In my own recent work on the relationship between creation and salvation as acts of God, I have returned to my theological roots after shunning that earlier by exploring contemporary contributions to ecotheology. More specifically, I returned to the work of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, remembering a comment from Willie Jonker that his own theological work remained very much in line with those two figures who helped to reform Dutch Reformed theology. I found especially in Bavinck's position on nature and grace and in his notion of "re-creatio" (*herschepping*), insights that are highly attractive if one is searching for a theology that could do justice to both God's acts of creation and of salvation – which is rather elusive, to say the least. I rediscovered Bavinck's oeuvre with a certain freshness, amazed at the emphasis (compared to Barth) that he placed on affirming science, art, philosophy, society and nature. This was not quite the Bavinck I read earlier – which was through the lens of Berkouwer and Noordmans – or in the form of the textbooks by Willie Jonker, Jaap Durand and Flip Theron, my mentors in systematic theology.

This brought me to a thought experiment. What if Dirkie Smit, given his early work on and lasting respect for Herman Bavinck (1856-1921), opted for the latter instead of for Karl Barth (1886-1968) as a dominant conversation partner? What difference would that have made? There is no need here to explore such a speculative question. However, it is important to assess what may be at stake in selecting one's conversation partners. In the rest of this contribution I will, therefore, explore one of the core differences between Bavinck and Barth, namely about

the relationship between Christ and creation. In order to do that I need to preface that with a few comments on the need for a Trinitarian approach to theology – which Bavinck and Barth certainly shared.

On the difficulties in adopting a trinitarian approach

In a famous essay on The Necessity of a Trinitarian Theology, Arnold van Ruler observes that "[s]imply recognizing the necessity of a Trinitarian theology does not mean that one succeeds in the project" (1989:1). He adds that he has not found such a theology in the entire Christian theological tradition, suggests that Calvin approached that ideal most closely, and admits that he is not able to offer anything approximating that. This comment may sound odd given the renaissance of Trinitarian theology in the past century and the astonishing flourishing of books on the doctrine of the Trinity over the last three decades.

However, a "fully Trinitarian" theology remains more elusive than a mere affirmation of its significance may suggest. Why is that the case? The key does not necessarily lie in revisiting classic Trinitarian debates and distinctions or in delving into a form of inner-Trinitarian mysticism based on the "social analogy". The key lies in seeing how the Trinity governs the very core of the Christian confession and forms its doxological conclusion – rather than a point of departure for an entire theological system. Yet such a doxological conclusion is undermined by a number of factors. For the sake of brevity, let me mention three core issues.

First, while the *filioque* controversy may be regarded as a highly technical theological dispute, the underlying issue of the relationship between the Christ and the Holy Spirit is of immense pastoral significance. One may argue that it continues to divide Christians in South Africa – those in mainline churches who suggest that the Spirit works through Christ (the church, the Word and the sacraments) and those who suggest that the Spirit "blows in different directions" (see the essays in volume 79 of *Scriptura* under the title Wither Does the Wind Blow?). One example (outlined in an unpublished paper by Dirkie Smit at the annual meeting of the Theological Society of South Africa in 2002) is the differences in ecumenical theology between those who adopt a Christological orientation (for example, Geoffrey Wainwright) and those who call for a pneumatological reorientation in the name of a fully Trinitarian approach (for example, Konrad Raiser).

Second, it is far more difficult to do justice to both creation and salvation than it may appear at first sight. Typically the one is subsumed under the other or under a third category. The most acute formulation of the issue at stake is perhaps by Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2000:75): Is the God of our redemption the same God of our creation? The same underlying problem emerges in many issues in ecclesial praxis, for example, on church and society, Christianity and culture, homosexuality, faith and science, and the relationship between Christianity and other religions. Again this matter divides Christianity deeply as the challenges posed by Marcion, the Gnostics, the Manicheans and various forms of dualism indicate. How is the material related to the spiritual and how can one do justice to that which is material, bodily and earthly? How does the work of Jesus Christ relate to that of the Father? The criticisms of "Christomonism" and a "binitarian" theology often raised against Barth reveal something of the underlying tensions. Regin Prenter (1946:161-182) accused Barth of "creation docetism" while Gustaf Wingren (in Vander Goot 1981:145) went so far as to suggest that Barth influenced many to regard the first article of the Christian creed as a Nazi principle. Although these criticisms may well be refuted by Barth scholar- ship, they do suggest that a Trinitarian theology needs to go beyond a mere affirmation of relatedness to explore the nature of the relationship in all its complexity.

Bavinck's rhetoric here is striking:

> The God of creation and of the Old Testament is not lower than the God of re- creation, than the Father of Christ, than the God of the new covenant. Christ, the mediator of the new covenant is also he by whom God created all things. And the Holy Spirit who is the author of regeneration and sanctification is the same as he who in the beginning hovered over the waters and adorned the heavens. Creation and re-creation, therefore cannot be contrasted in terms of being lower and higher. They are both good and pure – splendid works of the one Triune God (2008:436).

Third, the relationship between God the Father and the Holy Spirit poses another set of issues. Perhaps this becomes most evident in Christian responses to religious diversity. This forms a test case for an affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity in ecclesial praxis, also and especially in the African context. For one group of Christians the only way to engage with people of other faiths is to acknowledge that "God has many names" and that knowing God as the Father of Jesus Christ is only one such name. Thus faith in the triune God is reduced to faith in God the Father on the basis of some form of subordinanism, the link between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity is discarded and God's revelation is clouded. The God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is different from the actual One behind the mask. Ironically, the Spirit (or a vague sense of spirituality) provides the generic category to place different notions of the transcendent, of Ultimate Reality alongside each other, thus compromising their ultimacy. While no Trinitarian theologian would put the matter in such crude terms, the challenges for ecclesial praxis remain undeniable in a world characterised by a "clash of civilisations" and religion-infused conflict. How could faith in the triune God plausibly guide Christians in such a context? How can the Trinitarian mystery be protected doxologically? Indeed where can such a Trinitarian theology be found?

On bavinck and barth, nature and grace

Given these comments on Trinitarian theology, comparing Bavinck with Barth is quite illuminating. Through his studies of Reformed theology, Barth knew Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* and occasionally referred to it affirmatively. One example is a reference to Bavinck's discussion of the incomprehensibility of God (Barth CD 2.1, 1957:186). For the early Barth, God can only be known as the unknown God. In Jesus Christ as well, God becomes accessible to us only through the impossibility that the eternal Logos can become flesh, through the veiling of the cross. Indeed, Barth and Bavinck have much in common, including the Reformed tradition in which they stand, their soteriological focus, their strong Christological orientation and a consistently Trinitarian approach to theological reflection.

The clearest difference between them may well be in terms of political economy rather than theology. Bavinck was a member of the Anti-Revolutionary party, Barth a staunch socialist. Both parties took up the cause of the *kleine luyden,* but differed on the "revolution" that was required. Barth responded to the crisis posed by the liberal legitimation of German nationalism and instigated something of a theological revolution. Bavinck was a lifelong critic of liberalism too, but compared to Barth his social ethics seems to be more establishment-orientated.

Theological differences emerge when Barth and Bavinck's respective views on nature and grace are considered. Barth's critique of natural theology is well documented. Bavinck's affirmation of the necessity of general revelation would raise Barth's deepest suspicions.

The relationship between nature and grace is a central theme in Bavinck's whole oeuvre. In a translated extract from his doctoral thesis entitled Nature and grace in Herman Bavinck, Jan Veenhof (2006:16) says: "It is the central theme that recurs in numberless variations, the refrain that is unceasingly repeated, the leitmotif that we hear everywhere." In the introduction to the English translation of *Reformed Dogmatics,* Volume 1, John Bolt (2003:18) suggests that the Trinitarian expression that "graces restores natures" shapes Bavinck's entire theology. The cosmic scope of Bavinck's understanding of the Christian faith is indeed unmistakable in his own summary: "that the creation of God the Father, ruined by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God and recreated by the grace of the Holy Spirit into a kingdom of God" (2003:112). Bavinck's soteriology may be captured under the rubric of "re-creation" (*herschepping*) and entails a consistent affirmation of God's creation as *creatura* – and thus of the spheres of culture, art, science and reason. Salvation in Jesus Christ is not an aim in itself, but to restore nature, to allow God's creation to flourish again. God's grace is indeed threefold: the original blessing of God's creation as indeed "very good", common grace and special grace (cf. Veenhof 1968:409). Only special grace functions soteriologically. For Bavinck, the deepest intention of Reformed theology is, therefore, a rehabilitation of the first article of the creed by affirming the value, indeed the eschatological significance, of that which is natural.

All of this is rather different in tone from Barth's critique of natural theology. Barth would scarcely have called for a theological appreciation of that which is "natural". For Barth, the emphasis is thus not on the created order (*creatura*) as the work of God (which, of course, he also affirmed), but on the God who created. In his famous discussion of the "lesser lights" he acknowledges that the world contains its own mysteries (alongside its mere existence, rhythms, contrariety, regularity and freedom – which Barth also examines), but this remains the world's mystery, not God's mystery or even that of the revelation of God (1961:149). That God the Father is the one who created can only be discovered through the teaching of Jesus Christ on his Father. Colin Gunton (1992:94) suggests that there is a "critical consensus" on the weakness of Barth's position on this particular point, namely his ability to do justice to the created order itself.

Barth's own mature position was that God's work of creation is the construction of the necessary space for the history of the covenant of grace. Thus creation forms the "external ground" for the establishment of the covenant. Because of God's election, the world is created and also sustained (cf. CD 3.1, 1958:44). Creation as *creatura* is thus understood in terms of covenant and creation as act of God in terms of election.

On Christ and creation

Underlying these differences one may detect deeper differences with regard to the way in which the relationship between Christ and creation is understood. Both Bavinck and Barth would acknowledge that God's act (decree) of creation forms a necessary presupposition for the possibility of incarnation. Moreover, both would emphasise the role of Christ in mediating the act of creation: "through him all things were made". Creation is not merely the work of the Father but also of the Son and the Spirit. However, for Bavinck this mediating role belongs to the Son eternally begotten from the Father (the *logos asarkos*). By contrast, Barth insists that this could only be known if one allocates this mediating role to Jesus Christ incarnate (*the logos ensarkos*) – leading to a "strongly immanentist theology" (Gunton 1992:95). This allows Barth to suggest that anthropology and creation theology may be built upon God's election in Christ. Jesus is not only the Mediator of reconciliation but the most authentic, the original

human being (Runia 1955:104). From here further theological differences emerge: Did God create the world for the sake of the incarnation or did God become incarnate for the sake of creation? Or is the purpose of the incarnation to redirect creation to its original destiny which was from the beginning in and through Christ (Gunton 1992:94)? Bavinck (2004:424) comments on this long before the time of Barth:

> This notion then automatically leads to a doctrine of incarnation apart from sin. The world as such is profane; creation is not really a divine work. For God to be able to create and for the world and mankind to be pleasing to him, he must view them in Christ. God could only have willed the world in Christ and for Christ. It is only in Christ as the head and central individual of the human race that we can be pleasing to God. In this view the incarnation is necessary for the revelation and communication of God, and the God-man is the supreme goal of creation. Ultimately, this train of thought culminates in the theory that the creation was necessary for God himself … This Gnosticism can only be fundamentally overcome when all dualism between God and the world is cut off at the root. Creation as a work of God is not inferior to re-creation; nature is not of a lower order than grace.

Another way of framing the issue at stake relates to the relationship between revelation and incarnation. Both Bavinck and Barth insist that God's revelation is primarily, if not exclusively, found on the basis of the incarnation. Such a virtual identification of incarnation and revelation is understandable given the uniqueness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. However, as Berkouwer (1955:93) observes, the exclusivity of God's revelation cannot simply be derived from the exclusivity of salvation in Christ.

Bavinck could even teach the identity of revelation and incarnation since Christ is the very centre of God's revelation (cf. Veenhof 1968:321-327). He says: "Revelation and incarnation stand and fall with each other. The incarnation is the completed, sustainable, eternalised revelation" (quoted in Veenhof 1968:408) [my translation – EMC]. However, for Bavinck this identity encompasses both special revelation and general revelation. The incarnation epitomises and concludes the history of God's special revelation. Special revelation is nothing but preparation for the incarnation. Special revelation assumes general revelation though (for a more detailed discussion, see Conradie 2011:55-62). The incarnation also epitomises God's general revelation in the work of creation. Already in the creation of human beings God becomes incarnate in the created image of God (cf. Bavinck RD 1, 2003:344). Nature itself is God's incarnated word! As Veenhof (1968:412) observes, this begs the question whether Bavinck was able to do justice to the radical newness of God's gracious salvation in Jesus Christ – so that special revelation tends to be degraded towards a special instantiation of general revelation.

For Barth, the very distinction between general and special revelation was problematic. It cannot but prepare the way for natural theology. In Barth's famous polemics against Brunner on the status of natural theology, he denied the need for any "point of contact" between Christ and our context, between the proclamation of the gospel and our hearing the gospel. There is no need for such a point of contact because the bridge is not provided by the human capacity to understand the gospel but by God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Since Jesus Christ embodied God's presence amongst us, there is no need to find any other point of contact (Barth 2002:121). The infinite gulf between God and the world, therefore, cannot be bridged by humans and need not be, as it has been crossed already – in Jesus Christ. The word (of forgiveness) creates its own point of contact and does not rely on any such point of contact in

human beings. There is no need to find vague traces of God's presence elsewhere in "general revelation"; if indeed they can be found. Theological reflection on Christ and on the world (creation) has to be kept together; the logic of first offering an exposition of the problem (fallen creation) to which Christ provides the "answer" (redemption) has to be resisted.

Instead, Barth insists that our knowledge of God is not derived from any previous knowledge of other lords or lordships; it is a consequence of God's revelation in Christ alone. He also insists that there is no analogy on the basis of which the nature and being of God as Creator is accessible to us:

> If we do know about God as the Creator, it is neither wholly nor partially because we have prior knowledge of something which resembles creation. It is only because it has been given to us by God's revelation to know Him, and what we previously thought we knew about originators and causes is contested and converted and transformed (Barth CD II.1, 1957:77).

We cannot move from knowledge of creation to knowledge of the Creator. It is not as if the first article of the Christian creed provides common ground with other religious traditions, only to be divided by the second article. The first article is also a matter of faith in Christ (cf. also Runia 1955:108).

One may argue that Barth's critique against natural theology was, in fact, aimed at an anthropocentric interpretation of the first article of the Christian creed that was so typical of liberal theology in the wake of Kant's critiques: where human self-understanding forms the key to the knowledge of God. Ironically, Barth has often been criticised from the perspective of ecotheology for a similar anthropocentrism, but then of the second article of the creed, namely a reduction of the scope of salvation to the encounter between human beings and God in Jesus Christ (cf. Santmire 1985; Thiemann 1981:124).

Yet another way of framing the underlying differences relates to the order of addressing the relationship between creation and salvation. Bavinck maintained the historical order where God's work of creation is followed by the fall and then by God's work of re-creation, thus privileging an infralapsarian position with regard to the divine counsel. By contrast, Barth not only affirmed a noetic priority for Christ over creation. He also affirmed an ontic priority: creation was necessary for the sake of Jesus Christ, that is, for the sake of God's covenant in Christ. Creation may be the first of God's opera ad extra, but does not have the same primacy in God's eternal counsel. Creation is a prefiguration of reconciliation; it has no independent purpose but to make reconciliation possible (cf. Runia 1955:107-117; Veenhof 1968:411).

While Bavinck maintained the historical order, Barth rejected a chronological "phase theory" of creation-fall-redemption as historical stages in order to stress the unity of God's work. For Bavinck, Christology is the central theme of dogmatics, but not the starting point (cf. RD II, 2006:274); for Barth it is both the central point and the starting point. Runia (1955:120) describes this as the main difference between Bavinck and Barth. Barth dubs the historical order as "double bookkeeping", thinking in phases, first in terms of creation and then in terms of redemption. He inverts this historical sequence by arguing from Christ to Adam, from God's election in Jesus Christ to the election of humanity. His sequence is, therefore, one moving from election to reconciliation. In the name of the unity of God's work Barth thus avoided any independent interest in creation or in the orders of creation (cf. also Berkouwer 1956:52-88, 215-261). However, such a soteriological interpretation of creation renders creation dependent

upon salvation. It begs the question what creation is to be saved from. Can the inherent goodness of that which is natural, material, bodily and earthly then still be affirmed? Or is creation itself an act of salvation from the shadow side of creation, if not from *Das Nichtige?*

This suggests that one can distinguish between the twin dangers of monism and dualism (Berkouwer 1956:254). Kuyper has been rightly criticised for compartmentalising creation and salvation, allowing for an independent interest in creation to the point that the orders of creation also structured the nature of salvation (and of grace). By contrast, Barth has been criticised by Van Ruler (1947:120) for a monism of grace, for fusing creation and salvation so that the act of creation itself becomes salvific and grace becomes God's only work (see also Runia 1955:115). Such a tidy unity of creation and salvation comes at the cost of much speculation (cf. Runia 1955:117; Veenhof 1968:412).

On Berkouwer's way of mediating between Bavinck and Barth

Berkouwer's considerable oeuvre may be understood as a constant engagement with Barth's ongoing work, on the one hand, and Roman Catholic theology on the other hand. He wrote several books on Barth's theology in which he seems to become less and less critical of Barth's position. His own theology was deeply rooted in Bavinck's renewal of Reformed theology. It may, therefore, be interesting to trace this engagement to see how he mediated between these two figures (see also Conradie 2011:96-98).

Berkouwer's early review of Barth's theology in *Geloof en Openbaring in de Nieuwere Duitsche Theologie* (Faith and Revelation in the Newer German theology) (1932) is already quite interesting. Here he argues that Barth's radical emphasis on the subjectivity of God and his rejection of any form of continuity between God and humanity leads to the affirmation that God can only be known by Godself. Berkouwer wonders whether Barth can account for the impact of salvation on God's own creation. Does any focus on that which is creaturely necessarily jeopardise the sovereignty of God (1932:212)? There is a need, Berkouwer says, for a correlation between revelation and faith in which faith is not seen as something that leaves the created reality untouched. Berkouwer criticises Barth's actualistic understanding of faith on the basis of his conviction that faith is to be understood within the tension between creation and re-creation. For Berkouwer creation may be distinguished from God, has an integrity of its own, yet remains dependent upon God. God's revelation touches creation in the form of faith. The underlying problem, Berkouwer argues, is Barth's emphasis on act instead of being. He asks whether one can still speak of the real existence of creation (*creatura*) or whether this would necessarily jeopardise an actualistic understanding of God's work (Berkouwer 1932:212; cf. also Brinkman 1983:35-42). Brinkman captures Berkouwer's early critique of Barth in the following way:

> According to Berkouwer, for Barth there could be no possibility that God's grace would transform the relationships that were created. Grace does not actually restore life but stands outside of it. Faith remains alien to life (Brinkman 1983:66) [my translation – EMC].

Here Berkouwer is clearly in continuity with Kuyper and Bavinck, his neo-Calvinist teachers.

Berkouwer also criticised Barth's ethics on this basis. Can Barth's radical emphasis on God's work maintain God's sovereignty in every sphere of life? How does it really touch society? Barth's theology does lead to protest against Nazism, but such protest is focused on matters of confession within the church (against the German Christians) and is necessarily vague in

making recommendations in society (Brinkman 1983:53-54).

In his book *Karl Barth en de Kinderdoop* (Karl Barth and Infant Baptism) (1947), Berkouwer argues that a historical sequence may help to prevent theological speculation. Where the unity of creation and re-creation is emphasised, there may be the temptation to devaluate the role of history. Berkouwer comments: "To qualify the 'very good' Christologically would lead to the relationship between original good creation and fall becoming vague and shallow" (Berkouwer 1947:121) [my translation – EMC]. What is especially crucial is to maintain the fall as an event which entered the world in history in the form of rebellion against God. Where this is not acknowledged (albeit perhaps not in terms of a singular historical event), it may have repercussions for an affirmation of the goodness and value of the created order and for an understanding of re-creation. Berkouwer argues that Barth's position on infant baptism has everything to do with his understanding of the relation between creation and salvation. He concludes, in my translation, that

> [i]t has been typical of reformed theology that it … maintained the real and irreversible historical sequence with no less emphasis. This alone allowed it to make the break in created reality evident and to recognise the guilt and responsibility following that break (Berkouwer 1947:128, see also Brinkman 1983:83).

In *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth,* Berkouwer returns to this point. Drawing on Regin Prenter, he suggests that the manner in which redemption and creation cross each other, imperils the significance and decisiveness of history:

> [Barth's] conception leaves the impression that everything has already been done, all the decisions have been taken, so that one can hardly say that the historical fall and the historical reconciliation are at issue, but only the revelation of redemption in history, the revelation of the definitive Yes of God's grace. There is no question of a "step-wise", one after the other, of creation and redemption. The whole of creation fundamentally rests in redemption (Berkouwer 1956:250) [italics in original].

And:

> The eschatological triumph [over the forces of chaos] will be no more than the revelation of this fact. Only one mandate remains for man to fulfil: to see through the appearance of things and not to fear (Berkouwer 1956:260).

Berkouwer observes that Barth's supralapsarianism here draws him into emphasising the unity of God's work more than its distinctness. However, Berkouwer suggests that the unity of God's work and the rejection of a historicising of the works of God (as if God could be surprised by historical developments, as if God's actions depend upon human actions) are not necessarily contrary to such a step-wise sequence. These comments suggest that there is a need to avoid both a compartmentalising of the various aspects of God's work (for which Kuyper has been criticised – cf. Van der Kooi 1999:99) and a fusion of God's work (for which Berkouwer criticises Barth).

What Barth legitimately objects to is the way in which liberal theology has gradually denied guilt and the need for reconciliation. In this way a "double book-keeping" could emerge which paved the way for the "single bookkeeping" of human reason (Berkouwer 1956:259). Although Berkouwer acknowledges Barth's critique in this regard, he is evidently more attracted to

an infralapsarian emphasis on creation, fall and redemption as discrete historical events (as accounted for in the divine decrees). His continuity with Bavinck is evident here. On this basis there is a need to do theology and to confront evil from within the midst of history, living with anxiety due to the uncertainties of the future and where the decision of faith is still of significance – instead of the proclamation of the triumph of grace as something eternal in God and only revealed in history (Berkouwer 1956:260-261). Berkouwer's questions highlight the danger of a noetic reduction of the meaning of history and of salvation itself. The human predicament is not merely a lack of knowledge – which can be addressed by revelation, but the struggle in the midst of history against the tangible manifestations of evil.

Inversely, Barth also tends to render an ontological status to evil and suffering through his notion of the shadow side of creation. For Berkouwer, this tends to conflate sin with the human predicament of finitude. He is clearly hesitant to allow for suffering in God's good creation. He therefore asks Barth:

> Can death be regarded as belonging to human nature as it came from the hand of God, or is death an alien, destructive power which has penetrated the good creation and is contrary to human nature? … Is death, although standing under the power of God, anything else than evil only? (Berkouwer 1956:154).

If death is embedded in creation, then the *eschaton* would have to overcome an inherent problem in creation. Berkouwer's concern is, therefore, that the fusion of creation and salvation inversely leads to too much emphasis on the eschatological discontinuity of God's works.

On incarnation and resurrection

There can be little doubt about Berkouwer's influence on South African Reformed theology through his supervision of many doctoral candidates, including Willie Jonker. It is another matter what such South African Reformed theologians heard and learnt from Berkouwer. Did they find a path leading to Bavinck's consistent affirmation of science, reason, art and culture? Did they consider his remarkably early critique of apartheid theology? Were they enticed towards his increasing appreciation of Barth? Did they follow his existentialist narrowing of Bavinck's Reformed theology? Did they learn from his broad engagements and from the mildness of his judgements?

Whatever the answers to these questions may be, it is at least clear that Dirkie Smit's work cannot be neatly captured under any of these rubrics. He was clearly excited by the avenue leading towards Barth, but through his engagement with so many other conversation partners from different contexts he gained an ecumenical range that is truly astonishing.

Given the theme of "Christ and creation" considered here, one of the most obvious features of Smit's own constructive contributions is his desire to re-orientate theological reflection along confessional lines towards the witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Following Barth, he has emphasised the centrality of the resurrection to an understanding of the Christian faith, the gospel, the church and ministry consistently. This clearly suggests a correction to discourse on "Christ and creation" that all too often employs the incarnation as a point of departure. If, then, the resurrection may be used as a point of departure to explore the relationship between "Christ and creation", this would require further reflection on the bodily resurrection and indeed, following Calvin, on the bodily ascension. As Gunton (1992:61) notes,

if the transformation associated with the resurrection is not related to that which is bodily, this effectively restricts the possibility of Christ's resurrection transforming the whole of creation (what was not risen cannot be redeemed). This applies especially if, again following Barth, the resurrection is understood eschatologically. The material form in which God's revelation comes to us is crucial, if this revelation is to transform the material world to which it is addressed and where it is confessed. God's engagement with the world cannot be reduced to prophetic critique. The incarnation of the Word cannot be reduced to a word about the incarnate Word. The key clearly lies with considering the full spectrum of Christological symbols: incarnation, ministry, cross, resurrection, ascension, session and *parousia*. Indeed, the key lies in a fully Trinitarian theology, elusive as that may be. This is indeed Dirkie Smit's deepest theological intuition.

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KEY WORDS
Christology
Creation theology
GC Berkouwer
Herman Bavinck
Karl Barth

TREFWOORDE
Christologie
Skeppingsteologie
GC Berkouwer
Herman Bavinck
Karl Barth

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"Real presence" and sacramental praxis – Reformed reflections on the Eucharist

ABSTRACT

As the subtitle indicates, this essay focuses on a Reformed understanding of the Eucharist or Sacrament of Holy Communion. After a brief introduction indicating why this topic is important today, the essay engages a number of key themes. First amongst these is the historical character of the sacrament which needs to be kept in tension with what Calvin referred to as its mystery. The second is the distinctly Reformed understanding of the relationship between Word, Spirit and Sacrament, and its implications for Eucharistic practice within Reformed congregations. The third is the meaning and significance of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This goes to the heart of the essay, for how this is understood is crucial for a proper Eucharistic theology and praxis. The essay argues that Calvin's understanding of the real presence has generally been lost within Reformed circles and needs to be recovered if the Sacrament is to be restored to its rightful place.

Amongst the themes suggested to authors of this *Festschrift* I have selected the sacraments, focusing specifically on Holy Communion or the Eucharist. There are three reasons for my choice, each of which relates to Smit's interests as a Reformed ecumenical theologian.

First, from a Reformed perspective, the "true church" is found where the Word is faithfully proclaimed *and* the sacraments are "rightly administered". Sacramental praxis (which embraces both theological understanding and liturgical practice) is, therefore, central to the identity of the Reformed church. God's grace may not be contingent on our having a sound theology of the sacraments or being liturgically adept, but if the "true church" requires the right administration of the sacraments, then good sacramental praxis can never be a matter of indifference.

Second, in 1857, sacramental praxis became the bone of contention when the Dutch Reformed synod at the Cape allowed segregation at the Lord's Table. This is the background to Smit's contribution to much theological discussion over the past decades relating especially to the Belhar Confession. A recent essay of Smit's, Calvin on the Sacraments and Church Unity (Smit 2010), which developed out of that interest is an important contribution to the Reformed understanding of the ecclesiological and ethical significance of the sacraments

Third, there is a growing desire amongst many Reformed Christians for a more meaningful and frequent celebration of Holy Communion. Many of us have moved beyond the polemics of the past and have discovered much to treasure in traditions other than our own. The agreements achieved between various confessional families, alongside the liturgies that have evolved in concert with them, are all evidence of a remarkable convergence in Eucharistic

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celebration (Thurian and Wainwright 1983). However, for this to be "rightly" integrated into the life of the church we need a clear understanding of what constitutes genuinely Reformed sacramental praxis.

SACRAMENT, HISTORY AND MYSTERY

One of the first books on the sacraments that I read as a student was *The Theology of the Sacraments* by Donald Baillie, Professor of Systematic Theology at St. Andrews University. Baillie observed that while there was in his day "a growing desire for the more frequent communion – which from the very beginning was in principle part of our Reformed tradition – and, along with this, a yearning for a deeper understanding of the sacraments", this had not yet gotten very far, largely because "we do not possess a theology of the sacraments" (Baillie 1957:40). To put that right, Baillie argued, it was necessary to rediscover the sacramental character of Christian faith and the universe we inhabit. There is something about human nature and the gospel of grace that demands a "strange, visible, tangible expression, in material things and in perceptible actions", which is what we mean by "sacramental" (Baillie 1957:42). The sacraments are, in fact, "concentrations of something very much more widespread, so that nothing could be in the special sense of a sacrament unless everything was in a basic sense sacramental" (Baillie 1957:42).

At the same time, the Christian sacraments are rooted in a historical narrative without which they lose their significance and specificity as "Christian". What transpired on the night of Jesus' arrest in the upper room and over the next few days from the cross to the resurrection marked the beginning of the new covenant and the birthing of a new humanity. The Eucharist cannot be understood apart from this history and its relation to what Jesus said and did when he shared the peace, took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples with the words: "This is my body given for you." As such, the Eucharist is a sacramental celebration of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and of our hope for the transformation and reconciliation of all things in him. The Eucharist is a celebration of God's redemptive love for the world in Jesus Christ. Therefore, what we do in the liturgy is directly linked to how we participate in God's mission in the world.

There is one further fundamental aspect of the Eucharist that follows from this and that is central to my reflections, namely the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. Nothing has been more contentious and divisive in the history of Christianity, as the debates at the time of the Reformation demonstrate. How we understand the "real presence" will inevitably shape the way we celebrate the "holy banquet", as Calvin called it. Later I will focus specifically on the "real presence" of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine, but the "real presence" cannot be narrowly confined to these elements. Christ is truly present in the Word proclaimed, in the community of faith that is "his body", in the bread and wine, and in the neighbour or "other" through whom he encounters us. In fact, the Eucharist requires a cosmic understanding of Christ as the "real presence" of the mystery of God through the Spirit in history and in our midst. This is what the ancient Church meant when it referred to the liturgy of the "divine mystery", that is, the mystery of God revealed in Jesus the Christ.[2] In affirming the real presence we are affirming above all else that Christ is the *sacrament* of the world (*sacramentum mundi*).

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2 The Greek word mysterion was translated into Latin as "sacramentum".

WORD, SPIRIT AND SACRAMENT

The Reformers were united in their opposition to what they regarded as idolatrous and superstitious practices in the celebration of the Mass in the late medieval church. Their objections to the "sacrifice of the Mass", transubstantiation, priestly mediation and excessive ritual are well known, as are the steps they took to reform sacramental praxis. Today, however, it is necessary to focus our attention not on the problems that the Reformers identified in sacramental practice in their day, but on the problems that have developed within Reformed practice itself. Most will be immediately recognised and the reasons for them generally acknowledged. However, the underlying theological cause may not be so clearly understood. I will argue that the problems have to do chiefly with a failure to maintain the unity of Word, Spirit and sacrament, and thus affirm the "real presence" of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Despite the fact that Calvin wanted a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper as indicated in the New Testament, this seldom became part of the Reformed ethos.[3] There were several reasons for this. In Calvin's Geneva this was due to opposition from the civil authorities who, despite their adherence to the Reformed faith, preferred the Catholic practice of taking communion infrequently. This practice continued as the Reformed church expanded and was later reinforced by practical considerations, as in Scotland and South Africa. Yet even when these attenuating circumstances did not apply, a quarterly or at best a monthly service of Holy Communion became normative. And while frequency does not necessarily determine significance, infrequency changes the character of Sunday worship and can have serious negative consequences on the life of the church. Amongst these is the separation of the Word and sacrament.

Calvin was insistent that the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments belonged together (Maxwell 1952:112-119). However, infrequency of Holy Communion inevitably meant that a separation occurred to the detriment of both Word and sacrament. For just as there should be no Holy Communion without first listening to the Word, by the same token, as Karl Barth observed, "a service without sacraments is one which is outwardly incomplete" (Barth 1938:211). When we speak of the Eucharist we are not referring to that part of the liturgy when we share in Holy Communion, but the service as a whole, including the reading and preaching of the Word. To do otherwise undermines the incarnational core of Christian faith: "the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us" (Jn. 1:14). In fact, to separate Word and sacrament suggests a Docetic Christology, namely that Christ is not understood as truly present in time and space as flesh and blood, but only as divine Word – a danger to which Calvin himself was not immune.[4]

But while Calvin's (and Reformed theology's) insistence on the unity of action of the Word and Spirit in the sacrament may not entirely satisfy Catholic critique, it is or should be fundamental to Reformed sacramental praxis. And yet, in my experience, one of the most frequent omissions in Reformed practice is the omission of what is traditionally known as the "epiclesis", that is, the invocation that the Holy Spirit should consecrate the bread and wine so that they are for us "the body of and blood Christ". From a Reformed perspective, this omission reduces the Eucharist to a fellowship meal or *agape*. The prayer of thanksgiving

3 Cf. my discussion in De Gruchy 2009:177-190.
4 Cf. the critique of Calvin's doctrine of the "real presence" in Dix 1943:632f.

is incomplete without invoking the Spirit to bless the elements that are being set aside "for this holy use and mystery".

Related to the separation of Word, Spirit and sacrament, as well as to the infrequency of communion, is the extent to which Sunday came to be regarded as the Christian Sabbath instead of the day of resurrection, the Spirit and the new creation. This sabbatical ethos meant that the synagogue alone provided the model for Sunday worship with (at best) the liturgy of the Lord's Supper tacked on at the end instead of being an integral part and its distinctive climax. This also led to an almost exclusive focus on Jesus' death on the cross ("holy Saturday") rather than on his triumph over sin and death and, therefore, on the risen presence of Christ as Host at his Table. As a result of the resurrection, the "last" supper has become the "Lord's Supper". As on the road to Emmaus, it is the *risen* Christ who meets and becomes known to us in the "breaking of the bread".

Further bad practice derives from regarding Holy Communion as a teaching opportunity deemed necessary in order to correct the false teaching of others. Thus, in much Reformed practice the service came to include lengthy rubrics on precisely what was taking place at the Lord's Table and, more especially, what was not taking place. This didactic emphasis made Holy Communion more an occasion of "sound teaching" than a joyous celebration of the risen and, therefore, real presence through the Word and Spirit of Christ whose life we share in the bread and wine.

Finally, bad practice also derives from relating church discipline to "taking communion". There is scriptural warrant for ecclesial discipline related to the Eucharist (I Cor.11:28), but this has too often been misunderstood and abused. If the Eucharist is a means of grace, it has to do with changing lives and strengthening discipleship, not with punishing sinners by excluding them from the Table. A related and seriously misguided practice is making attendance at the Eucharist a way of checking up on whether members of the congregation have made their contribution to its financial needs. All of this turns the sacrament into an instrument of law, shifting the focus away from the presence of Christ, who graciously embraces us at his Table, to an instrument for the exclusion of deemed unworthy despite any words of invitation to the contrary.

Christ the real presence

The Reformed tradition will always be indebted to Huldrych Zwingli for his pioneering efforts (cf. Stephens 1986). Amongst these were his emphases on the preaching of the Word, the work of the Spirit and his recovery of the Eucharist (the term he preferred to use) as a fellowship meal within the community of faith. This is an important antidote to the individualism that too often is apparent in the celebration of the Eucharist. However, the shift in Zwingli's Eucharistic theology toward a purely symbolic understanding of the "real presence" and his strong emphasis on the Supper as a memorial (cf. Stephens 1986:224) had a profound effect on Reformed sacramental practice and may be held responsible for some of the problems I have mentioned. Calvin was certainly not blameless, but he did not make this symbolic shift and held fast to the Eucharist as a sacrament and, therefore, as a means of grace. "Zwingli", Gerrish writes,

> held the same gospel as Luther or Calvin, and he wanted the Evangelical Eucharist
> to give cultic expression to the Evangelical faith. Nevertheless, it does make a profound

difference that for Zwingli the Lord's Supper was an act of thanksgiving for the gospel, whereas for Luther and Calvin it was a concrete offer of the gospel (Gerrish 1982:129).[5]

What was important for Zwingli was what happened in the past, namely on the cross, which we now remember in faith and fellowship; for Calvin it was not just what happened then, but what was central was what happened *here and now* in the breaking and receiving of the bread. For Calvin the Eucharist was more than a fellowship meal where we confess our faith in Christ and give thanks for his saving death; it is a means of God's redeeming grace in Jesus Christ. Despite Calvin and the Reformed Confessions, which followed his understanding, it was Zwingli who, in many ways, won the day. However, the Eucharistic nature of Calvin's theology as a whole (cf. esp. Gerrish 1993), makes him a more profound and helpful resource for the renewal of Reformed sacramental praxis today.

The Eucharist is a fellowship and covenant meal; it is a memorial and act of faith; but, above all, it is a means of redemptive grace in and through which we are encountered by Christ who is truly present through the Spirit in Word and sacrament. We recognise Christ in the "breaking of bread", feed on him by faith and with thanksgiving are united with him in one body as those called to serve the world in love and hope. But how are we to understand specifically the real presence of Christ in the sacramental "bread and wine"? That, after all, is the stumbling block that has divided the Church both prior to and since the Reformation.

The Fourth Gospel does not give an account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, but it is profoundly sacramental in its use of symbols or signs. In it signs such as those at Cana in Galilee are the equivalent of miracles in the synoptics: they point us to and become windows through which we see and grasp hold of the kingdom of God. But symbols and signs can be understood in several ways. They can simply represent something, like the South African flag calls to mind our nation and, in doing so, makes us feel proud and stirs us to patriotic deeds. But the flag does not really resemble South Africa in any way. There is little correspondence between the symbol and reality. This understanding is symbolic in a Zwinglian sense. The signs at the Eucharist can move us to devotion, (sometimes profoundly) strengthening our faith and our love, but everything depends on our response to them rather than on the grace we receive through them.

However, symbols can also be understood in another way, as in John's Gospel and in Calvin's Eucharistic theology, namely as communicating the reality to which they refer: so the breath that gives us life corresponds with the Spirit who renews us; the water that cleanses our bodies is the water in which we are baptised into Christ; the bread we eat and the wine we drink are the same as those elements that nourish us at the Eucharist. And just as bread we eat and wine we drink change as they enter our bloodstream in order to sustain our lives, the bread and wine of the Eucharist "are set apart from all common use" and in some significant way become what they signify. As Calvin put it in his Genevan Catechism of 1541," as wine strengthens, refreshes, and rejoices a man physically, so His blood is our joy, our refreshing and our spiritual strength" (Torrance 1959:60, Q. 341). Closely following Calvin, this is how most early Re formed confessions and theologians usually understood the "real presence".[6]

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5 Gerrish distinguishes between the "symbolic memorialism" of Zwingli, the "symbolic parallelism" of Bullinger and the "symbolic instrumentalism" of Calvin.

6 Cf. the discussion on "The Lord's Supper" in Heinrich Heppe's sourcebook on Reformed dogmatics (1950:632-656).

In his exposition of chapter six of John's Gospel – where Jesus speaks about himself as the "bread of life" and utters his enigmatic, and for some troubling, statement about "eating his flesh" and "drinking his blood" (6:52-56) – Calvin declared "that souls feed on his flesh and blood in precisely the same way that the body is sustained by eating and drinking" (Calvin 1961:169). We are united to Christ and share his life. And, while Calvin said that this passage does not refer directly to the Lord's Supper, he continued by saying that there was "nothing said here that is not figured and actually presented to believers" in that "sacred Supper" (170). In fact, Calvin went so far as to say that "they are false interpreters who lead souls away from Christ's flesh", clearly meaning interpreters of the Eucharist as the French text makes clear (170). Yet Calvin did not accept the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. So in what sense was Christ truly present in the consecrated "bread and wine"? Or, put differently, what do we mean – and not mean – when we pray in our Reformed liturgies that in receiving the bread and wine we may be made partakers of Christ's body and blood?

Although the sacramental reality of the presence of Christ's "body and blood" in the bread and wine at the Eucharist was part of Christian tradition from earliest times,[7] the dogma of transubstantiation was only adopted at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The formulation of the dogma in the language of medieval scholasticism was the outcome of a debate sparked by the theologian Berengar of Tours. Berengar maintained that it was not necessary to believe in the physical change (trans substance) in the bread and wine in order to believe in the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. According to him, this undermined the mystery of the Eucharist. In ensuing debates Berengar was required to recant, something that would in retrospect influence Calvin, believing as he did that Berengar was faithful to tradition and to Augustine in particular.[8] Partly as a result of the controversies with the Reformers, the dogma of transubstantiation was reaffirmed at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, and in response the Protestant churches reinforced their own dogmatic positions.[9]

Anyone familiar with the debates about the "real presence" in Catholic theology that preceded and followed Vatican II[10] will know that, despite some disagreements, the official doctrine firmly remains "transubstantiation" as defined by Trent. In 1965, it was again confirmed by Paul VI in an encyclical as follows:

> For there no longer lies under those species what was there before, but something quite different since after the change of the substance or nature of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, nothing remains of the bread and wine but the appearances, under which Christ, whole and entire, in His physical "reality" is bodily present However, it is significant that Paul VI immediately qualified his statement with the words, "although not in the same way as bodies are present in a given place" (*Mysterium Dei* in Neuner and Dupuis 1983:438). This is not exactly what Calvin believed, but it is far closer to what he believed than what Zwingli maintained. To quote from his *Genevan Catechism* in answer to the question whether at the Supper we receive what is truly given to us: "… I do not doubt that he makes us partakers of His very substance, in order to unite us with Himself in one life" (Torrance 1959:62, Q. 353).

7 Apart from the New Testament itself, see also, for example, Justin's Apology, I/lxvi, (c. 150).
8 Cf. Kilian McDonnell 1967:53-59. See also the documentation in The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church (Neuner and Dupuis 1983:407-443).
9 Cf. Gerrish 1982:118-130; Niesel 1962:271-275.
10 Cf. Gutwenger on transubstantiation (1975:1751-1755). For the debates on the Eucharist at Vatican II cf. Josef Andreas Jungmann 1967:31-34. Cf. also A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults (1970:332-347).

In light of preReformation history, the Roman Catholic Benedictine scholar Killian McDonnell (1967:59) rightly asserts that Calvin was "not an innovator". He saw himself standing firmly in the Augustinian tradition on symbols and signs in the Eucharist. There is also some correspondence between Calvin and Eastern Orthodoxy, both with regard to the role of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist and a hesitation to speculate on the mystery of Christ's real presence. In connection with what was just said, let me share the following personal story.

In December 1963, I was one of the thousands of students who participated in the World Student Christian Federation's conference held in Athens, Ohio, in the United States. The keynote speaker was Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann. He enthralled his predominantly Protestant audience with his daily lectures on worship and mission. The second lecture was on the Eucharist. The latter Schmemann described as a journey "into the dimension of the Kingdom". From the beginning of the liturgy until its culmination in mission, Schmemann told us, we are drawn deeper and deeper into the mystery of the kingdom, seeing our lives and the world in a new way as we encounter the presence of Christ through the Word and Spirit in each moment and action of the Eucharist. Only by understanding the Eucharist in this way could we begin to appreciate the "real presence" of Christ in the bread and the wine, and the real presence of Christ in the world. But, said Schmemann,

> to understand their initial and eternal meaning in the Eucharist, we must forget for a time the endless controversies which little by little transformed them into "elements" of an almost abstract theological speculation (Schmemann 1963:20).

I was profoundly moved by what Schmemann said, not least because he shifted the focus in the Eucharist from a static scholastic debate about the "real presence" to a dynamic Trinitarian understanding of the Eucharist as a journey into the mystery of the kingdom of God revealed in Christ and made real to us through Word and Spirit.

While this is not precisely how Calvin himself described the Lord's Supper, it does resonate with what he said. Christ is the host at the Table of the "holy banquet", giving himself to us in his Word and sacrament through the Spirit in the breaking of the bread and the drinking from the cup. In this way we are united with him in his death and resurrection as well as with each other within the "body of Christ". But Calvin refused to reduce the mystery to rational concepts.

Now if anyone should ask how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it. Therefore I embrace without controversy the truth of God in which I may safely rest. He declares his flesh the food of my soul, his blood its drink [Jn. 6:53ff.]. I offer my soul to him to be fed with such food. In his Sacred Supper he bids me to take, eat, and drink his body and blood under the symbols of bread and wine. I do not doubt that he himself truly presents them, and that we receive them (Calvin *Inst*. IV.II.32 – 1960:1403f.). More succinctly, as Calvin wrote to fellow reformer Peter Vermigli: "I adore the mystery rather than labour to understand it."[11] In sum, we can say with good reason that Calvin's position resembles much of what we find in the church virtually until the thirteenth century.

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11 In a letter to the reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli, August 1555 (in Gerrish 1993:128).

Many later Calvinists thought Calvin's language was far too close to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass and preferred Zwingli's position, though neither the Lutherans nor the Catholics felt that Calvin's position was adequate. At stake was the objectivity of Christ's presence in the bread and wine. Calvin agreed, but insisted that the mystery could not be reduced to a formula that bordered on magic, nor could the "whole Christ" be confined to the elements. However, he did not doubt that in eating the bread and drinking the wine we do receive the "body and blood of Christ" that was offered onceforall on the cross. Through the Holy Spirit the symbols of bread and wine *convey what they signify* and in eating and drinking them we receive the "bread of life" that "nourishes us into eternal life" (cf. Calvin *Inst.* IV, xvii, 5 – 1960:1365.) More than that he could not and did not say. Nor need he have done so.

In sum, let me reiterate what I intimated at the beginning. The "right administration" of the sacrament from a Reformed perspective assumes the "real presence" of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. Christ is present through the Spirit and the Word throughout, just as he is truly present in the bread and the wine, in the community gathered in his name and in those we greet with the "kiss of peace". However, if we do not believe in his presence in the bread and wine that is set apart and through the Spirit becomes for us his life giving "body and blood" that we receive in faith, then the sacrament becomes a fellowship meal of remembrance, an *agape,* but is not the Eucharist as Calvin understood it. If this is what we do believe, then it should be evident in our practice, in the structure of the liturgy, in the prayer of thanksgiving and the invocation of the Spirit, and in its importance for the transformation of the Church in the service of the world.

I give the last word to Pope John Paul II, who helps us understand the point of it all in a way that is surely beyond all controversy. In a letter to his fellow bishops in 1980 he wrote: "The sense of the Eucharistic Mystery leads us to love for our neighbour, to love for every human being" (Neuner and Dupuis 1983:443). That is the ultimate end of sacramental praxis, discovering the mystery of the real presence of Christ in the "other". To that Calvin would undoubtedly have added a loud "Amen". So should we.

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"Honour thy father and thy mother" – What do grown children owe their aged parents?

ABSTRACT

What do grown children owe their aged parents? This article describes some visions on filial obligation, current in modern ethical theory, and evaluates them from a theological perspective. Why should children help their parents? Is it out of gratitude, friendship, because they are indebted to them, or is it simply because they are their parents? And what kind of assistance may parents justly expect their children to offer them? The article presents and evaluates four theories of filial obligation. Biblical texts seem to support the so called debt theory which argues that children are in debt to their parents and that they are repaying them with their care what they owe to them. A variant of the debt theory is the model of gratitude. Both theories go astray by supposing that the mutuality in parent-child relationship is marked by reciprocity. The friendship approach argues that there are many things that children ought to do for their parents, but that it is inappropriate and misleading to describe them as things "owed". Parents' voluntary sacrifices tend to create love or "friendship", rather than creating "debts" to be "repaid". But friendship does not describe sufficiently the filial reality neither: one can end friendships, but not parenthood. And parents can never be the equals of their children, as friends can be. Apparently, the most satisfactory theory is the special goods theory, which underlines the special relationship between parent and child. That means also that the goods of parenting are unique in kind. Accordingly, adult children should provide frail and dependent parents with something that they will not get otherwise. This approach can get theological support and a faith inspired horizon by interpreting filial relationships in an eschatological perspective and considering them as a divine mandate.

Having been raised in the roaring sixties of the previous century, I was left with mixed feelings about the fifth commandment. "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Ex. 20:12) was used in church and at home, in and out of season, to prevent rebellious youngsters from "escaping" their parents' "authority". Children should not strive for independence and autonomy, but obey their parents, was the message, in line with the modern history of interpretation of the above Biblical passage. Christian ethicists supported this view. The fifth commandment was considered a legitimisation of the contested authority of educators in the nuclear family.[2]

Recent exegesis clearly distances itself from such an interpretation. The focus of the fifth commandment is on filial duties towards elderly parents rather than on parental authority:

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2 In their exegesis of Exodus 20:12, almost all manuals on Christian ethics concentrated exclusively on the issue of parental authority.

The command (cf. also Lev. 19:3a) is not about the obligation of (young) children to submit to parental authority, but is directed to adult persons, those who in the patriarchal society are family heads. They, the (oldest) sons, when their parents have relinquished authority, and are no longer able to look after themselves, must provide them with food, clothing and shelter and after their death give them an honourable burial (Houtman 2000:51f.).

DIFFICULT CARE

The prominence of regulations regarding the care of the elderly in the Bible indicates that in practice respect for the aged was often lacking (cf. Gen. 27: 18ff. 35:22; 49:3f.). Apparently, abuse of the elderly was such a well-known phenomenon that it could be prevented only by the threat of capital punishment (Ex. 21:15, 17). Even in tradition-oriented societies such as the Hebrew society – as is the case in many other societies today still, where something is found that is reminiscent of an ancestor cult – honouring the elderly was not an obvious duty.[3]

With the injunction to honour father and mother, the fifth commandment points towards filial duties owed to dependent and frail elderly parents. According to Old Testament scholar Cees Houtman (2000:52), this rupture in the interpretation history of Exodus 20:12 was in particular the result of increased knowledge of *Umwelt* texts on the relationship between parents and children. However, the demographic shifts of the past century probably made the exegetes receptive for this reinterpretation. While from ancient Israelite times until far into the twentieth century parents seldom survived their adult children – the average life span in biblical times was around forty-five for the better off; for the socially weak it was undoubtedly even less (Houtman 2000:53) – the opposite has become quite common nowadays, also in developing countries.[4]

In Biblical times, reaching the age of sixty meant being old (Houtman 2000:53). Until at least one generation ago, at that age people slowly begin preparing themselves for ending their days in a retirement home. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, a sixty year old might be found in institutions of residential care for the aged – but only as visitors of *their* elderly, care-dependent parents. In any case, being sixty today does not mean a person has grown old, although society and institutions such as universities still think that it is an appropriate age to prepare for retirement.

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3 "Oswald Loretz has argued that the commandment to "honour thy father and thy mother" is an offshoot and an echo of the ancestor cult, since it links the care for the elderly with the promise of the possession of the land" (Van der Toorn 1996:378).

4 Demographical statistics show that the world population is ageing rapidly. This "demographic transition" is driven by two factors: increased life expectancy and declining fertility rates. While the global population will increase by almost fifty per cent, from around six billion in the year 2000 to nine billion by 2050, the numbers of the elderly will experience a three hundred per cent increase. In developing countries where mortality rates among the younger segments of societies are rising and contraceptive use is more and more readily available, the increase. In developing countries where mortality rates among the younger segments of societies are rising and contraceptive use is more and more readily available, the increase may be as high as four hundred per cent. In fact, according to the United Nations Population Division, over sixty per cent of the world's aged is already found in developing countries, and this will increase to seventy-five per cent by 2025 and eighty-five per cent by 2050 respectively. The eighty-plus age group constitutes the fastest growing segment of the population; the over-sixty segment will increase from twelve per cent to nineteen per cent of the total by 2050 (cf. De Lange 2009: 201).

Along with the increase in life expectancy the number of extended three (or four) generation families also increases. While in previous centuries taking care of dependent parents was rare and occurred seldom for an extended period, a gerontologist already remarked twenty-five years ago that "nowadays adult children provide more care and more difficult care to more parents over much longer periods of time than they did in the good old days" (Brody 1985:23).

This means that many adult children are confronted with the question why and how they should care for and about their frail and dependent parents, and how far their help should go. In developed countries, it seemed for a long time that the "welfare state" could take away adult children's worries by providing sufficient state care. But only a small minority (in the Netherlands, about 6%) of the elderly ever lived in residential institutions. Neo-liberalism and the global risk society increase state pressure on the elderly's own social network to provide them with the support they need. However, the frightening question remains: Will there be enough caring hands available in the near future? Due to the on-going decline in the birth rate, having children around in one's old age seems to be the only guarantee (even in so-called individualised societies) – a secure pension, as it was in Biblical times and still may be in non-Western cultures. Needless to say, in countries without a state pension scheme but with a traditional family culture, the pressure on children to assist their parents is much higher. Research among immigrant families in the Netherlands showed that parents consider it self-evident that their children should take them in once they have grown old – a conviction with which they were brought up in their countries of origin. Their children, however, born and raised in an individualised culture, cannot meet this expectation and feel caught in a double bind (De Valk and Schans 2008: 54, 62). This feeling is probably shared by adult children in many rapidly urbanising and modernising countries in the developing world.

What, then, do grown children owe their aged parents? In the rest of this contribution I want to focus on some current views on filial obligation in modern ethical theory and evaluate them from a theological perspective. *Why* should children assist their parents? Is it out of gratitude, love or indebtedness to them? Is it, perhaps, simply because they are their parents? *What kind* of assistance may parents legitimately expect their children to offer them? Are children also obliged to feed, clothe and nurture their parents and to take them into their homes, as in Biblical times (cf. Jn. 19:27), or is material or financial support something the broader community or government should provide? Can children limit themselves to social and emotional support? And how far should filial care reach? Should children allow themselves to be overburdened? Taking care of a parent suffering of dementia may, for example, ask too much of children, both physically and emotionally. May children be obligated to sacrifice themselves (their time, their futures) for the sake of their parents, because the parents sacrificed themselves for the *children* in *their* childhood?

A QUESTION OF DEBT?

The Hebrew Bible motivates filial obligation with the argument that your father is your procreator (Prov. 23:22) and that your mother carried you and gave birth to you (Sir. 7: 27f; Tob. 4:4). "The thought behind [this] is that one should return some of the care and nourishment provided by the parents. Love is not mentioned as a motive" (Houtman 2000:55). The Bible seems to support the so-called debt theory, the first model of filial obligation I want to present here. This theory argues that children are indebted to their parents and that they

are repaying them with the care they give them. Your parents showered benefits on you when you were young and dependent on them, and now it is "payback time".

Throughout history and quasi-universally, the debt theory has been propagated as transparent and self-evident. My own parents too, having been poor in my early youth, in their old age implicitly expected something "back" from their two grown-up children. They had sacrificed themselves to let us attend the best schools possible. It went without saying that their sons, highly educated and relatively well-to-do, should do something in return.

The debt theory, balancing benefits and favours, has a long and popular history. The justification for it, however, is less convincing than is seems. Harry Moody retells a story of a mother bird and her chick. The chick rides on its mother's back while the mother forages for food. One day the mother bird says to the chick, "When you're a big bird and I'm old and frail, will you take me on your back just as I'm doing for you now?" The chick then replies, "No, Mother, but when I'm a big bird, I'll carry my chick on my back just as you're doing for me now" (cf. Moody 1992:229).

The story shows that reciprocity is not at the heart of the filial relationship. Parents and children do not relate in terms of *do ut des*. They do not enter their relationship in order to obtain mutual advantage: "If I push your pram now, will you later push my wheelchair?" A child can reply in all fairness that it did not ask to be born. There is an insurmountable and fundamental asymmetry in a parental relationship. From the perspective of children, families are communities of fate, not voluntary associations. Between parents and children there exists mutuality, not reciprocity.

The debt theory also cannot account for the open-endedness and on-going character of filial duties. A child will never be able to say (and sometimes may suffer because of it!), "Well, now that's enough – I have repaid my debt." While some might call an adult son, a good businessman, visiting his mother once a month and demanding petrol money for his trip on her doorstep (a true story), most of us would rather call him a bad son.

The debt theory has other flaws too. It presupposes that it is the children who owe something to their parents and not the other way around. Even if we continue to think of intergenerational relationships within the framework of the balance of justice (as the contextual therapy of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy does), we have to admit that in transgenerational book-keeping of merits children come first:

> Reciprocal equity, the traditional framework for assessing justice among adults, fails as a guideline when it comes to the balance of the parent-child relationship. Every parent finds himself [sic] in an asymmetrically obliged position toward his new-born. The child has a source of unearned rights. Society does not expect him to repay the parent in equivalent benefits (Boszormenyi- Nagy 1973:55).

Not all parents are ready to redeem *their* debt towards their children in promoting the human flourishing of their children. Children are abandoned, neglected, exploited, abused. Some parents might have been heroes during "their times of the struggle", but others were simply opportunists under or collaborators with a wrong regime. What, then, are children supposed to pay back? According to the debt theory they would simply have to turn their backs on their parents, let alone care for them in their frailty. In such a framework of justice, there can only be talk of forgiveness and hope of reconciliation, not of retribution.

Furthermore, not all children grew up more privileged than their parents did. What can rich, well-off parents then expect of their poor, highly-burdened children? Within the debt paradigm parents who do not "deserve" it, cannot demand any assistance from their children. And what about "effortless" parents, who simply enjoyed their parenthood, for whom it was only a matter of having fun? What are their "merits" that should be repaid?

Thus, despite its long tradition and apparent justification, the debt theory creates a number of problems. The parent-child relationship is richer and more complex than can be expressed in a juridical and economic language game of "give and take". Filial obligations cannot be reduced to keeping book of benefits and compensations.

A case of gratitude?

Ethicists looking for an alternative theory that is more compatible with a thicker description of the parent-child relationship came up with a variation of the debt theory, namely the model of gratitude. The warm language of intimacy, care and love probably better expresses what really exist between two generations within one family. Children do not "owe" their parents anything. As Boszormenyi-Nagy rightly puts it, intergenerational debts go in one direction from parents to children: The latter's care for the former is only an expression of their gratitude towards their parents. Debts are not "paid back", but "paid forward", in favouring the next generation – as illustrated by the young bird in the story told by Moody above.

Good parents surround their children with love and care. They do this out of benevolence, not in order to receive something in return. Though their children do not owe them anything, they have a moral obligation to show them their gratitude and appreciation with gestures that make this clear. Imagine someone who has risked their life for you. No price can be put on such an act; however, one will at least have a moral duty to show an appropriate level of gratitude, by keeping in touch with, for example, or sending that person flowers or a postcard on his or her birthday. If you go too far and want to "pay back" too much, that person will surely be embarrassed: that is not why he or she saved your life!

From a Reformed theological perspective, the model of gratitude sounds appealing: those who honour their parents are doing a good job according to the *tertius usus legis,* the "rule of gratitude". The parental relationship resembles the biblical covenant with God: although the initiative for it is one-sided in origin, the relationship it establishes creates a bond with mutual expectations. Speaking of "duties of gratitude" is, however, paradoxical. It is love, not the contract that forms the foundation.

An analogy between the God-human relationship and the one between parents and children seems obvious. In the history of interpretation of the fifth commandment the parents' authority often has been legitimated by the argument that parents are God's representatives (Houtman 2000:56). For does this commandment not follow immediately after the first table of the Law, the one dealing with the relationship with YHWH? In procreating offspring, parents are participating in the divine work of creation. As God "deserves" our gratitude, the same goes for our parents (Houtman 2000:57).

However, despite its theological attractiveness, the gratitude model has flaws, similar to the debt model. First, this model presupposes that parents really "earned" their children's gratitude, though this is often not the case. Many women cannot worship God the Father

because of traumatic memories of their own abusive fathers. The analogy between God and parents is problematic as well because of its connotations with power and authority. Many parents do not resemble the good God, but rather the contrary. Resentment on the children's part often seems more justifiable than gratitude.

Second, the emphasis on *feelings* of gratitude may rightly remove the filial relationship from a juridical and economic framework, but at the same time it disregards an essential element in the phenomenology of the parent-child relationship: filial duties are experienced as direct acts, not as *expressions* of sentiment. Helping an elderly, sick parent to dress or eat is not analogous to sending a postcard or a bunch of flowers. It is done because the child feels obligated to do so, even without any feelings of gratitude. Caring for our parents is not an instrumental illustration of an emotion, but an inevitable responsibility.

A QUESTION OF FRIENDSHIP?

The debt model being too juridical and the gratitude model too authoritarian, the *friendship model* was developed in order to escape the shortcomings of both. "What do grown children owe their parents?" is the question with which Jane English, the *auctor intellectualis* of this model, opens her seminal article with the same title. "I will contend that the answer is 'nothing'", is her response (English 1991:147). She argues that, although there are many things that children ought to do for their parents, it is inappropriate and misleading to describe them as something "owed" to the parents. The voluntary sacrifices made by parents tend to create love or "friendship", rather than "debts" to "repay".

The duties of grown children are those of friends, and result from love between them and their parents, rather than being things owed in repayment for their early sacrifices (English 1991:147).

The friendship model radically breaks with pre-modern tradition and its patriarchal and hierarchical ethics. This appears unimaginable without an egalitarian society where parents and children share households on an equal basis and daughters can say of their mothers that they are their best friends. However, despite its contemporary appearance, it does offer an alternative to the short- comings of the two models discussed above. It acknowledges that a parent-child relationship is not typified by a reciprocal give-and-take, but by mutuality.

Friends offer what they can give and accept what they need, without regard for the total amounts of benefits exchanged, and friends are motivated by love rather than by the prospect of repayment. Hence, talking of "owing" is singularly out of place in friendship (English 1991:149).

Therefore, the friendship idiom seems to offer a better vocabulary than the juridical jargon of favours and debts. It accounts better for the uniqueness of the parent-child relationship than the impartial language of bookkeepers and lawyers. Just like friendship, caring for children requires an ethic of intimacy instead of an ethic of strangers. Parents and children enter into a particular history with these specific parents, these specific children, just as friends enter into a unique relationship. Of course, English knows that not all parents and children are indeed friends. To her, however, friendship within the household is an ideal to which parents should strive in order to with their children, benefit from it throughout their lives. Only then, receiving and raising a child means entering into a lifelong friendship. "The relationship between

children and their parents *should* be one of friendship characterized by mutuality rather than one of reciprocal favours" (English 1991:151) [my italics – FDL]. English does not consider friendship to be an analogy of the parent-child relationship but a description of its utmost reality. In the ideal case, bestowing care on dependent parents is bestowing the obvious care on friends through thick and thin. The friendship has been more rewarding in earlier times, to be sure, but we do not let our friends down when circumstances change. Friends can count on each other.

The parental argument, "You ought to do x because we did y for you," should be replaced by, "We love you, and you will be happier if you do x," or "We believe you love us, and anyone who loved us would do x" (English 1991:153).

The strength of the friendship model lies in the fact that it neither gives way to any pre-emptive rights of parents, nor puts unlimited and unconditional pressure on children. Children cannot and should not provide in all of their parents' needs. Love's knowledge develops a subtle balance between the needs of the one and the abilities and resources of the other. And, what a stranger can do (cleaning the house, medical care, shopping), a friend does not need to do. Children who are friends with their parents will offer socio-emotional rather than material and/or financial support.[5]

On second thought the friendship model presents more than a superficial image of modern, non-authoritarian family life. Many adult children do experience in the final years of their parents' lives that they grow close to each other, as equals. The friendship model does not want to make small children in young families adults who they obviously are not, but rather the other way round, it warns adult children against a paternalistic treatment of their mentally and physically weakened parents. Though a process of "parentification" of adult children might become inevitable in the final stage of their parents' lives and they exchange roles, children should resist the temptation to treat their parents like children, but ought to respect their autonomy. The friendship model emphasises the equality of parents ("coming of age") and children (coming of age as well) – even difficult decisions (placement in a nursing home, for example) are to be taken with persuasion rather than with free "advice" (cf. Moody 1992:100f.). Psychogerontologists describe how adult children, after a *filial crisis* in which they have to learn to accept their parents' dependency and to meet their needs, eventually succeed in fulfilling their *filial tasks,* and reaching *filial maturity.*

Filial maturity means to be willing to provide help voluntary to one's elderly parents and to actually help them, motivated by feelings of love and a sense of duty, without losing one's autonomy in a reciprocal relationship and in the context of a well-functioning family network (Marcoen 1995:126).

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5 Because of the unique relationship between children and their parents, Goodin (1985) proposes an alternative need model: children are in the unique position to grasp and meet their parents' needs, as no-one else is. Their obligations are comparable to the one of the Good Samaritan towards the victim on the roadside. There are no alternatives. Families are communities of fate. Not the question "should I help here?" is at stake here, but, "how could I ever refuse to help?" "If one party is in a position of particular vulnerability to or dependency on another, the other has strong responsibilities to protect the dependent party" (Goodin 1985:39). However, this model is also counter-intuitive. Parents are something special, while the biblical narrative proposes an ethic between strangers. (cf. De Lange 2010: 97-113).

Filial maturity requires of both parents and children respect for their mutual autonomy: parents should not be over-demanding towards their children, and children in turn should support their parents voluntary and not because they feel they are forced to.

However, despite its merits, the friendship model has clear limitations as well. What does it mean for parents and children (is this perhaps so in the majority of cases?) who, for whatever reason, cannot be friends (anymore)? Jane English's answer is far from reassuring. Just as in the case of a genuine friendships , "what children ought to do for their parents (and parents for their children) depends on the extent to which there is an on-going friendship between them" (English 1991:151). This restrictive condition is not only threatening for parents who are too dependent on their children, but it is also counter-intuitive.

It also does not help to reinterpret the friendship model – as Dixon (1995: 77-87) proposes – by saying that parents and children do not need to be real friends, but should only consider each other as friends. Even when the parent-child relationship functions as an *analogy* to friendship, this also means that when a friendship ends so do the duties of friendship. However, there is a fundamental difference between parenthood and friendship: friends are chosen (and some- times left behind) voluntarily, while who one's parents are is part one's lifelong destiny, even if one feels condemned to having them. In this respect, the parent-child relationship is incomparable and irreducible.

A second flaw in the friendship model is the flipside of its strong attraction. It rightly abandons traditional patriarchy, but suggests too much equality between parents and children. Parents come first; they precede their children. As generations they follow each other in time. "The heteronomous character of his [sic] relationship to them has now ceased", wrote Karl Barth – one of the few Reformed ethicists who have considered the relationship between adult children and their parents within the framework of an exegesis of the fifth commandment. "But they remain the fellow-human beings who in their way are irreplaceably nearest to him [sic] and are given precedence over him" ("sie bleiben die ihm *vorgeordneten* Mitmenschen") (Barth 1961:254; German edition, 1951:285) The sequence of generations reflects an ontological inequality in time that should be expressed in their mutual relationship. It does not necessarily result in the natural leadership of parents and the docility of children. However, the parents remain older, preceding their children in time.

An ethic of "equal regard" for families – as proposed by Don Browning – ignores the uniqueness of this inequality between parents and children. It introduces a formal, impartial and "timeless" moral principle as the moral core of a special and unique relationship (cf. Browning 1997:274). Equal regard may be a necessary condition for a mature parent-child relationship, but it is not sufficient on its own. Parents will never be siblings of their children, even when the latter are close to them in age.

A CASE OF SPECIAL GOODS

The ethics of the parent-child relationship requires a thick description that takes into account its unique character. This ethics will not be convincing as long as it is deduced from other relationships' moral implications. We assist our parents, not as a result of us having certain general obligations towards them, but in direct response to the particular persons they are to us – our parents. An equal regard construction, as Bernard Williams once put it in defending the moral uniqueness of personal relationships, "provides the agent with one thought too

many" (Williams 1981:18). Guilt, gratitude, friendship – these remain analogies. Being the child of our parents is something special. That means, as Simon Keller writes, that

> …the goods of parenting are unique in kind, meaning that there are no other sources, or not many easily accessible other sources, from which they can be gained. For the child, as well as the parent, there are distinctive special goods that come from the parent child relationship (Keller 2006:265f.).

In order to give a full account of this uniqueness, Keller then proposes a "special goods theory" of filial obligation. Fundamental to this approach is a distinction between generic goods, which could just as well be provided by others, and special goods, which parents can receive from no-one (or almost no-one) but their children, or which children can receive from no-one (or almost no-one) but their parents. Medical care, housekeeping, a ride to the shops, financial advice – these are generic goods that need not be provided by an adult child if they can be delivered by others. To the special goods in the parent-child relationship, however, belong: keeping in touch, visiting, spending time together, listening, being present, recalling memories, seeking advice, making plans, opening up our family life to the other – not in the role of, for example, a pastoral caregiver, but precisely as a *child* of this parent. We provide our parents with something that they will not get otherwise, by making them part of our adulthood. They may:

> …experience a sense of continuity and transcendence, a feeling that they will, in some respect, persist beyond their own deaths. There is also a kind of joy, and a kind of wisdom, that comes from a close involvement with the development of a person from birth to childhood and beyond (Keller 2006:267).

These "family values" are indeed *special goods.* On the other hand, Keller observes, there is a special value in having a parent from whom we can seek advice (as a parent) and who shares with us the history of our whole lifespan. An on-going healthy relationship with a parent can create a link between our life's different stages, helping to see that they all belong to us.

The special goods of this relationship correspond to special duties. Good care for our parents implies that we make sure that generic goods are well provided, though this needs not necessarily be done by the children themselves. Others can do this as well.

In my opinion, the special goods theory offers a better phenomenology of the parent-child relationship than the other approaches mentioned above. Consequently, it represents a more convincing view of filial obligations. On the one hand, it frees children from the burden of unjustified expectations to do *everything* for their parents, since some generic needs may also be met (and are often met much better) by others. Children's care for their parents is primarily a caring about, not a care for their parents, so to speak (Stuifbergen and Van Delden 2011, 71). On the other hand, it leaves the parents without the liberty to make unreasonable demands on their children. They are not justified in asking of their children whatever they want to; certainly not when it exceeds their children's resources. "What you should do for your parents depends upon what goods you are able to generate" (Keller 2006:270). The special goods approach also acknowledges differences among children about theirselves taking care of their parents – often a source of friction among siblings. Children who are unable to provide special goods to their parents are morally justified to do less than those who are better able to do so. Filial maturity develops as both parents and children learn to see and acknowledge the delicate requirements of their unique relationship.

But how do we distinguish between generic and special goods? Keller concedes that the dividing line may shift, depending on historical and cultural context. Growing old in an extended family in a poor society differs from aging in an individualised welfare state. Cultural traditions may view and value the relationship between community and autonomy quite differently. Aged parents surrounded by a strong social network, a state pension system and well-functioning institutions of care for the elderly will be much less justified in appealing to their children for assistance than parents in less privileged contexts. If children are the *only* ones able to provide their parents with food, safety and shelter, it will be difficult to justify a refusal of parents' request to provide them with generic goods as well. In such a case, and only then, children are required to take on the role of Good Samaritan towards their parents. Voluntarily, as an act of charity – not because of the special relationship they have with their parents, but because of the unique position they are in.[6]

In times when the pressure increases on families to take over the entire responsibility for their elder members, which may even happen in developing countries, it is important to retain the distinction between special and generic goods – and, correspondingly, between filial and communal duties. "It takes a whole village to raise a child", the African saying goes. That it takes the whole community to care for its elderly is true as well. Such a comprehensive approach lessens the burden on the conscience of adult children in caring for their parents; they cannot do *everything* and neither should they. A comprehensive approach also points out the social responsibilities of local communities and state governments. Care of the elderly should not be left to families alone. The special goods theory offers a balanced ethical framework for both filial and communal obligations.

A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE – A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Theological ethics should wholeheartedly support the distinction between filial en communal obligations. The recognition of the fact that the family cannot be reduced to other social structures has made it one of the orders of creation in the tradition of Christian ethics. In fact, I prefer Dietrich Bonhoeffer's formulation (2005:68f, 388-408), calling the family one of the "divine mandates".[7]

Luther emphasised thjat it is necessary to keep each of the different creation orders within its own boundaries. "Confusion here is not healthy" (*mixtura hic non valet*). Bonhoeffer continued in the same spirit:

> Only in their being with-one-another [*Miteinander*], for-one-another [*Für-einander*] and over-against-one-another [*Gegeneinander*] do the divine mandates of church, marriage and family, culture and government communicate the commandment of God as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. None of these mandates exists self-sufficiently, nor can one of them claim to replace all others. The mandates are with-one-another or they are not divine mandates. However, in being *with-one-another* they are not isolated and separated from one another, but oriented they are directed toward one another (Bonhoeffer 2005:393).

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6 Cf. above, note 5. Here Goodin's "needs theory" (Goodin 2005) comes in.

7 Luther distinguished three ordines, Bonhoeffer four mandates; the latter separated the oeconomia from of the ordo parentum as a distinctive mandate because of their separation in modernity. For a fuller account, cf. De Lange 1997.

Therefore, adult children cannot be held fully responsible for the complete care of their elderly parents. It is also a task for the broader community. The Bible reflects this very well. Even if children should neglect their duty to honour their fathers and their mothers, the Old Testament community is called upon again and again to look after the "widows" – a term mostly concerning older women. However, the care of the aged was not seen as a special and separate task; it was included among the general societal regulations (cf. Houtman 2000:56, 220ff).

When the family is considered as a divine mandate it obtains an institutional character. Family is a social *structure* among others, which embodies the triune God's care for a sustainable society.[8] Children do have their own responsibility in this institution and they have to fulfil their specific "role". Even if the mutual relationship between parents and children is motivated by feelings of love and affection, its moral requirements obtain their compelling character only because families represent one of the divine institutions that keeps the fabric of society together, preparing – as Bonhoeffer would say, "in the penultimate" (2005:146ff.) – the way for God's kingdom.

An eschatological perspective, oriented towards a sustainable future, makes clear that the relationship between aged parents and their children must not be considered retrospectively, as the repayment of a personal indebtedness. On the contrary, it should be seen in a broader context, prospectively, within a framework of the on-going struggle for a humane society. By caring for their aged parents, children contribute to a society that will one day, when they have grown old, treat them with dignity in turn. Moody (1992:229) recounts of an old story where a farmer decided he has no more room at the table for his old father, who lived with the family. So he banished the old man to the barn, where the father had to eat from a wooden bowl. One day the farmer came across his own little son playing in the barnyard with some pieces of wood, and he asked the little boy what he was doing. "Oh, Father," replied the boy, "I'm making a bowl for you to eat from when you get old." After that, the old man was invited back to his place at the family table.

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8 The belief that one of the marks of high moral conduct included respect for aged parents was something Israel shared with its surrounding world. Its background is the ideal of a stable society. In the OT, the requirement to take care of parents is presented as arising from special (in the laws) and general revelation (in the Wisdom books)" (Houtman 2000:55).

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KEY WORDS
Ethics
Care of elderly parents
Theories of filial obligation
Parent-child relationship/Ouer-kindverhouding

TREFWOORDE
Etiek
Versorging van bejaarde ouers
Teorieë van kinderverpligtinge
Ouer-kindverhouding

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An ethics of responsibility reading of Eduard Tödt's theory of the formation of moral judgement

ABSTRACT

In the article the interpretation of Eduard Tödt's theory of the formation of moral judgements as descriptive of the six steps that are logically presupposed in the formation of all moral judgements is critically discussed. On the basis of an analysis of the four publications in which Tödt developed his theory it is demonstrated in the first part of the article that such an interpretation is incorrect. The normative nature of his theory is acknowledged. In the second part of the article a case is made for an ethics of responsibility reading of his theory. Each of the six steps in the process of the formation of moral judgements that Tödt distinguishes, is analysed. It is demonstrated that each of these steps entails a distinctive normative ethical approach that can be depicted as ethics of responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

It is a great honour for me to contribute to this Festschrift for Dirkie Smit in celebration of his sixtieth birthday. We have been close friends for almost three decades, undertook – together with our wives – a number of unforgettable tours and have had over many years, and especially during simultaneous sabbaticals in Germany and Princeton, intensive and – for me – inspiring theological exchanges. We have also jointly undertaken a number of memorable theological initiatives.

One of these theological initiatives was to co-author three Afrikaans articles on fundamental Christian ethical issues that were all published in *Skrif en Kerk* (Scripture and Church) between 1994 and 1996. In this contribution I wish to revisit one of these joint articles, namely (in translation) 'Why do we differ so on what the will of God Is? Comments on the formation of Christian moral judgements'. The bulk of this article consists of an exposition of Eduard Tödt's ethical theory on the formation of moral judgements and an illustration of how the six steps he distinguishes play a role in that process. Because Tödt's publications on the topic were only available in German at that time, Dirkie's and my article helped to introduce Afrikaans-speaking theological students to his theory.[2]

I interpreted Tödt's theory at the time of co-writing the article with Dirkie as descriptive of the formation of all moral judgements. It was clear to me that Tödt does not assert that in the process moral agents always chronologically or psychologically follow the six steps he distinguishes. However, in my opinion, what he does assert is that these six steps are always *logically presupposed* in the formation of all moral judgements, even though those who make moral judgements are often not aware that it is the case. From the way postgraduate students

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1 Etienne de Villiers is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics, Faculty of Theology University of Pretoria.
2 Quite a number of theological students wrote their master's or doctoral theses on Christian ethics after 1996 using Tödt's six steps as an analytical tool in discussing particular Christian ethical issues.

utilised Tödt's six steps as an analytical tool in their research I was not the only one who took such an interpretation as point of departure.

It was only recently, when I again read through four works Tödt wrote over a period of more than ten years and in which he explicitly and extensively dealt with the steps involved, that I began to wonder whether such an interpretation of the process was justified (Tödt 1977:81-93; 1979:31-71; 1988a:21-48; 1988b:49-84). First, it dawned on me that he indicates in his later writings that the six steps only play a role in the formation of a particular type of moral judgement. More importantly, it has become clear to me that Tödt is presenting an ideal typical analysis of a very specific approach to the formation of moral judgements that he himself favours, an approach that stands in contrast to some other approaches that have been developed in moral philosophy and Christian ethics and which, in his opinion, is more appropriate in our time than those approaches. He distinguishes his approach from the others as one based on an ethics of responsibility.

In the remainder of my contribution I attempt to substantiate the interpretation of Tödt's ethical theory of the formation of moral judgements as a responsibility ethics one. In order to do this I first argue why his theory cannot be interpreted as descriptive of the logical steps presupposed in all instances of the formation of moral judgements. In a second part I provide a responsibility ethics reading of Tödt's approach to the formation of moral judgements.

TÖDT'S THEORY IS NORMATIVE IN NATURE

It is not without reason that I (and others) initially interpreted Tödt's theory as purely descriptive of the logical steps presupposed in all formation of moral judgements. Especially the first version of his theory, entitled "Versuch zu einer Theorie ethischer Urteilsfindung" (1977) ("An attempt at formulating a theory on the formation of ethical judgements"), renders such an interpretation plausible.[3] In this version Tödt asserts that he identifies in his scheme the essential elements (*Sachmomente*) that form part of the formation process of moral judgements and arranges them according to the objective logical order (*sachlogische Reihenfolge*) that applies to this process (Tödt 1977:84). The impression that he is claiming that the elements he identifies are presupposed in all formation of moral judgements is also strengthened by his use of the word "theory" (in the first version without the qualification "ethical"). He provided the following definition of "theory":

> [A] system of precise concepts and assertions, which serves to order the factual knowledge in a certain area of study, and to explain and, eventually, also predict the order in which the data are related to one another (Tödt 1977:84) [my translation – EDV].

On account of this definition the conclusion that Tödt is providing a theoretically sound explication of the essential elements involved in the formation of moral judgements as such is certainly not far fetched.

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3 In 1978 the greatest part of an issue of the Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik was devoted to the first version of Tödt's theory. In it Otfried Höffe (1978:181-187), Christian Link (1978:188-199) and Christopher Frey (1978:200-213) critically discussed the theory. Wolfgang Huber (1992:15 footnote 31) felt that the strong criticism of this version of the theory by Johannes Fischer (1989:91-118) was unfair. Fischer showed more appreciation in a later discussion of Tödt's theory – which took later versions of it into account (1994:226-234).

However, when one takes into account all the publications in which Tödt deals with the formation of moral judgements, the correctness of this interpretation becomes highly unlikely. First of all, he clearly indicates in the last two writings on this topic (published together in a book in 1988) that his scheme of six steps does not apply to all types of moral judgements. He denies, for example, in his "Versuch einer ethischen Theorie sittlicher Urteilsfindung" that it is not applicable to moral judgements in which we express a moral evaluation of the attitudes and actions of other people, or of the moral quality of institutions and relations. It rather applies to moral judgements that are elicited by serious concrete problems and culminates in decisions that lead to action (Tödt 1988a:21-22). He does not expand on why his scheme is not applicable to moral judgements of evaluation. It is, however, not difficult to see that the reason is that in such moral judgements some of the steps he identifies do not play a role. In the case of such moral judgements the point of departure is not a problem that engages an agent unconditionally and challenges him or her to take a *decision* that involves both mind and the will to act morally in order to solve or alleviate the problem.

In his "Die Zeitmodi in ihrer Bedeutung für die sittlicher Urteilsfindung" ("The significance of the different temporal modes for the formation of moral judgements"), Tödt narrows down the type of formation of moral judgements to which his scheme applies even further. He excludes the intuitive moral judgements that play an important role in everyday life from his analysis (Tödt 1988b:55). With that he acknowledges the valid insight of the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre and the Christian ethicist Stanley Hauerwas that moral virtues, and not so much moral norms, play a pivotal role in providing moral guidance in everyday life. As moral judgements based on moral virtues are mostly not made in a process of conscious moral deliberation, but rather *intuitively,* there is no way that one can cogently argue that the steps Tödt distinguishes are logically presupposed.

Not only is it clear from the two essays mentioned that Tödt does not present his scheme of six steps as applicable to the formation of all types of moral judgements, but it is also clear that he does not see this scheme as a timeless one that is presupposed in the formation of at least a certain type of moral judgement. It is rather that he is convinced that in our time his proposed approach to the formation of moral judgements on moral problems that challenge moral agents is the most appropriate one. His reason for proposing this particular approach is that traditional approaches, like the casuistry approach, are not able to adequately deal with the complex new problems we face today as the result of rapid, modern, technological developments. These approaches were developed for a social environment that remained unchanged and stable for long periods of time and were, therefore, based on the conviction that all that is needed to reach a moral judgement is to apply the traditional ethos or a general moral principle to a particular issue. Given the complex problems we face today it is, in Tödt's opinion, advisable to in the formation of moral judgements rather depart from the stipulation of the problem that needs to be solved and to only then inquire into the criteria for right action (Tödt 1988b:50-51).

This, however, does not mean that Tödt supports a situation ethical approach to the formation of moral judgements. In fact, he strongly criticises situation ethics and clearly distinguishes his own approach from it (Tödt 1988b:58-59). Situation ethics – especially the version that was influential in Germany in the 1920s and that took as its point of departure Kierkegaard's understanding of "situation" – shares the conviction of ethical decisionism that we do not need norms that transcend a situation, but that the situation itself rather prescribes what should be done. The subjectivism and arbitrariness to which such situation ethics could lead became clear

when influential proponents, such as the German jurist Carl Schmitt, actively supported and legitimated Hitler's rule (Tödt 1988b:58). Unlike these situation ethicists, Tödt does not believe that the situation can be isolated from the flow of history as if it is a sort of "eternity atom". In the process of moral judgement its relation to preceding historical developments should, therefore, be taken into account by way of a thorough situation analysis (Tödt 1988b:59).

That Tödt does not develop a theory on the timeless elements that are presupposed in the formation of moral judgements becomes even clearer when his exposition of the different steps in his two later works is taken into account. As more attention will be given to his understanding of what is involved in each of these steps in the next paragraph, I restrict myself here to a brief discussion of only the fifth step, namely the testing of the morally communicative and obligatory character of the selected course of action (Tödt 1988a:39-41; 1988b:74-77). This step is not included in the first version of Tödt's theory. In the first version he rather introduced as sixth step what he calls "retrospective adequacy control" (Tödt 1977:83). Criticism that "adequacy control" could hardly be seen as a separate step that follows the decision on right action, but should rather be regarded as inherent to each of the first five steps apparently convinced Tödt to omit this step (for criticism cf. Höffe 1978:186). In his later version he instead introduced the above-mentioned step as the fifth one. With this step he proposed that a decision on right action should not be taken before the moral agent had determined whether there might be something regarding the possible options for action that does not relate to other people, are unacceptable to them or may cause division. It inevitably involves real consultation with stakeholders. What is rather obvious is that, unlike the other steps, this step cannot in any way be interpreted as one that is logically presupposed in the formation of moral judgements. It is clearly prescriptive or normative in nature and only makes sense in a theory that is itself a normative proposal on the most appropriate approach to forming moral judgements in our day.

This discussion of the status of Tödt's theory – whether it is descriptive or normative in nature – raises the more general question of whether any theory on the formation of moral judgements could ever be purely descriptive in nature. In preparation of this contribution I also read the works of philosopher Otfried Höffe (1977) and theologians Hermann Ringeling (1984) and Dietz Lange (1992) who, in critical dialogue with Tödt, develop their own views on the elements involved in the formation of moral judgements. First of all, it is obvious that their versions of the steps involved in the process differ significantly from Tödt's and from one another. It is clearly not universally evident what these steps are! Even more significant is that the differences between these versions can at least in some instances be traced back to different normative elements that the mentioned authors find necessary to introduce into the schemes they develop: Höffe's conviction that no adequate formation of moral judgements is possible without a creative, constructive design of suitable solutions to the problems at hand (Höffe 1977:186); Ringeling's insistence on the fact that recognition should be given to the deontological Kantian question ("What do we want to do?"), as well as to the teleological question ("What should we do?") and the responsibility ethics question ("What can we do?") (Ringeling 1984:419-420); and Dietz's assertion that relevant, concrete norms based on the criterion of being human (such as the protection of life and the possibility of taking responsibility) should also be taken into account (Dietz 1992:521). One may wonder whether any theory on the formation of moral judgements can be purely descriptive. Such theories mostly, if not always, seem to be based on normative assumptions and to be normative or prescriptive in nature.

A RESPONSIBILITY ETHICS READING OF TÖDT'S THEORY

Tödt's ethical theory of the formation of moral judgements rests on two important presuppositions that have to be taken into account in its interpretation. The first is that his construction of such a theory was motivated by his desire to find an appropriate contemporary approach in Protestant (German: *evangelische*) ethics. The second is that, in Tödt's opinion, a theory of the appropriate formation of moral judgements in our time has to be based on responsibility ethics. In the tradition of the Reformation the salvation the loving God grants believers is central. Protestants, especially in the Lutheran tradition, interpreted this salvation to include freedom from the specific norms of the law. In his disputation with Hieronymous Weller, Martin Luther even declared that we are empowered by faith to make new laws, new decalogues that are better than those of Moses (*WA* 39 I, 47). This unfortunately led to the widespread misunderstanding among Protestants that all norms have lost their obligatory significance (Tödt 1979:54,56). The fear of making specific norms binding on Christians also led to a lack of concretisation in Protestant ethics and uncertainty among members of Protestant churches on how they should relate their faith to urgent moral issues of our time and on what specific steps they should take to decide on morally acceptable actions. In Tödt's view, this is an unfortunate situation that should be rectified. Protestant Christians should take the task given in the Bible of discerning the will of God seriously in order to learn what is good, acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:2). They should accept that they are empowered by faith to reflect on serious moral issues, to make judgements on morally right actions and to act accordingly (Tödt 1988a:46-47). It is partly to overcome the lack of concretisation of Protestant ethics and to provide guidance to contemporary Christians towards making moral judgements that Tödt develops his theory. In his own words:

> In a theological framework a theory of the formation of moral judgements serves to give clarity on how God's salvific claim on our lives accompanies and moves us even in the most concrete aspects of our relationships with fellow human beings, the environment and ourselves (Tödt 1988a:47) [my translation – EDV].

In the development of his theory, Tödt often refers to those who contributed to the development of an ethics of responsibility: Max Weber, Georg Picht, Hans Jonas and also Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He is clearly convinced that the insights gained from an ethics of responsibility should be incorporated in a contemporary theory of the formation of moral judgements and sets out to do just that in the construction of his own theory (cf. Tödt 1979:53-56; 1988a:43-46; 1988b:51, 79-81). Tödt shares the conviction of the responsibility ethicists that the traditional approach to ethics has been overtaken by rapid and incisive changes in contemporary social reality. In the traditional approach the emphasis was on retrospective evaluation (Tödt 1979:36). The central concept was the concept of "duty". The presupposition was that it is possible to identify a number of typical moral issues in personal and social life and to formulate a number of corresponding duties that adequately deal with these moral issues. As Max Weber has already pointed out in his famous speech "The profession and vocation of politics" (1919), the "ethics of conviction", which he contrasts to "ethics of responsibility", entails only a narrow responsibility to strictly obey a prescribed duty without taking any consequences into account (Weber 1994:309-369). However, in our present social reality – especially as a result of the rapid development of modern technology – we are ever more confronted with new and complex moral issues, which cannot be dealt with by means of available duties. These issues confront us with new tasks and challenges that entail comprehensive responsibilities and reveal the need to find moral agents who

are willing and able to take on these responsibilities. What complicates the matter further is that modern technology often has unintended, long-term, negative consequences that pose serious risks for future generations. An ethics of responsibility recognises these drastic changes in the moral landscape as well as the need to make "responsibility" the key concept of ethics instead of "duty".

Tödt does not only acknowledge in general terms that insights gained from an ethics of responsibility serve as presuppositions of his own theory. He also incorporates these insights into his exposition of the six steps in the formation of moral judgements. In the remainder of this contribution I, therefore, turn my attention to a brief demonstration of the responsibility ethics dimension of each of the steps.

The perception, acceptance and stipulation of the problem as a moral problem

Tödt is aware of the fact that the ethics of responsibility differs from other ethical approaches, among others, by its emphasis on taking the pressing problems of the modern period morally serious. As he strives to construct a theory of the formation of moral judgements in tandem with the ethics of responsibility, Tödt is convinced that the "point of departure for the formation of moral judgements in the vein of an ethics of responsibility must be to tackle the problems that crop up from the context of life and history" (Tödt 1988b:51). Taking such problems morally serious entails, in his opinion, to first perceive them from a moral perspective and to take them on as moral problems that engage one personally and unconditionally. He is quite aware that this means deliberately going against the tendency in our time to see these problems as purely sectorial problems – for example, economic or technological – that can and should be solved by purely functional or technical means. Second, to take these problems seriously means stipulating precisely the exact nature of the moral problem that has to be solved. Tödt recognises that people involved often differ on what the precise nature of the moral problem is. They can also differ on which moral problem is more serious and should be attended to first. By emphasising that they ought to critically investigate their own prejudices based on interests, try to express themselves in an understandable way and strive to reach agreement on the moral problem that has to be tackled he, in my opinion, adopts and recommends a responsibility ethics approach. Such an approach entails the responsibility to do everything reasonable that is needed to solve the serious moral problem at hand. To reach consensus on the moral problem is an indispensable step in the process of resolving such moral problems (Tödt 1988a:30-31; 1988b:56-58).

Analysis of the situation

Taking seriously the pressing problems that face us in our communal and personal lives today, implies that the concrete situation in which these problems are embedded should also be taken seriously by thoroughly analysing it. That a thorough situation analysis is an imperative of responsibility ethics has been emphasised by most of its proponents (cf. for example, Weber 1994:309-369). Tödt recognises this imperative by underlining the need to analyse the situation (the "real context", according to him) within which such problems present themselves and explicitly states that "[t]o not analyse a situation as thoroughly as possible is negligence" (Tödt 1988a:32). Part of this situation analysis is to take the *historical* context of the problem into account. Situation analysis has as task "to get clarity on possible and commendable future actions and only succeeds in understanding the situation concretely if it reveals which past events have given shape to the present constellation of the problem" (Tödt 1988b:62).

What has to be taken into account is that even actions that follow from good intentions (or from the "good will", to use Kantian terminology) sometimes have very bad consequences (Tödt 1988a:31-32). This is something that Max Weber already convincingly pointed out in his criticism of the ethics of conviction and his defence of the ethics of responsibility in "The profession and vocation of politics" (Weber 1994:309-69). Therefore, it is imperative – especially from the perspective of responsibility ethics – that the possible and foreseeable future effects and side effects of present and past actions, but also of alternative actions that are considered as moral solutions to present problems, should also be determined as accurately as possible (Tödt 1988a:32).

Design and evaluation of options for action

Max Weber already pointed out in "The profession and vocation of politics" that proponents of an ethics of conviction need not consider different options for action, because a very specific action is already prescribed by the duty they accept as their own. It is, however, different in the case of proponents of the ethics of responsibility. The latter have to consider different courses of action by deciding on a specific goal to strive toward and by looking at different means available to achieve that goal (Weber 1994:309-369). This includes weighing up the consequences of the different courses of action. In the same vein, Tödt emphasises the need to design and evaluate different options for action in order to find the best solution to a moral problem. He adds: "The person who designs options for action in a responsible way cannot ignore effects and side effects, because all moral actions play out in the field of inter-human relationships" (Tödt 1988b:64). An attempt should be made at predicting and managing the future by way of prognosis and planning. By analysing trends in the present the consequences of different courses of action should be determined as accurately as possible. Tödt agrees with Weber that the consideration of morally suspect or ambivalent means in order to ensure the achievement of a morally good goal is sometimes unavoidable. There are, however, moral limits to the means that may be utilised. The moral agent should never act contrary to his or her own conscience as his or her own moral identity will then be at stake (Tödt 1988a:34-35).

Testing norms, goods and perspectives

It is one of the fundamental insights of the ethics of responsibility that in the modern era moral norms, virtues and values have lost their monopoly in all spheres of life. As the differentiation of social spheres like politics and the economy progressed, it became increasingly clear that the validity of functional norms, virtues and values, and not only of moral norms, virtues and values, has to be recognised. Weber was one of the first to incisively reflect on the growing competition moral considerations experience from functional ones. In formulating the ethics of responsibility he attempted to find a solution that would do justice to both political and moral principles (Weber 1994:309-369). Tödt is also clearly aware of the fact that moral norms are not the only applicable norms in the process of the formation of moral judgements. Available social norms, often embedded in institutions and social roles, are not necessarily moral in nature, but often nonmoral and sometimes even immoral, as they express discriminatory societal practices. There are also "goods" or material values that societies recognise as desirable. In the process of the formation of moral judgements all these social norms and "goods" must be scrutinised for their applicability, but also tested for their moral quality. Tödt is adamant that we should not give in to the modern tendency to allow only functional considerations to play a role in deciding what

actions are to be taken or policies implemented. In deciding on applicable moral norms, (what Tödt calls) "perspectives" can and should play a decisive role. These are the broader belief systems in which particular beliefs about life, the world and God are integrated. These perspectives – according to Tödt – can and should also serve as sources when the need arises to formulate completely new moral norms to make decisions regarding the new and complex problems we are faced with today (Tödt 1988a:37-39; 1988b:65-74). With that we touch on what I like to call the "meta-responsibility" implied by the ethics of responsibility to formulate applicable new moral norms where none is available in order to salvage the moral dimension of life in our time.

Testing the morally communicative and obligatory character of the selected course of action

Tödt finds it necessary to introduce this step because he agrees with Georg Picht that an understanding of the concept "norm" as referring to a fixed principle that has validity for all people of all times would contradict an ethical approach that takes "responsibility" as its central notion. The reason for saying this is that each person is confronted by history with his or her own specific responsibility regarding the moral problems that have to be solved. On the other hand, an overly individualistic interpretation of the norm concept has to be avoided, in any case when it comes to *moral* norms. Implicit in all *moral* judgements based on *moral* norms is the standard of the unity of humanity that has to be respected. For that reason processes of interaction and communication have to be implemented in order to find common norms and "goods" and to ensure that all stakeholders acknowledge their validity (Tödt 1988a:39-41; 1988b:74-77).

The judgement decision

That responsibility ethics obliges a person to take a deliberate decision in the face of contemporary moral problems is something that Weber already underlined (Weber 1994:309-69). Encroaching modernisation processes of rationalisation and bureaucratisation have resulted in diminished room for acting in accordance with one's own ethical convictions. A responsibility ethics approach, according to Weber, nonetheless insists that a politician should not shy away from making decisions needed for the realisation of those ideals that unconditionally appeal to him or her and to take on the responsibility to find the means to do so – even if it inevitably involves morally ambivalent means. In a similar vein, Tödt emphasises that a person may not automatically act according to a moral judgement made according to the first five steps of the process. The possibility remains that one becomes paralysed by uncertainty or fear. No action will follow unless a deliberate decision is taken that involves not only cognitive insights gained in preceding steps, but also the will to do what is required and to take responsibility for the consequences of one's actions (Tödt 1988a:41-42; 1988b:77-78).

Conclusion

In light of the discussion above it follows that the interpretation of Tödt's theory as descriptive of the logically presupposed steps in the formation of moral judgements is inaccurate. It should rather be understood as a normative theory of the most appropriate approach to the formation of moral judgements in our time. As this approach is based on insights gained by the ethics of responsibility it can be described as "a responsibility ethics approach to the formation of moral judgements".

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KEY WORDS
Eduard Tödt
Ethics of responsibility
Formation of moral judgements
Max Weber
Norm

TREFWOORDE
Eduard Tödt
Etiek van verantwoordelikheid
Vorming van morele oordele
Max Weber
Norm

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Orientation and ambiguity – On a decisive hermeneutical dimension in Dirkie Smit's theological thinking

ABSTRACT

This essay explores Dirkie Smit's theological thinking from a hermeneutical perspective. Smit's linking up with Karl Barth's view on confessing, as can be seen in the Accompanying Letter of the Belhar Confession, is taken as illustration. After a historical perspective on the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer with its central concepts of historicality, contextuality, orientation and dialogue, it is demonstrated how these concepts also play a significant role in Smit's way of doing theology. Barth's three aspects of Reformed confessions (historical context, the one message and the one church) are associated with three Gadamer's concepts of historicality, orientation and contextuality. While Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics move from application (contextuality) to practical philosophy, Smit's theology moves from contextuality to public theology. Confessing the old Christian creed that Jesus is Lord in the public sphere as the church's decisive orientation contains the risk of ambiguity within an ongoing dialogue. The argument of the article is that the core of Smit's theological thinking can be understood as orientation and ambiguity amidst the dialectic of historicality and contextuality.

INTRODUCTION

In this essay the core of Dirkie Smit's theological thinking will be explored from a hermeneutical perspective. The focus is not on his theory of hermeneutics, but on his theology; not on his thinking about how understanding happens, but on a decisive hermeneutical dimension in his thinking about God. Although Smit is well aware of the ongoing debates in hermeneutical thinking and had written a book and several articles on it (Smit 1987, 1998a and 1998b), the primary focus of his thought is not hermeneutics, but theology. It is like Gerhard Ebeling's statement about Luther's hermeneutics: He didn't introduce a new kind of hermeneutics, but discovered the gospel in a new way and, by discovering the gospel in a new way, a new hermeneutics was constituted (Ebeling 1969:275-276). Smit's way of doing theology explores the gospel in a refreshing way. By doing this he opens up several exciting hermeneutical dimensions. In this article the question simply concerns a decisive hermeneutical aspect of his theology.

To answer this question, I will first give a historical perspective on the most important aspect of the philosophical hermeneutics of HansGeorg Gadamer, namely the problem of "application". This aspect resonates with a decisive hermeneutical dimension in Smit's theological thinking. I will illustrate this by his reference to Karl Barth's view on confessing, as can be seen in the Accompanying Letter to the Belhar Confession. With this approach I would like to argue that, from a hermeneutical perspective, the core of Smit's theological thinking can be understood as orientation and ambiguity amidst the dialectic of historicality and contextuality.

Gadamer: from application to practical theology

The problem of application

Schleiermacher, the father of modern hermeneutics who introduced a general hermeneutics of understanding, excludes application from his hermeneutics. According to him, application is not part of the act of understanding. Application is a separate action following the completed act of understanding. Schleiermacher refers to Ernesti's distinction between three "abilities" or "arts" – *subtillitas intelligendi, subtillitas explicandi and subtillitas applicandi*. According to Schleiermacher, hermeneutics has to do only with the *subtillitas intelligendi* – it is the art or ability to understand. The art to explain is part of hermeneutics only in so far as it is the explication of what is already understood. The moment explication becomes a creative activity it is already part of rhetoric (Schleiermacher 1974:31; Fouché 1978:49-50).

The way Schleiermacher's hermeneutics developed cancelled his initial approach so that understanding and explication became intertwined and inse parable.[1] However, his exclusion of application from the heart of hermeneutical thinking is precisely the Achilles heel of his thinking. This redirected his her meneutics to focus on the true intention of the author instead of on the truth intended by the author (Fouché 1978:104-105).

For Gadamer application is not a separate action that follows on an indepen dent and completed act of understanding. In his answer to the main question posed in his magnum opus Wahrheit und Methode (Truth and Method) – "What happens when we understand?" (Gadamer 1975:XVI) – application or the truth or relevance of what we understand is indissolubly part of the process of understanding. The reason for this is his concept of historicality by which understanding is not primarily an act of the human subject, but a happening within the overwhelming, powerful working of history by which we are transformed. This concept of historicality opens up a whole new view and experience of the process of understanding of which application forms part (Gadamer 1975:157-161, 290-323; Fouché 2001:71-88).

From historicality to dialogue

Gadamer's concept of *history*[2] is not the romantic idea of a wonderful past that can be studied by gathering bits and pieces as positive facts. It is not even the idea of an ongoing and never-ending movement of occurrences which can be viewed from some point of reference. History is rather the allencapsulating and overwhelming power of occurrences that not only transforms us, but is always already accompanying us on our way. There is no point of view outside time and space from where one can observe and interpret history, one is always already part of ongoing occurrences, always already making sense of them, and frequently reinterpreting them according to new situations (Gadamer 1975:250-290). In short, one is not (like riverrafting adventurers) standing on a hilltop searching for appropriate routes around the rocks within the rapids, one finds oneself within the rapids and challenged to navigate

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1 The reason for this is simply Schleiermacher's strong convictions on the identity of language and thought throughout his hermeneutical journey in his earlier and later phases – this view differs from Kimmerle (Kimmerle 1957; Fouché 1978:46-48, 83-93).

2 Gadamer's concept of history can at best be translated as "historicality". Historicity denotes the mere ongoing flow of history; historicality is the noun referring to something which is "historical" in the sense that it is happening and is meaningful … that we are also involved in this meaningful "happening" is not directly seen in the word, but should be explained.

without any view from above. One can do no other than to change strategy with every new view of the oncoming, dangerous rocks.

Gadamer uses different metaphors to illustrate how understanding takes place within the movement of historicality (for example, "fusion of horizons", "dialogue", "tragedy", et cetera) and the metaphor of dialogue serves as a model. We are encapsulated in tradition, an interpreted tradition or living awareness of the truth claim of tradition. One lives within an always already meaningful tradition that does not lie behind one, belonging to the past, but that remains relevant. One remains in a constant dialogue with tradition. When one's understanding works properly, this dialogue is, according to Gadamer, not the type of dialogue where tradition as the counterpart of dialogue amounts to mere facts (as in the positive sciences) or a romantic and very interesting past (as in the methods of historism), but rather as a "you" where the otherness of the other is acknowledged and where one is open to correction and enrichment.[3] Tradition is like a "you" that is not "I" and that can tell me something I do not know. In a dialogue with such a counterpart, the outcome is not the standpoint of the one or the other, but rather something which is new. That which is new is something which one could never have come to was it not for the dialogue (Gadamer 1975:329-360; Fouché 2001:88-95; Fouché and Smit 1996:80-83). Understanding as a process of historicality is the ongoing dialogue, "the dialogue which we are".[4]

Understanding as a constant dialogue with a relevant tradition where new meaning is generated, is always already "applied". Understanding is constantly evolving from application as the ongoing realisation of the relevance or truth claim of what one is trying to understand. The notion of application in Gadamer's hermeneutics differs from Schleiermacher's banning of it to some other discipline outside of the field of hermeneutics; application is drawn into – or rather, is recognised as being at – the centre of hermeneutics.

From dialogue to practical philosophy

The "I" of the dialogue is not a bloodless or abstract subject who registers positive and objective facts, but an involved "I" – passionately involved as a human being fluctuating between hope and despair. In Gadamer's hermeneutics understanding is not a purely intellectual activity; it is a process of involvement and action. It can be illustrated in his use of Aristotle's definition of tragedy, as well as in his linking up with the key concept of *phronesis* in Aristotle's ethics.

Aristotle gives a remarkable definition of tragedy. His definition includes not only that which occurs onstage, but also what happens to the audience offstage. A tragedy creates emotions of *eleos* and *phobos* (sorrow and fear) in the audience – sorrow for the person who experiences such a tragic event and fear for the possibility that it might happen to themselves (Gadamer 1975:122-127; Fouché 2001:64-67). The "I" in the process of understanding is not bloodless but humane.

What is more, understanding that incorporates application is not only emotional involvement,

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3 For Gadamer, the hermeneutic experience is a Hegelian dialectic: The world is different from what one thinks it is, it is learning through faults and correction like Aeschylus's *pathei mathos* – learning through suffering.

4 This is the phrase with which Gadamer links up with a poem of Hölderlin (Friedensfeier): "Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören können von einander" (Since we are a dialogue and we are able to listen to each other).

it is also an involvement of the will resulting in deliberate decisionmaking and action. To illustrate this Gadamer refers to Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*. According to Aristotle, we do not really know what the good, which should be practised in every situation, is. We do not even have a clear concept of what the good is – we have only a vague and general idea of this good. In the light of our vague and general idea of what is good, we have to weigh up the different possibilities against each other in every concrete and particular situation in order to act. This is the activity of *phronesis,* common sense or prudent judgement. The weighing up of possibilities is not solely a matter of intellectual playfulness; it ends in a decision to act. Gadamer uses Aristotle's idea of *phronesis* as metaphor for how understanding happens. Understanding is also the prudent activity of connecting the general with the particular, the common-sense deliberation on how the general truth claim of tradition connects to the particular situation and what it compels us to think and to do (Gadamer 1975:295-307).

Understanding happens in the same way as *phronesis* in practical philosophy. Practical philosophy is not – as we tend to think – the application of some theoretical idea; it is rather a philosophy of praxis[5] (Gadamer 1974, 1976a, 1976b, 1980, 1983, 1999; Fouché 2001:128-141; Bernstein 1982; Foster 1991; Riedel 1972 and 1974). Praxis is also the everyday life of decision-making regarding what is good and useful for the community and what is bad and should be rejected for the sake of a humane society. Logical reasoning results in a statement or theory; within practical philosophy practical reasoning results in a decision to act. Understanding functions within practical philosophy as *phronesis* (practical reasoning or common-sense deliberation). Its conclusion is not a theoretical statement, but a practical decision on a new orientation towards life and action.

It is for this reason that Gadamer typifies hermeneutics as practical philosophy and views understanding as *phronesis*. For him, hermeneutics is the heir of practical philosophy – the vindicating of the noble task of the citizen, namely decisionmaking according to one's own deliberation and responsibility instead of leaving it to the experts (Gadamer 1976a, 1976b; Dutt 1995:71-72).

Dirkie Smit: from contextuality to public theology

From the above historical perspective on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics a decisive hermeneutical dimension in Smit's theology is quite obvious. The prominent characteristic of Gadamer's hermeneutics is his incorporation of the problem of application within the centre of understanding that transforms the face of hermeneutics to practical philosophy; a decisive hermeneutical dimension in Smit's way of doing theology is contextuality, which transforms the face of theology to public theology (Cf. Smit 2007a & 2008).

To illustrate this I refer to the motivation for the Belhar Confession found in the Accompanying

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5 Aristotle differentiates between three types of knowledge – *episteme, phronesis* and *techne.* Episteme refers to exact knowledge, such as mathematics, and *techne* to knowledge as the skill to produce something exactly according to a blueprint. *Phronesis* is practical reasoning within the field of uncertainty – the everyday life in the community or praxis. Practical philosophy is philosophy of praxis. In *episteme* and *techne* the teacher has the exact knowledge and teaches the student who knows nothing; in *phronesis* within practical philosophy the more experienced one teaches the less experienced one and both ask, from a position of uncertainty and of not knowing, what the best conduct would be. The choice for the best conduct is made from *phronesis* or common sense.

Letter (which is part of the Confession) – Smit was, of course, instrumental in the formulation of both these documents. The motivation links up with Karl Barth's reasons for the necessity for a church to confess her faith in an official confession, not directly, but broadly speaking. In his essay, No Other Motives Would Give Us the right – Reflections on Contextuality from a Reformed Experience, Smit quotes Barth's definition of a Reformed creed (given in the latter's 1925 lecture "The Desirability and Possibility of a Universal Reformed Creed", at the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Cardiff): A Reformed creed is the statement, spontaneously and publicly formulated by a Christian community within a geographically limited area, which, until further action, defines its character to outsiders; and which, until further action, gives guidance for its own doctrine of life; it is a formulation of the insight currently given to the whole Christian Church by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, witnessed to by Holy Scriptures alone (Smit 2007b:159).

Smit refers to three key aspects of this definition of a Reformed creed that, although formulated differently, are also found in the Accompanying Letter. These key aspects are the motivation for the creation of the Belhar Confession. They also form the core of Smit's way of doing theology, albeit in a slightly different philosophical perspective.

Three aspects of a Reformed confession

First: the importance of the historical context. The Accompanying Letter reads: "We are deeply conscious that moments of such seriousness can arise in the life of the Church that it may feel the need to confess its faith anew in the light of a specific situation" (in Smit 2007b:157). This aspect has to do with the historical context, the time, the circumstances, where the truth of the gospel is threatened in such a way that a *status confessionis* is declared. This compels the church to confess her faith publicly. In this confession the truth of the gospel is to be stated and the misleading lie is to be rejected (Smit 2007b:159-161). Second: the one message. In the words of the Accompanying Letter, "… only if it is considered that the heart of the gospel is so threatened as to be at stake … Accordingly, we make this confession … as something we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel …." (in Smit 2007b:158).

The Confession is not intended to be a contribution to a debate; it is a cry from the heart. It is done in freedom, without fear and without demands made on anyone; it is done in the hope that others will confess in the same way (Smit 2007b:162-163). Third: the one church. According to the Accompanying Letter,

> [t]his confession is not aimed at specific people or groups of people or a church or churches. We proclaim it against a false doctrine, against an ideological distortion which threatens the gospel itself in our church and our country … We are deeply aware of the deceiving nature of such a false doctrine … Therefore it is that we speak pleadingly rather than accusingly. We plead for reconciliation … which follows on conversion and change of attitudes and structures … Our prayer is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false division, but rather that it will be reconciling and uniting … We pray that our brothers and sisters throughout the Dutch Reformed Church family, but also outside it, will want to make this new beginning with us, so that we can be free together, and together may walk the road of reconciliation and justice (in Smit 2007b:158-159).

Three philosophical aspects in an on-going dialogue

From a philosophical and hermeneutical perspective these three key aspects of confession can be associated with three similar philosophical concepts, namely historicality, contextuality and orientation.

The first aspect – the importance of the historical context or the moment of truth – can be associated with the philosophical concept of historicality. Historicality is the powerful working of meaning through history. It comes to the fore in tradition, in creeds and in customs; it is actualised in the understanding of the creeds and the experience of the customs. For this reason it also finds its way into deceiving ideologies and ways of living that make people blind to each other and distorts the truth.

The second aspect – the one message – can be associated with the philosophical concept of orientation. In Aristotle's ethics, orientation is a vague idea of the good. What "the good" really is, is time and again realised and discovered in concrete situations where different possibilities are weighed up against each other and decisions are made. In Smit's theology this orientation can be expressed in the words of the first Christian creed (which is also part of the closing phrases of the Belhar Confession): "Jesus is the Lord". The immediate reaction to this statement may be that this creed is not at all vague or ambiguous. My point is that it has, of course, been clearly stated and confessed for ages, but it is still a vague and ambiguous concept because it is not very clear in every situation what Jesus' Lordship entails. It is rather that we have to pray: *Veni Creator Spiritus!* We have to seek and discover what the meaning of this crucial and ancient Christian creed is.[6] This is precisely the endeavour of Smit's theological thinking.

The third aspect – the one church – can be associated with the philosophical concept of contextuality. Contextuality can easily be misunderstood as if it is the interpreting theologian who applies some eternal truth to the context. That will be in line with Schleiermacher's idea of how something that is clearly understood can be applied afterwards. From a Gadamerian perspective as well as from Smit's approach that would be an objectionable idea. Contextuality is, rather, the meaningful possibilities of tradition in our situation in light of the orientation which is the confession that Jesus is Lord.

There exists an ongoing dialogue between historicality, contextuality and orientation. It is possible to differentiate between the different "partners" in the dialogue, but not in any clear-cut way as in Gadamer's description of it. In Gadamer's view, dialogue occurs between the interpreter and the historical text. The dialogue has a Hegelian structure of thesis, antithesis and synthesis – the thesis is the preconception (Vorurteil) or preliminary understanding of the text, the antithesis is the text with its traditional meaning, and the synthesis the "fusion of horizons" (the new understanding). There is thus an ongoing movement of to and fro from which a point of view emerges that is not the opinion of the one or the other, but a new point of view.

The dialogue between historicality, contextuality and orientation is even more complex. The interpreter or theologian is not above or against any one of the "partners" in the dialogue, but

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6 Peter concluded his sermon on the Day of Pentecost with the Christian creed: "All the people of Israel, then, are to know for sure that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the one that God has made Lord and Messiah!" (Acts 2:36). However, he still had to learn in humbling ways what this confession entailed – once in a vision from God (Acts 10), another time in a public rebuke from Paul! (Gal. 2:11-14).

rather is part of each of them. Historicality, as the tradition of the creeds and customs that is actualised in thinking and experiencing, is an overwhelming power. It can sweep one away toward ideologies that distort the truth and that blind one to proper conduct. Orientation, as the creed "Jesus is Lord", is the default creed of every theologian so that everyone is always already convinced that he or she is thinking and living by this confession. However, this confession often amounts to confusion because of matterofcourse attitudes and unwillingness to be open and to stand corrected. Contextuality, as the meaningful possibility within our context, is also an always already happening in such a way that, within a distorted ideological historical situation, theologians can (and have!) declared that to live as a divided church and to justify a system of injustice is obedience to Jesus as Lord!

The important point to realise is that we are always already drawn into the dialogue of historicality, contextuality and orientation. The crucial question is: How ecumenical is our dialogue? For Smit it is of critical importance that the dialogue with mothers and fathers of the past should go as far back as possible, and the dialogue with sisters and brothers in the present should be as broad as possible. In his paper on the relationship between the socalled contextual and universal theology, he is quite clear:

In continuously searching to remain faithful to this gospel, we are less concerned for "universality", which reflects typically modernist assumptions, but deeply concerned for catholicity and ecumenicity, referring to the fullness of the truth and of the one church of this Triune God, through all ages and in all possible localities, in all its irreducible richness, creaturely, culturally and historically (Smit 2007b:178).

The risk and ambiguity of confession

Confessing in a historical moment of confusion is running a risk. The confession may be misunderstood, it may be rejected, it may divide instead of unite, it may be ridiculed as a caricature of the truth … actually, it is not that it "may be…", it is rather that it "will be …!" In his later work, Karl Barth refers to four characteristics of (the moment of) a confession. They are: (a) confession is "without an ulterior goal" – the only concern is the honour of God; (b) confession rejects unbelief, superstition or heresy and states what is to believed – the "yes" should be heard in the "no"; (c) confession is public – it is not a private affair; (d) confession is an action taken freely – nothing is demanded from anyone (Smit 2007b:161-162).

Every one of these characteristics involves an element of risk. On the first characteristic Smit (following Barth) elaborates:

> We aim at no results and expect none. We confess because we cannot keep silent. It is a serious act, but in its freedom from purpose it has more the nature of a game or song than of work or warfare. For this reason confession will always cause headshaking among serious people who do not know the particular seriousness of confession (Smit 2007b:161).

In the words of the Accompanying Letter:

> Being fully aware of the risks involved in taking this step, we are nevertheless convinced that we have no alternative. Furthermore, we are aware that no other motives or convictions, however valid they may be, would give us the right to confess in this way … We do not make this confession from his throne and from on high, but before his throne

and before other human beings (Smit 2007b:158).

An important reason for confessing being such a risky undertaking is because of the ambiguity of what we confess. The old Christian confession that Jesus is Lord will be confirmed by all Christians, but we will differ on its contextual implications, what it means. The Belhar Confession may also be accepted by the Dutch Reformed Church – hopefully in the near future – but we will still need dialogue and debate on what the unity of the church, reconciliation and justice in our country and in every local community actually imply.

The ambiguity of confession is not because it is unclear or untrue; it is rather part of the wonderful richness of what we confess about God. In Christian theology we are not reflecting on an abstract idea that one may call "God"; we are reflecting on the *Magnalia Dei,* God's saving acts in history – especially on the saving acts of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, Christ's reign from the right hand of the Father and his second coming. When we reflect on these saving acts, we are doing it from our context. It is not possible to talk about God in an abstract way as if God has nothing to do with the situation in which we find ourselves. It is also not possible to reflect on God's saving acts as if they only affect our innermost lives or some future destiny. Rather, we are compelled to follow God in our context or situation with its grandeur and misère, to confess and live in public.

The ambiguity of confession is also part of being Reformed (Cf. Smit 2009a). Smit refers to Barth's famous answer to the question regarding the possibility of one common confession: it is neither necessary nor possible. Reformed confessions are addressed at the whole church as a call and an appeal; both are authoritative and provisional – "currently", "until further notice". According to Smit, Reformed confessions

> are not primarily intended as instruments of unity. In fact, they should probably not be instrumentalised in any way or for any single purpose. Properly understood, they function in a variety of important ways within communities of Reformed faith. They can perhaps originate for one main purpose, and gradually change their function and serve other purposes as well (Smit 2009b:303-304).

By functioning in this way, Reformed confessions indeed serve forms of unity in a variety of ways and as such constitute a "gathering of fragments". As doxologies they provide a common language of faith; as hermeneutical lenses they provide frameworks with which to deal with the diverse and ambiguous collection that is the Bible; as textbooks for instruction they provide orientation and identity (Smit 2009b:304-305). However, the Reformed tradition has

> … no central authority, no hierarchical structure, no teaching magisterium, no corpus of infallible doctrine, no common canon of biblical interpretation, no continuous and unchanging liturgical tradition, no charismatic leadership, no basic ethnic or national loyalty, no shared set of religious symbols or legacy of cultic practices, no characteristic kind of religious experience, no special kind of spirituality, not even one common and universal book of confessions. Instead, it is a tradition that claims in radical fashion that it strives to live by "the Bible alone" – and then admits that it has no final interpretation of that Bible and no final authority that can guarantee any interpretation, only a plural and ambiguous confessional tradition (Smit 2009b:305-306).

In a remarkable way this manner of confessing helps Christians to live a life of service and love.

For Smit confessing is never final; it is an openended and ongoing dialogue. For this reason many of his essays' titles contain a question mark. He is questioning what has perhaps been seen as unquestionable. He is inviting dialogue, calling us to partake in the ongoing dialogue …

CONCLUSION

The dialogue between historicality, orientation and contextuality is not only present in the *kairos* or moment of truth in the situation of a declared *status confessionis;* it is always present. Of course there is the moment of truth where the church cannot but confess her faith for the sake of the gospel in a public confession. But there are always little *kairoi,* little moments of truth, where we have to confess our faith publicly. In these little *kairoi* confessing does not occur in the form of a creed, but in different ways of disclosing and opposing false ideologies, inhumane customs, selfdestructive lifestyles, oppressive political structures, laws or customs.

From a hermeneutical perspective the core of Smit's theological thinking can indeed be seen as orientation and ambiguity amidst the dialectic of historicality and contextuality. The confession in the creed that Jesus is Lord is Smit's orientated direction. But this direction is not a straight and paved way, it is rather similar to the orientated direction of a river meandering through rolling hills. The contextual meaning of the creed is vague and ambiguous, it is not known offhand or beforehand. It much rather is discovered within the dialectic of historicality and contextuality, within the dialogue with the mothers and fathers, the sisters and brothers. It is an ongoing and openended way of doing theology, an adventurous discovery – even more exhilarating and dangerous than river rafting!

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KEY TERMS
Historicality
Contextuality
Orientation
Dialogue
One message & one church

TREFWOORDE
Historiese bepaaldheid
Kontekstualiteit
Oriëntasie
Dialoog
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The Belhar Confession – 29 years on

ABSTRACT

Twenty-nine years down the line, this essay revisits the birth of the Belhar Confession in 1982. It describes the immediate reaction in South Africa, specifically by the Dutch Reformed Church, to the acceptance of this confession by the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church. It shows how the Confession was "held hostage" by church politics in the Dutch Reformed family of churches in South Africa from 1982 until 1994, constituting and continuing to constitute, a major stumbling block for efforts of reunification between the DRC and DRMC (and later, URCSA) – either to the chagrin or relief of those involved. In light of the continued importance of this confession with regard to the issue of church reunification and its positive reception over time in some North American and European Reformed churches, the article calls for a reconsideration of the possible role the confession can play in a new millennium, in a vastly different South African church and society and in a time thinking about confessions seem to be closer to those of Calvin and the reformers, and of Karl Barth, steering away from the dogmatic Dordt way in which it for long understood by many Dutch Reformed Christians in South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The Belhar Confession was a ground breaking document in South Africa in the 1980s. While the *Kairos Document* is often quoted as the epitome of the South African churches' confessional protest against apartheid, it came three years after the adoption of Belhar as a draft confession by the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa (DRMC) in 1982.

The birth of the Belhar Confession was a surprise development at the 1982 General Synod of the DRMC. It was not on the agenda and no one thought of it before it was suggested by Professor Gustav Bam of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Western Cape.

The issue on the table was a report of the ad hoc commission for ecumenical affairs, *Prinsipiële Besinning oor Versoening en Apartheid* (Principled Consideration Regarding Reconciliation and Apartheid). The commission proposed that the synod follow the example of the Ottawa Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) that "the secular gospel of apartheid" constitutes a *status confessionis* (state of confession) for the church of Jesus Christ (DRMC Synod 1982:704).

The motion by the ad hoc commission did not mention anything about a confession. It merely took over the decision of WARC in Ottawa earlier in 1982 with a few minor changes. It was only after the motion was moved that Professor Bam spoke, quoting Karl Barth and reading the first article of the Barmen Declaration, that the idea of a confession dawned on the synod (DRMC

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Synod Agenda and Minutes 1982:605, 606).[2] Bam asserted that declaring a *status confessionis* cannot stand on its own:

> [A] *status confessionis* asks for a clear confession and a clear rebuke from the church. It must create a symbol that will become part of the confession of the church whereby the church declares (its position) now and here, a confession for the church to recognise the heresy (DRMC 1982:605) [my translation – NH].

An ad hoc committee consisting of Professors Bam and Jaap Durand, Doctors Dirkie Smit and Allan Boesak and Reverend Isak Mentoor drew up a draft confession with an accompanying letter. The draft Confession was accepted as such by the synod on 6 October 1982 (DRMC 1982:637). Four years later, at the 24th Synod of the DRMC, the Belhar Confession was adopted as one of the confessions of the church.

The reaction to and influence of Belhar in the 1980's

Much has been written on the content of the Belhar Confession. For this study it is enough to make a few comments regarding its historical significance. While the South African Council of Churches issued several strong statements against apartheid (see De Gruchy 1979:118ff.), and WARC suspended the membership of two Afrikaans Reformed churches (the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk) at its General Council in Ottawa, no church or Christian movement ever felt the need to confess its faith anew in the midst of the South African political situation and the constant support for and religious justification by white churches of the oppressive regime.

Reaction to Belhar

The reaction of the DRC and its members was predictable. At best the Confession was seen as an inappropriate document at the wrong time. In its official answer to Belhar the *Breë Moderatuur* (executive council) referred to the discussions at the Belhar Synod as a *status accussationis et divisionis* (a state of accusation and division) (quoted in *Die Kerkbode* of 9 April 1984, see Gaum 1997:36). The term is possibly only a Latin translation without any technical meaning in church history. However, the DRC made it clear that as a church it was not impressed by the process and saw it as an attack on them. Even moderates were cautious to afford any authority to the Belhar Confession. The respected Old Testament scholar Ferdinand Deist defined a *status confessionis* as an explicit declaration of the church or part of the church declaring that a specific political (or economic or social) system or action contradicts the Word of God and [therefore] the church dissociates itself in public from it (Deist 1983:52).

According to Deist's understanding, a church may only declare a *status confessionis* or proceed to an act of confession once all other remedies have failed and he doubted that the DRMC could really say that this had been the case (Deist 1983:55).

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2 It is known that Bam requested the moderator to allow him the last word before the synod voted on the *status confessionis* motion. A motion of closure prevented the moderator to give him the last word. Instead, the moderator gave the floor to Bam immediately after the motion was moved. Since Professor Bam has passed away, one can only speculate on what he wanted to say before voting took place. It may be that he wanted the synod to consider the seriousness of declaring a *status confessionis,* pointing out the confessional consequences of such a decision. Being a principled, consistent Christian, he used the opportunity after the motion was moved, to guide the synod towards the next step.

Deist made the classic mistake to see the *status confessionis* primarily as a reaction of the church to an unjust system. The Confession is, however, much clearer. In paragraph 3 the so called Accompanying Letter to the Confession explains that the latter is not directed at specific people or groups but against a false doctrine and an ideological distortion that threatens the gospel in the church and country. The problem with apartheid was not only that it was a dehumanising political ideology, but that it was proclaimed by both the state and a significant section of the church as a God given solution in the South African context.

If a moderate like Deist had so little understanding of the issues that lead the DRMC to follow the example of the church of the Reformation and the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany, the chances that the rest of the white DRC would react in a positive manner was almost non-existent. Jonker described October 1982 DRC Synod as one driven by the momentum of the political right in Afrikaner politics (Jonker 1998:164).

If the DRMC expected a sudden change of heart in its so called mother church, the Belhar Confession was obviously not the right instrument, and it definitely did not come at the right time. Jonker (1998:164) referred to the influence of growing extreme right wing tendencies in South African politics as one of the strong forces at the 1982 DRC Synod. The majority of the elected leadership were people whose rightist political sentiments were well known and clearly expressed in the debates and motions.

However, there were also some positive signs, albeit from individuals and small segments in the DRC. The most important reaction to Belhar came from the Western Cape Synod in 1983. However, it remained a solitary voice in the 1980s.

Belhar's influence in South Africa

Belhar could never break out of its Reformed confessional box. The first twelve years between 1982 and 1994 it was held hostage by the church politics of the Dutch Reformed family. It became the shibboleth of those in favour of structural unity of the ethnic denominations, while its opponents (the majority in the DRC) scrutinised Belhar with the proverbial comb to find traits and signs of its allegiance to liberation theology. While the DRMC was successful in using Belhar as a tool in its negotiations on reunification with the majority of congregations in the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA), it failed to create a unified confessional platform for all black Christians in the historical Dutch Reformed family. The Reformed Church in Africa, consisting predominantly of Christians of Indian descent, and a number of churches in the DRCA did not join the new church.

The DRMC, and after reunification URCSA, was not prepared to compromise on the issue of the Belhar Confession. Belhar is seen as a confession similar in status to the three other Reformation confessions of the Dutch Reformed family, the so called Three Forms of Unity, that is, the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Belgic Confession (1566) and the Canons of Dordt (1619).

For those opposed to reunification in the DRC, the strong position taken by the DRMC and later URCSA was like manna from heaven. They could hide behind some dogmatic or confessional position as to why they opposed Belhar as a confession of faith.

In one sense the approach of the DRMC and URCSA can be said to have been and to be too narrow. Any possible influence that Belhar could have had outside the Dutch Reformed

churches came to naught because of the bitter struggle in the DRC family. When the ethnic denominations of the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), the biggest Pentecostal church in South Africa, united in 1994, they saw no reason to be involved in any movement or to give attention to a document that, in their minds, did not result in a unified church.

BELHAR AND THE REFORMED CONFESSIONS

Unlike the Lutheran confessions, Reformed confessions from the Reformation period were never seen as compendia or codifications of Reformed dogma. While the Genevan Harmonica Confessionem of 1581 and the Corpus et Syntagma of 1612 were, like the Lutheran Formula Concordia, a compilation of several confessions, it never had the same authority. The two Reformed confessions remained private, regional confessions binding only a small section of Reformed churches (Weber 1962:15). It is interesting to note that both these ancient Reformed confessions included important Lutheran confessions such as the Augsburg, Saxon and Württemberg Confessions – possibly as a sign of the unity of the Protestant tradition.

The Reformed confessions were never drafted with the intention to become enforceable confessions of the church. The Zürich Confession of 1523 was drafted by Zwingli at the request of the rulers of the city to give them an adversarial document to use against radical Protestantism and Catholicism. The document deals with the place of images in the church and the role of the Eucharist. While the rulers of the city accepted the document, it was never adopted by any church council (Augustijn 1969:11).

In the Lutheran tradition confessions are always more formal. They were much more than documents guiding political authorities in Lutheran cities. The Augsburg Confession became an authoritative confession of the Lutheran faith after 1553. After 1580, the Formula Concordia codified the Lutheran confessions.

This approach of affirming one confession or a set of confessions at the cost of all others was not initially followed by the Reformed tradition possibly because of the influence of Calvin and the fact that Reformed churches spread much wider across Europe than the Lutheran churches.

While both Calvin and Zwingli often asserted their unity with the Lutherans by affirming the Augsburg Confession, Calvin discouraged the French Reformed church to accept it as a confession because Augsburg was closely related to the German context and issues which were not relevant in France, and also because he doubted the quality of the document (Augustijn 1969:31).

Flexibility similar to that of Calvin was also demonstrated by the next generation in the Reformed version of the Formula Concordia, the Harmonica of 1581. While they had similar objectives, they followed totally different approaches. The Formula Concordia is a codification of Lutheran confessions and dogma, while the Harmonica is not a codification of the Reformed faith. All the Protestant confessions, including three Lutheran confessions, the Augsburg Confession, the Saxon Confession and the Württemberg Confession are equal to each other, organised according to subject and include a short explanatory notes. It also included the Bohemian Confession of the Hussites and the Anglican Confession (1562). The message of JeanFrançois Salvart and his co-workers was clear: none of the classic confessions has prominence over the other. And the Lutheran, Hussite and Anglican confessions are included without any adversarial statements.

Augustijn quotes from a book by Ursinus, one of the drafters of the Heidelberg Catechism. This book was published in 1581, eighteen years after the adoption of the Catechism. In it Ursinus condemned the static, inflexible use of confessions (Augustijn 1969:64f.). Not all disagreements are heresies or lies, Ursinus observed. He severely criticised Lutherans for making the acceptance of Lutheran confessions a prerequisite for Christian fellowship. To Ursinus, confessions were not necessarily eternal truths valid in all places and in all circumstances.

The next generation of Reformed theologians and church leaders in the Netherlands and Germany did not adhere to the foundations laid by the Harmoinica Confession or the understanding of Calvin and Ursinus. In 1619 they created their own Reformed concord at the Synod of Dordt where the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt were accepted as the so called Three Forms of Unity. It is important to bear in mind that the latter is a continental compilation that played little if any role in the English speaking world. It never became the "Formula Concordia of the Reformed world". The Westminster Confession became the most prominent Reformed confession of the English speaking world.

The Synod of Dordt nevertheless represented a clear break with the tolerant character of the first two generations of Reformed thought. In South Africa, with its Dutch/German Reformed heritage, the Three Forms of Unity were seen as the authoritative confessions – especially by Afrikaans Reformed churches.

There was always a school of thought in continental Europe that opted for the less dogmatic and more flexible approach of the early Reformed churches and theologians, Karl Barth being its most prominent proponent. He summarised his own understanding of the authority of confessions in an article he wrote shortly after the Synod of Barmen (Barth 1976:592ff.).[3]

In Barth's understanding, confessions are always temporal and called for by a specific historical situation. A confession can, therefore, never be applied in a legalistic way or forced upon others (Barth 1956:625f.). Therefore, the authority of a confession does not depend on the authority of a synod, or the way in which it was adopted, but in its conformity to Scripture. "What really decides its authority is simply its content as scriptural exposition, which is necessarily confirmed or judged by Scripture itself" (Barth 1956:638). Barth warns against two extreme approaches to confessions. On the one hand, one should not place it on par with Scripture or see it as a direct revelation from God. However, on the other hand, it is an important document that draws the line between the true and false church:

It says Yes and No – not as God says Yes and No, but in the human sphere, and yet in that sphere with an appeal to God Himself, and therefore with a definite assertion and denial of the unity of the Church, and with a definite indication in what sense and within what limits there is or is not fellowship in God (Barth 1956:643).

Belhar, a reformed confession

Despite its history as a confessional document that had a tremendous effect on the South African churches, the Belhar Confession never managed to play any significant role outside the Reformed tradition. While several American and European Reformed churches aligned

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3 Although written in 1934, a fragment of the article was only published in 1976 in *Evangelische Theologie* Vol. 36, several years after Barth's death.

themselves in some way or another with the Confession, in Southern Africa it soon became internal Reformed "confusion". It became the ammunition in the unity battles between the DRC and URCSA, a battle that seems to be far from over.

In the process both the DRC and URCSA deal with the Belhar Confession in the spirit of the Synod of Dordt. For URCSA this means that no compromise is possible: the DRC has to adopt the Belhar Confession and align itself to it as a fourth confession on par with the Three Forms of Unity.

In the aftermath of the Belhar Synod of 1982, a dogmatic, noncompromising stand on the DRMC's position was unavoidable. The draft Confession was a direct result of the declaration of a *status confessionis* against apartheid. The use of the term dates back to the Protestant protest against the adoption of Roman Catholic Church practices in the new Protestant churches in 1548. When several Protestants approved of the practice because church practices are "neutral" (*adiaphora*), the Reformed theologian Flavius answered: *"In status persecutionis et confessionis nihil est adiaphoron"* (In a state of persecution and confession nothing is neutral) (quoted in Bethge 1982:2).

However, dogmatism did not help others to see Belhar as a special gift to the church in the apartheid era, but rather as a typical Reformed Dordt instrument of exclusion. Even Johan Botha and Piet Naudé in their *On route with Belhar* take as point of departure the Reformed confessions rather than the "cry from the heart" of the Belhar Synod (1998:622). They use the Canons of Dordt's strong rejection of both the Anabaptists and the Roman Catholics as an example of how confessions addressed heresy during the Reformation (1998:15). One would at least expect a reference to the understanding of these dogmatic statements at the turn of the twenty first century. To merely state that the Dordt truths of election and rejection can only be understood if one knows something of the battle with the Armenians does not help either. It is doubtful whether dogmatism plays any significant role in the life of the average Reformed Christian.

Is this how Belhar will function as a confession? Until the 1980s the DRC played a prominent role in keeping Pentecostals, Roman Catholics and evangelicals from broadcasting church services over the Afrikaans service of national radio and television – the reason being that they did not subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity. Both the Canons of Dordt and the Belgic Confession formed the foundations of the Reformed battle against the *Roomse gevaar* (Roman threat).

While the authors of Belhar seem to address the members of the DRC, it is debatable whether a reliance on the Three Forms of Unity will be of any assistance to understand Belhar. Belhar is a modern confession, inclusive and without the harsh condemnations and exclusions of the Canons of Dordt.

After the declaration of a *status confessionis* and in the light of the effect of apartheid on in the churches, it was impossible for the DRMC to allow the draft Confession, and after 1986 the Belhar Confession, to be an optional document amongst many others. Belhar was the shibboleth that distinguished between the true church and the heretical church; it was a call for repentance.

However, the important, uncompromising stance of the 1980s became a dogmatic issue after 1990. The attitude of URCSA was demonstrated by the general reaction to a comment by

Allan Boesak at the Church's synod in 2005. Presenting a report on gay and lesbian Christians, Boesak referred to the discrimination against homosexuals and stated that Belhar was never meant to be the last word against discrimination or opposed only apartheid but that it is a document that speaks out against all forms of discrimination. The synod reacted with anger against the idea of relating the Belhar Confession to the gay issue. Boesak, on the other hand, maintained that if one does not see Belhar as a confession against discrimination in general, it amounts to a denial of its confessional position (Jackson 2008).For the majority at the synod the Belhar Confession was a document confessing in the harsh apartheid era of the 1980s and early 1990s against an unrepentant church and nothing more. This attitude can, in the long term, only lead to the diminishing importance of Belhar.

The attitude of the DRC, as we saw, was even more dogmatic. Despite the steps taken in Ottawa by WARC against the DRC and the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk, the latter churches still refused to see any merit in listening and reacting to Belhar as a serious attempt to bring unity to the church and justice to society.

DRC ministers were schooled in the orthodox thinking of the Dordt Synod. The initial objection to adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession on par with the Three Forms Unity was an orthodox response: Reformed faith was codified at Dordt, giving the latter an almost sacred status equal to Scripture. Belhar could not compete as a confession with the historical documents of the Reformation and the DRC was by no means convinced that the political Reformed process of the Nationalist Party was not going to bring about a just society – an opinion shared by moderate theologians such as Ferdinand Deist.

To read Belhar as a confession complementing the confessions of the Reformation seemed illogical from the perspective of Afrikaner Protestant thinking. The Three Forms of Unity was known ground. It made the DRC stand out as the church, or at least the only true church. The powerful DRC could use its influence to keep "sects" from broadcasting on national radio and television by relying on the Three Forms of Unity.

As recent as November 2010, journalist and historian Leopold Scholtz attempted to justify any political implications in Belhar by pointing out that the Three Forms of Unity were all drafted and adopted with political motives (Scholtz 2010). In a response in the Afrikaans daily, *Die Burger,* a DRC member pointed out that the Reformed confessions are nowadays seldom read from the pulpit. The Reformed confessions, the reader stated, are possibly no longer meaningful for church members. Why then add another one, he asked (Erasmus 2010).

The context of the South African church struggle is so different from the orthodox battles of the sixteenth and seventeenth century that it would possibly be historically more acceptable to link Belhar with what Beyers Naudé referred to as the South African "confessing church" (De Gruchy 1997:103ff.) and the confessional documents of the apartheid era, beginning with the Message to the People of South Africa (see de Gruchy 1979:115ff.), the so called Open Letter by Bishop Auala to Prime Minister John Vorster (Auala and Gowaseb 1971. Cf. Buys and Nambala 2003:331ff.), Belhar and finally Kairos (Kairos Theologians 1986), the *Evangelical Witness* (Concerned Evangelicals 1986) and the *Relevant Pentecostal Witness* (Relevant Pentecostal Witness 1991). However, if the supporters of Belhar see it only as an extension of the traditional Reformed confessions, it will remain a bone of contention between two opposing confessional positions in the South African Dutch Reformed family rather than a universal South African confession.

BELHAR, 29 YEARS ON

In 1982, the white DRC was still representative of mainline Afrikaner ideology and in many ways a national church of the Afrikaners. Kuyperian Calvinism was the generally accepted theology of the DRC, with a minority following the Scottish pietism of Andrew Murray. The extreme right wing element was the dominant political faction in the leadership (Jonker 1998:164) and the church's executive was still prepared to defend the inhumane apartheid ideology as good intentions of the church and the state.

However, the DRC and South African society of 2011 have little resemblance to the church and society of 1982:

- The extreme right wing leaders left the DRC to form the Afrikaans Protestant Church;

- the DRC is no longer a church with a single theological identity. The church represents extreme positions, from conservative charismatics and evangelical fundamentalists to liberal theologians questioning the fundamentals of the Three Forms of Unity and attempts to "purify" the DRC from one side or the other are almost without exception unsuccessful;

- the confessions, including the Three Forms of Unity, have become a reminder of the theology of the Reformation rather than truths and shibboleths dividing the true and the false church;

- the DRC (or the Reformed churches) are no longer the sole representatives of Afrikaner religiosity.

- the growing independent evangelical and charismatic movements are not only growing in numbers, but are also taking over the traditional role of the DRC in advising government;

- in November 1990, at the historic Rustenburg Consultation of churches, Willie Jonker confessed the sins of the DRC in initiating and keeping apartheid in place. His confession was later condoned by the leadership of the DRC and publicly accepted by Bishop Tutu (Jonker 1998:204ff.);

- Beyers Naudé, once epitomising resistance to apartheid, was welcomed back into the DRC fold (see Ryan 1990:207f.);

- the acceptance of Belhar by North American and European churches confirmed the Reformed basis of the Confession;

- political changes were even more dramatic:

1. South Africa has a democratically elected government since 1994;

2. apartheid is no longer part of the political environment and even conservative political parties stay clear of any reference to apartheid in their ideological approach;

- however, the majority of the pastors and congregations of the DRC are not in favour of accepting Belhar as a confession. If one accepts the historical significance of the Belhar Confession, it does not make sense to expect URCSA to compromise on the issue. In their understanding it is an important landmark in the struggle against a heresy.

The history of the church since 1982 has taken the Belhar Confession out of the 1982 context as a document of a disenfranchised group to a national and international confession of the church.

In the DRC the old Dordt view of confessions is no longer the prevalent theological approach to confessions. Unless one can still accept that all the ministers (let alone the members) subscribe to the theological content of the Three Forms of Unity, it seems as if the thinking of the early Reformers (including Calvin) and later the theology of Karl Barth have become the mainstream way of thinking within the DRC. One can even argue that the DRC of the twenty first century is less concerned with confessions than Calvin and the early Reformed theologians. The Armenian pastors within the DRC may not be comfortable with the Canons of Dordt, but that does not prevent them from signing the confessions and then transforming their congregations into typical fundamentalist evangelical congregations. The allegations of heresy against the theologians of the church always come to naught and somehow very few pastors leave the church for confessional reasons.

The question still remains: Why is the DRC so reluctant to accept the Belhar Confession? Given the different theological streams in the DRC, there is possibly more consensus on the four articles of Belhar than on the Canons of Dordt or even the interpretation of the Nicean Confession.

Theologically there seem to be no reason why Belhar cannot take its place next to the Three Forms of Unity. It will be the last step of the DRC to rid itself of its historical role in developing and supporting apartheid, both as a doctrine and an ideology of the state. Accepting the Belhar Confession will be the logical final step to make the confession of Willie Jonker at Rustenburg credible.

And URCSA? No one should expect URCSA to let go its demand that Belhar be a confession of a future united Reformed church in Southern Africa. But one can expect of them to be less rigid in their understanding of confessions. Is it really necessary that all *congregations* of the DRC accept Belhar as a confession? Why not allow the DRC to accept the Confession while the local congregations can become part of the new church without making it a precondition? It seems that Calvin and Zwingli would have been comfortable with such an arrangement.

The confessional crisis can be changed into an opportunity. Why do both churches not acknowledge the fact that the Three Forms of Unity means little if anything to its members and play an insignificant role as real "catechisms of the heart", to use the expression of Karl Rahner? Why should a modern Reformed church persist in a hypocritical allegiance to confessions that are icons of the past, "catechisms of the book", that are neither appreciated nor believed?

Looking at the reception of Belhar in Reformed churches in Europe and North America, it seems to answer the need of a modern confession addressing the needs of a movement to whom the language and the issues of the seventeenth century has no relevance. But URCSA must allow the Belhar Confession to speak against the post apartheid oppression of women, gays, and other op pressed people. In this way the one church of Jesus Christ may just find one confession that can become a "catechism of the heart".

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KEY WORDS
Reformed Confessions
Belhar Confession
DRC & URCSA
Reception
Church reunification
TREFWOORDE
Gereformeerde Belydenisse
Belydenis van Belhar
NGK & VGKSA
Resepsie
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The dignity of the different – Towards a Christian ethics for a pluralistic society [2]

ABSTRACT

From the perspective of three periods of professional experience of the author – twelve years as a church-related researcher, fourteen years as a full-time professor of ethics and sixteen years as a church leader – the essay expresses the need to address the role of Christian ethics for society anew. It shows how and why, in the next period of his research and public involvement, the author wants to take the pluralistic character of modern societies even more seriously than in some of his previous approaches. In order to do so and to reach some ethical agreement in pluralistic societies, a central prerequisite is to make room for different voices to be heard. For only then we shall find a relevant, overlapping consensus amongst these voices. This, furthermore, requires rethinking of the forces – religious or otherwise - behind why human beings are motivated to act according to their ethical convictions. In all of this a useful guiding principle may be found in the so-called dignity of the different.

Normally one writes a paper first and decides on the title only at the end. Or one receives a title to speak on from the organiser of a conference that one should use. None of the two possibilities applies to the following text. I first chose the title myself and afterwards had to struggle with it. I present my reflections in four steps:

From practical ethics to ethical theory; ethics in a "time of many worlds"; from ethical plurality to pluralistic ethics; and, the dignity of difference or the dignity of the different.

FROM PRACTICAL ETHICS TO ETHICAL THEORY

To begin with, I will briefly sketch the three periods of my professional life and the different ways in which I had to do public theology in general and Christian ethics in particular in these three periods.

After my theological studies and sometime in the ministry I was for twelve years, beginning in 1968, as a staff member and then the deputy director of a church-affiliated research institute, the Protestant Institute for Interdisciplinary Research, in Heidelberg.[3]

The question we had to address was, broadly speaking, how a Christian church can face the great challenges of our times, challenges we at the time saw as shaped by science and technology, by the presence of military means of mass destruction, by a growing global disparity between the North and the South. Together with some colleagues I concentrated in those years on two main topics, namely the Christian responsibility for peace and a Christian understanding of human rights (cf. Huber and Tödt 1977). The way in which Christian churches, as communities of faith, take public responsibility from that time onward became a constant feature of my academic work as well as of my practical involvement in the church.

That period was followed by fourteen years, beginning in 1980, teaching systematic theology, especially Christian ethics, at two German universities. How to teach Christian ethics academically became the question that I had to address. I had to deal with the fact that the canon of subjects in this field was, of course, very broad (both for the students and for me as a teacher), but rather narrow from the perspective of the on-going international debate on applied ethics as well as the thematic variety within applied ethics. In those years I concentrated again on the fields of peace ethics and the ethics of law (cf. Huber and Reuter 1990; Huber 1996). At the same time, I had the opportunity to gain a broader international experience. Among my deepest personal impressions during those years was the confrontation with apartheid in South Africa and with the ways Christian theologians dealt with this topic both academically and existentially. In fact, my friendship and co-operation with Dirkie Smit, John de Gruchy, Renier Koegelenberg, Etienne de Villiers and others goes back to that period. I mention with especial gratitude the many years of co-operation with Dirkie Smit, to whom I owe so many insights, suggestions and inspiration. For me he represents a truly reformed and liberated form of Reformed theology (cf. Smit 2009). His role in the writing and interpretation of the Belhar Confession (1982, as adopted by the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1986) clarifies in depth the relationship between Christian faith and political responsibility with regard to the equal dignity of every human person (cf. Cloete and Smit. 1984; Smit 2005: 355ff.; Naudé 210).[4] The Belhar Confession made clear why Christian churches cannot be "neutral" with regard to such questions and why they cannot promote the forced separation of people on a racial basis.[5]

For me personally, the encounter with the struggle to overcome apartheid in South Africa, as interpreted by people like Dirkie Smit, was an exemplary experience of the conviction that faith, ethics and the public witness of the church cannot be separated from each other. For me the lesson was: One cannot teach Christian ethics in an academic setting without practising what we teach in our personal lives and in public.

The way in which I was provoked to do so was a special one. After those fourteen years in academic life I was called to become Bishop of the Protestant church in Berlin – which was

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4 On the relationship between the Barmen Theological Declaration (1934) and the Belhar Confession cf Koopman 2009:60-71, Smit 2006a:91-302. For the general overviews by Smit 2007b:840-844 and 2006b:322-332.

5 The BelharConfession states, among under things, "that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity; that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine" (Naudé 2010:221f.).

to become in that time the German capital once again – and for the rural Brandenburg area surrounding the city. This position I filled for sixteen years, the last six years of which I also served as President of the Rat der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany), ending in November 2009.

I was exposed to political quarrels right from the beginning: How to deal with political refugees when they are not legally recognised as asylum seekers? Are Christian congregations allowed to grant them sanctuary until their cases are eventually reopened? This was one of the initial conflicts I had to deal with. This first issue already implied a question regarding Christian partiality towards the matter of foreigners in public discourse or even before the judiciary. How to uphold Christian ethics in a pluralistic, highly secularised public arena became one of the main dimensions of my ministry in all those years.

Over the past ten years, bioethics has turned out to be one of the important fields in such a discourse. Embryonic stem cell research, pre-implantation diagnosis and euthanasia were among the themes that in many countries have led to considerable ethical disagreements and heated public debates. These debates and disagreements present clear evidence of pluralism in ethics. Amongst the questions raised was: Do Christian ethics matter at all? It is the Christian position that embryonic life already shares in the respect for human dignity owed to all. If so, does this have consequences for legal restrictions on the possibilities for embryonic stem cell research? Furthermore, does public discourse have to be limited to so-called secular or neutral arguments? If so, which arguments are secular or neutral? Is the reference to human dignity secular – and is it clear how humanity is relevant to the questions that I have mentioned?

Another similar example was the debate on the implications of the global financial and economic crisis of the past two to three years. Can the preferential option for the poor proclaimed by Christian ethics be mediated into public discourse? Should there be a Christian position on the remuneration system in investment banking or on an upper limit for the salaries of industry executives? (cf. Huber 2010).

The last example I want to mention is the new awareness of a Muslim presence in European countries. This awareness has changed profoundly after 11 September 2001. Whereas the size of the migrant population in Germany used to be calculated according to the numbers of Turks, Iranians, Russians or Italians, migrants from countries with a Muslim majority nowadays generally feature as "Muslims" in these calculations. Thus, the creation of stereotypes of cultural identity occurs in a very significant way. This has consequences for the way in which Muslims organise themselves in a country such as Germany, as well as for dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

After the above three periods of professional experience – twelve years as a church-related researcher, fourteen years as a full-time professor of ethics and sixteen years as a church leader – I feel a duty to address the role of Christian ethics for society anew. In my next period of research and public involvement I want to take the pluralistic character of modern societies even more seriously than I did in some of my previous approaches. However, in order to reach some ethical agreement in pluralistic societies, we have to make room for the different voices to be heard. For only then we shall find a relevant, overlapping consensus amongst these voices.[6]

6 The concept of an "overlapping consensus" was first developed by John Rawls in his essay The Idea of an

Another aspect is relevant in a similar way. We will not succeed in promoting some kind of ethical behaviour in people's personal lives and in society without mobilising the motivational forces embedded in the deep convictions of human beings – whether these convictions be based on religion or something else. Ethics has to do not only with the question of what one should do, but even more with the question why we should do so. In the obvious crisis of social coherence we experienced in many societies characterised by a high degree of diversity, the ethical problem has to do not only with ethical pluralism or a lack of moral standards, but even more – as the New York philosopher Simon Critchley calls it – with a "motivational deficit" (cf. Critchley 2007:2ff.).[7] In my view this is one of the obvious points of comparison between the present situation in South Africa and in Germany.

In both societies this observation applies to young males in particular. In different forms and to a different extent a lack of constructive perspective, a feeling of not being needed by society and not knowing what the purpose of one's life is lead to a period in the lives of especially of young males when they may be called "youth at risk" (cf. Duckenfield and Swanson 1992; Brendtro, Brokenleg and Von Bockem 2002). It is probably not that young people do not know that physical violence is a crime, that rape brutally violates the integrity of its victims, that robbery is an act of unacceptable aggression or that xenophobia blatantly contradicts human dignity. In reality, ethical pluralism does not go so far as to make these moral insights controversial. Instead, it is rather a case of the experience of social exclusion, of a lack of being morally embedded or of lacking a personal outlook for the future that produces these kinds of motivational deficits and these depressing forms of social *anomia*.

How can these social conditions be changed? Also, how can ethically acceptable options be clarified and motivated? These seem to be the tasks at the heart of our common problems in societies with both high diversity and a lack of social cohesion, be it South Africa, Germany or other pluralistic societies.

ETHICS IN A "TIME OF MANY WORLDS"

Calling contemporary societies "pluralistic" cannot be taken for granted at all. The Chicago ethicist William Schweiker calls the present time a "time of many worlds" (Schweiker 2004). He uses a metaphor that has grown in its attraction since we became used to distinguish between a First, Second and Third – or even a Fourth – World. But irrespective of the metaphorical attraction of this way of speaking, we live only in one world. The oneness of this world is underlined even when we take into account other possible *kosmoi* (cf. for example, Ellis, Kirchner and Stoeger 2004:921-936), or when Christian faith upholds the hope for a world to come that will transform the current one (Rev. 21:1). Therefore, we have to proceed from the metaphor of a "time of many worlds" towards a (hopefully) clearer description but which one?

I put aside the description of our time as being "postmodern". I do so not only because I have begun to increasingly doubt post-terminologies in general, but even more because, in the case under discussion here, the term used for descriptive reasons already prescribes what we should think in normative terms. "Postmodernism" makes it meaningless to ask for common

Overlapping Consensus (1987)Cf. John Rawls (1996).

7 It was Dirkie Smit who encouraged me to read Simon Critchley, as is the case with Kwame Anthony Appiah whom I cite later on.

moral perspectives or for an ethical overlapping consensus because we know in advance that the great narratives are something of the past (namely modernity) and, therefore, that any narrative can unfold its meaning only for a specific community, existing more or less separately next to others (cf. Lyotard 1984). Therefore, I do not plan to work with the concept of postmodernism because I got the impression that it does not offer sufficient room for the question of social coherence between or mutual respect for and by those who differ from each other.

Nowadays, many people start describing our time by referring to the notion of globalisation. This term seems to be appropriate for a time in which the international order (or disorder) is no longer shaped by competition between two superpowers and their allies, but by a multitude of global actors. Furthermore, this concept takes into account that global actors are not necessarily only political bodies, but also include economic actors that combine a great deal of power with the minimum of public control and democratic accountability.

The fact that economic globalisation is the driving force of contemporary developments can be highlighted from different perspectives. Those who claim a growing independence of economic decisions from political control blame it on globalisation. Those who are convinced that today's global economy undermines the demands for social justice also use globalisation as framework for their critique – from directly the opposite perspective!

In both cases globalisation is used to explain diversity. In one case it is regarded from the perspective of diversity *in competition*. By means of growth and profit every global player tries to gain the upper hand in a special field – be it Germany's role as "world champion" in export in general, or South Africa's role as the world's premier exporter of gold and platinum. From the other perspective, globalisation is explained with reference to the diversity of *disparity:* the inequality between a small minority growing richer and richer and a majority becoming increasingly poorer and poorer (at least in comparison), with a shrinking middle class in between.[8]

However different these two perspectives may be, they do share the characteristic of looking at the human condition from a merely economic perspective. The globalisation approach is consciously monothematic. Either for the benefit of affirmation or for the benefit of critique it reflects an image of society formed according to the idea of the *homo oeconomicus.*

Another very surprising way of describing diversity in society gained popularity over the last few of years. It uses terminology relating to culture. Group membership is seen as the decisive criterion for diversity. Gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, and religion are the main criteria employed to evaluate this diversity. The term "culture" is used as an umbrella term for listing such heterogeneous criteria. Astonishingly, in a time when cultural diversity in a narrower sense is diminishing in many societies – due to the combined effects of modern mass communication and mass consumption – the word "culture" in a very general sense is used to cover all kinds of diversity. Princeton philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah reminds his readers that "culture", used in such a general way, is a rather new and clearly Western concept (Appiah 2005:114ff.). The term goes back to German Romanticism, which was not really a multicultural intellectual movement that identified a certain people (the *Volk*) with its culture. Later, as we know, this assumption became an attractive one for some Afrikaners in South Africa. Around

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8 For this perspective, cf. the Stellenbosch project on globalization in Boesak and Hansen 2009 cf. also Smit 2007a:192-209.

the time of World War I, the strong link between the German people and its culture contrasted with Western civilisation in general. The idea that culture is superior to civilisation has its origins in this debate. In the meantime, this idea has changed into the conviction that culture is more basic to human life than civilisation. Therefore, the term "culture" has been incorporated into most languages of the world. Kwame Appiah uses Asante – one of the languages spoken in his native country, Ghana – to illustrate this (Appiah 2005:119). However, the ubiquitous use of the term "culture" deprives it of any clear contours.

There is no doubt that the identities of human beings are formed by the groups they belong to, the traditions they grow up with, the languages they speak, the songs they sing, the God(s) they worship. But is it really convincing to deduce from the relational character of human identity that one of these group memberships can be distinguished from all others as *the* decisive one responsible for a collective identity? As mentioned earlier, after 9/11 people of Turkish decent in Germany came to be identified not by their "Turkishness", their migration background or their economic position in society, but mostly by the assumption that they all are Muslim. It is this reductionist effect of the paradigm of multiculturalism that worries me. The awareness of cultural diversity found at the outset of the discourse on multiculturalism has changed over time into a one-dimensional understanding of human identity.

Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen begins his book *Identity and Violence,* which deals with this "solitarist approach" to human identity, by telling about his return to England from a trip abroad in the time when he was Master of Trinity College in Cambridge (Sen 2006:1). The immigration officer at Heathrow scrutinised his Indian passport and ended up by looking at his address in Britain: Master's Lodge, Trinity College, Cambridge. On seeing his address, he expressed his surprise in the form of a question – namely whether the Master whose hospitality this Indian citizen enjoyed was a close friend of his. Amartya Sen tells of the kind of philosophical reflection this question triggered in himself, namely: Are you the friend of yourself?

If a question regarding a person's personal identity can lead to complications such as these, it is even more so with regard to social identity. When we move from the notion of "being identical to ourselves" to "sharing an identity with others" we have to be cautious. A one-dimensional interpretation of this shared identity is often combined with a sharp dissociation from others. An identity of this kind easily ends in conflict, hatred, aggression and destruction. It is one of the driving forces behind physical violence. Any kind of monothematic interpretation of social identity is bound to strengthen such a dangerous move towards hostile, irreconcilable identities. In our day religious identities in many places are driven to play such a role. Whether they really remain at the root of a conflict or not, religious identities play a conflict-enforcing role. Much too often they are also used as instruments pushing in that direction.

Over the years I became sceptical of the concept of multiculturalism. We need some idea of the individual in order to overcome the collectivist misunderstanding that sharing an identity with others means to be completely identified with this collective group identity. In real life we share certain aspects of our identity with certain groups, but regarding others we differ. We may share a religious affiliation with some group, but differ regarding the rugby team we support. We may belong to a certain professional group, but differ in political preferences from many members of this group. For a long time I have been opposing a narrow, individualistic understanding of the human person. I continue to do so. I remain

convinced that the human self is relational by its very nature. We depend on others from the very beginning of our lives until their very end. As self-transcendent beings we interpret our relational existence within the framework of being created in God's image – or we use other, even contradictory ways to understand and explain it. However, the variety of our social bonds is not and should not be restricted to one single relation determining our identity. To avoid this kind of identity determinism we need a strong emphasis on the individual character of the human person. Consequently every use of the concept "multiculturalism" should be balanced by the insight that the diversity of human societies basically consists in their multi-individuality. We are "diversely different", to quote Amartya Sen once again (2006:1).

Why I see the responsible, relational self (instead of irresponsible, individualistic self) as the basic unit of an ethics of responsibility for pluralistic societies will be one of the themes I intend to focus on in the years to come. For now.

FROM ETHICAL PLURALITY TO PLURALISTIC ETHICS

Given this diversity in societies such as South African or German society one should not be surprised to find this diversity reflected in ethical pluralism. Whereas in former times pluralism in society mostly was described as a pluralism of conflicting interests – capital and labour being the most important – today it is often said that the pluralism of convictions, world views, ethical orientations and religious affiliations are the strongest elements of pluralism as such. The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, for example, concentrates exclusively on religious diversity;[9] the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* also explains the term "pluralism" only with reference to religious diversity.[10]

I will not dare to give such a clear priority to one or the other dimension of diversity in society. In any case, it is not at all surprising that this diversity is reflected in the form of ethical pluralism with differing ethical claims, which may be either compatible or incompatible. There is nothing new about this kind of ethical pluralism. Amartya Sen, in his *The Idea of Justice,* quotes Shakespeare's King John: "Well, whiles I am a beggar, I will rail / And say there is no sin but to be rich; / And being rich, my virtue then shall be / To say there is no vice but beggary" (Sen 2009:196f.). Sen also uses almost as a motto for his book the example of three children and one flute. All three children claim the flute, but each bases their claim on quite different reasons: Anna knows how to play flute, Bob is the poorest of the three, and Carla made the flute herself (Sen 2009:13). Is that not an excellent example of an ethical dilemma?

However, it is only the built-in structure of ethical dilemmas that leads to ethical pluralism; the growing diversity within society creates an even greater degree of ethical pluralism. Different strategies exist to deal with this. The most prominent strategies are found in hard exclusivism, on the one hand, and in hard relativism on the other.

Hard exclusivism – often called "fundamentalism" – refers to the position that, amongst a variety of competing truth claims, only one can be acceptable. In history this position has opened the door to intolerance and inquisition. In opposition to this strategy developed a modern understanding of human rights that has as centre the recognition of freedom of religion and conscience. Unfortunately this development has not hindered the resurgence

9 online at: http://pluralism.org/.
10 The key word "pluralism" leads immediately to "religious diversity". Cf. Zalta 2011.

of new forms of exclusivism that react to the complexity of modern societies with a return to clear, seemingly undeniable truth claims. Whoever denies such truth claims becomes separated from the truth and, therefore, from the possibility of being truly human. The eventual violent consequences of such exclusivism are obvious.

Hard exclusivism stands opposite to hard relativism, which denies the possibility of any truth claim in the field of ethics or other basic convictions, be they religious or secular. At first glance this seems a very pragmatic approach: "Let all be saved in their own way!" said a Prussian king to justify his kind of religious tolerance.[11] Unfortunately, a pure relativism does not take the functioning of strong convictions seriously enough. It applies relativity to spheres of human existence where exactly the opposite usually happens. Very few people will see their deep and strong convictions as something relative. And at the same time relativism does not take seriously enough the problem of social cohesion and human coexistence. To make a life together possible, people need shared convictions; they look for common rituals and need at least minimal shared standards of behaviour. For every human community a common moral basis and a common understanding of how to deal with differences seem to be indispensable.

Some search for a way out of the impasse between exclusivism and relativism by espousing a kind of neutrality. Their proposal is to restrict public discourse to arguments that they call "purely rational, secular or neutral". They declare religious convictions to be a private matter that should not be brought into the public sphere. A common understanding of such rump morality ("morality in the sense of 'what we owe to each other'" – Appiah 2005: xiii quoting Scanlon) can be reached according to this strategy by way of minimal agreement. However, religious convictions are not purely a private matter; on the contrary, they are of remarkable public relevance – especially nowadays. Nor is it meaningful to search for ethical solutions to the challenges of our time without using the sources of religions, humanistic world views, secular convictions, et cetera. It is in this regard that Jürgen Habermas hints at the deeper sources of solidarity in religions for which the enlightened morality of equal respect for all or other forms of secular ethics – in his view, as a Protestant turned agnostic – seemingly do not present a motivational equivalent (see Habermas 2008; 2009a:137-147; 2009b:387-407; Mendieta 2010; Calhoun, Mendieta and Van Antwerpen 2011).

Indeed, a modern constitutional order is secular by its very nature. However, this does not imply that public discourse must be restricted to secular arguments. The secular option is only one option among others within society, and it should not be the general prerequisite for participation in public discourse. Religions, and (in South Africa, as in many parts of Europe) the Judeo-Christian tradition in particular, played a major role in the search for a democratic society based on equal freedom for its members. Not only for genealogical reasons, but also because such traditions continue to be relevant sources of orientation, a society should exclude neither its wisdom nor the critical analysis of its failures from public discourse.

This reflection leads us from ethical pluralism to pluralistic ethics. In order to find common ground regarding human and societal diversity, we have to understand the term "pluralism" not only in a descriptive sense but also in a normative sense. We have to acknowledge the "fact of reasonable pluralism" (Rawls 1996:188f.) and search for ways to deal with it. Pluralism then becomes reflexive and is understood not only as a fact but also as a task. This task can be summarised as the simple challenge to live together amidst diversity.

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11 The quotation originates from King Friedrich II (1712-1786): "Die Religionen Müsen alle Tolleriret werden und Mus der Fiscal nuhr das Auge darauf haben das keine der andern abrug Tuhe, den hier mus ein jeder nach seiner Fasson Selig warden".

It is for this purpose that an old distinction has attracted new attention, namely the distinction between morality and ethics. Ronald Dworkin describes this distinction in a classic way by saying that ethics "includes convictions about which kinds of lives are good or bad for a person to lead, and morality includes principles about how a person should treat other people" (Dworkin 2000:485, fn.1; cf. Appiah 2005:xiii). Morality has to do with the question "what we owe to each other" (Scalon 1998); ethics has to do with the question as to what it means for a person to lead a good life. Whereas the first of these two questions (the question of morality) needs answers that can be universalised, the second one (the ethical question) needs answers that may differ from person to person, from culture to culture, from religion to religion. Thus, all kinds of ethics need to include universalistic positions, but this they do on different grounds. They even have to be open to the different interpretations stemming from different cultural or religious backgrounds – otherwise they will be universalistic in theory only and not in practice. What we need in this respect is what I call "a perspective universalism" – that is a universalism open to different perspectives on our common humanity.

In daily life we regularly do not distinguish morality from ethics. Our ethical reflection includes both types of questions. And ethics – religious or otherwise – include both elements. Christian ethics, for example, include the Golden Rule (Mt. 7:12) as well as the commandment to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Mt. 22:37-39). An ethics that includes morality as well as the ethical in the narrow sense can develop the capacity to respect difference and to deal with the coexistence of people who differ from one another. In this precise sense it can develop into a pluralistic ethic, namely an ethics for living together amidst diversity. Christian ethics, in my understanding, are obliged to take this direction. Thus I come to my final brief observation.

THE DIGNITY OF DIFFERENCE OR THE DIGNITY OF THE DIFFERENT

The guiding idea for my reflections on a Christian ethics for pluralistic societies is the dignity of the different. The Christian understanding of the human person is based on the conviction that all human beings are created in the image of God, as creatures corresponding to God, as responsive and responsible selves. They are ends in themselves and not merely means to alien purposes. That is what human dignity is all about.

It has often been emphasised that every understanding of human dignity has to be inclusive. The term "dignity" itself is taken seriously only when it applies to all human beings equally. Jürgen Habermas, among others, has emphasised that this egalitarian universalism is a specific contribution of Judeo-Christian thinking to modernity.[12]

However, just as important as this emphasis on the equal dignity of all human beings is the equal dignity of the different. Human beings have to respect and to love, to protect and to

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12 Jürgen Habermas (2006:150f.): "Christianity has functioned for the normative self-understanding of modernity as more than a mere precursor or a catalyst. Egalitarian universalism, from which sprang the ideas of freedom and social solidarity, of an autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, of the individual morality of conscience, human rights, and democracy, is the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in the light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk."

promote each other in their otherness. Respect for the uniqueness of the other is at the core of respect for their dignity. It is only in this way that one can see human dignity as a guiding principle for a radically pluralistic – that is, a multi-individual – society.

In 2002 Sir Jonathan Sacks, now for nearly two decades Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, published a book under the title *The Dignity of Difference* (Sacks 2002). This phrase also occurs in comments by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, who sees the sanctity of life, the integrity of creation, and the dignity of difference as the three essential points of departure of Christian ethics (Makgoba 2010). Sacks links the phrase "dignity of difference" to the difference of cultures, mainly religions. He repeats the fear that those differences may lead to a "clash of civilisations", as Samuel Huntington predicted. But, he says, every one of those cultures echoes and reaches out to God in its own ways. Thus Sacks speaks about the dignity of difference.

I would argue, however, that not every difference is good and acceptable or should be "dignified". Not all diversity has a place in an "ordered complexity", to use Sacks' phrase. The question is not whether differences of culture have an inherent dignity, but whether those cultures respect the equal dignity of human persons.

Cultures often reflect the brokenness of human existence; they even express the selfishness of human endeavours and become instruments of the arrogance of superiority. Therefore, not the dignity of difference but the dignity of the different should, in my view, be respected as a guiding moral principle in the twenty-first century – a "time of many worlds".

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KEY WORDS
Ethics
Pluralistic societies
Public Theology
Dignity of the different

TREFWOORDE
Etiek
Pluralistiese samelewings
Publieke Teologie
Waardigheid van die anderse

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Talking hope – Dirkie Smit and public theology

ABSTRACT

Dirkie Smit creating dialogical space between Habermas' criticism of rationality and the criticism of experience required by the South African context of poverty and gender bias is explored. The contribution of Smit's public voice is argued in terms of a criticism of survival which is as yet unsuccessfully lodged from the "private" spaces of the geographically marginalised, that is, believers living in rural "townships" who do not have access to public spheres or theology. It is concluded that Smit's contextualisation of Habermas' call for a critical rationality in the public sphere finds a legitimate place in him "talking hope", albeit rationally limited, to people who are still oppressed by illiteracy and genderised behaviour. It is proposed that Smit expands the criticism of rationality which he holds in common with Habermas, to a prophetic and public voice that is based on a criticism of experience and survival in which the voices and needs of the voiceless will be heard and contra-cultured.

INTRODUCTION

Known for his preference to use the work of German authors as inter-texts for formulating theories of theology, Dirkie Smit points to the work of Jürgen Habermas as a possible way of defining the "public" in public theology. He does this in an essay, What Does "Public" Mean? Questions with a View to Public Theology (Smit 2007:11-46), which became seminal in defining public theology in the South African context.

The aim of the present essay is to communicate (rather than to argue) on Smit's preferential option for the ideal public sphere as described by Habermas, as well as on Smit's theologisation of this concept. It will be communicated that *criticism in the public sphere based on rationality*, as proposed by Habermas, needs to accommodate locally a *criticism based on experience and survival* that reflects the reality of South African communities.

The present essay, then, communicates this "argument" in five phases. First, Habermas' *criticism of rationality* will be communicated by means of Smit's interpretation thereof. Second, a *criticism of experience* will be described as alternative to rationality by means of the "private" experiences of a local South African, Piet Sibande. Third, a *criticism of survival* will be communicated as a second alternative by means of the "public" experiences of a rural South African congregation. Fourth, the possibility that South African churches, at present, publicly pronounce themselves within a *criticism of irrationality* that, of course, forces us to take another look at Smit and Habermas' plea for rationality in the public sphere.

Lastly, Smit's voice in the public sphere as one of "talking hope" rather than one of "talking rationally" will be discussed as a conclusion to the essay.

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A CRITICISM OF RATIONALITY: THE CASE OF JÜRGEN HABERMAS

Smit (2007:11-37) commends Habermas for identifying the public sphere as a prominent feature of modern societies, and for describing the means to influence this sphere publicly via a criticism of rationality. Reacting against a public that is sacrificing criticism for consumerism, Habermas promotes a critical public opinion that is based on rational conversation and argumentation (Smit 2007:16). However, engaging in rational communication is not to play mind games, but to engage rationally in furthering basic human conditions such as freedom, humaneness and human dignity. Communicating these values of critical democracy in the public sphere asks for rational communication that is understandable, truthful, and honest in motive.

Smit (2007:32-37) both appreciates and criticises Habermas' views on a criticism of rationality. Smit's criticism revolves around rationality as the only means of mediating transformation. Surely there can also be structural and systemic intervention to open up society towards freedom and human dignity, Smit argues with others (2007:32). On the other hand, Smit's appreciation for Habermas' thinking lies in the possibilities it creates for public theology as a critical – that is, prophetic – voice against state and economic policies that infringe on the freedom and dignity of people.

As Smit himself points out (2007:37), Habermas has changed his initial resistance to religion as per se irrational, to the church as a potentially important role player in conscientisation and transformation. Dreyer and Pieterse (2010) wrote an insightful article in this regard called Religion in the Public Sphere: What can Public Theology Learn from Habermas' Latest Work. They refer to the problematic role religion plays in the public sphere and the contribution Habermas has made in recent years to point to the church's public role both in grounding morality and in giving voice to the marginalised and vulnerable in a post secular society (Dreyer and Pieterse 2010:4).

Although Smit then credits Habermas for indirectly – and of late directly – widening the public sphere to include (secular) forms of public theology, it is precisely here that we need to challenge Habermas on his narrow view of religion as morality and his accommodation of religion in a post secular society with religion having relevance only when it speaks in a (post) secular tongue.

Is Habermas relevant when public theology enters community life in South Africa and how does Dirkie Smit himself challenge Habermas and his criticism of rationality? For this challenge, we shall look at the story of Piet Sibande.

A CRITISISM OF EXPERIENCE: THE "PRIVATE" CASE OF PIET SIBANDE

Piet Sibande is 55 years old. He is an elder in a Reformed church. His father was an evangelist in the same congregation and two of Piet's brothers are pastors. His grandfather had two wives. Piet has six grown children. Two years ago his wife passed away due to tuberculosis. He now lives in a house with four walls and a tap. He is self-employed. Piet is proudly and culturally Zulu.

Last year Piet paid *lobola* (bride's prize) for Rosina. She is in her thirties but lobola has never been paid for her. She has children of her own. She is an elder in the same church as Piet.

Piet and Rosina lived together without being legally married, as their church requires. Things soon became violent between them. Piet believes that a married woman should come home immediately after work and start cooking and washing for her husband. Rosina likes to visit her family and to dress up for the shebeen (local tavern). A counsellor at work told her that she does not have to put up with Piet's controlling behaviour. One day when Piet came home, Rosina had left with everything, the bed and the food included. Piet then went to the house of Rosina's mother where she was then staying. He beat Rosina badly and broke the doors of the house when she tried to lock herself in. She managed to call the police and eventually obtained a restraining order against Piet.

The church council met to decide how to act on this issue – Piet was, after all, an elder. However, Piet convinced them that they should act against Rosina. She did not behave like a good wife, left him and was visiting the shebeen even more than before.

Piet now rules the congregation. There is no fulltime minister in the congregation and Piet insists that people should call him *mfundisi* (pastor). He has gathered a strong church council around him, and he pays pastoral calls on members of the church at their homes. The church is also growing rapidly.

In the above section we have said that Habermas' position – here called a "criticism of rationality" – as applied to the church as public space, empowers the church to be, first, a place where morality is enhanced; second, a platform from where to prophetically criticise the marginalisation of the vulnerable and poor; and third, a place where rationality can be expressed in secular language amongst believers.

What, then, is the public role that the church needs to play in Piet's private life that has bearing on the public life of the church? Piet's context differs radically from that of Habermas. The former lives in a society where he is not free to be moral in terms of the criticism of power that Habermas suggests. Furthermore, Piet's view of the world is premodern, in conflict with the human rights tradition of the younger people around him and his world is not secular, let alone post secular. He lives in a world where culture and religion blend in perfect harmony with male concepts of honour and shame.

Does Dirkie Smit "talk hope" to this context? Or does he, as public theologian, continuously cling to the binary opposition between the privileged oppressors and the vulnerable oppressed, without criticising the power discourses in vulnerable societies? Publicly Smit mainly speaks to a white privileged society because of the historical need for transformation amongst those addressed. However, in the process he, like Habermas, opens up space for public theology to address personal responsibility towards the common good of society where everybody shall have equal access to human dignity – as Smit (1994) does in the essay Morality and Individual Responsibility, to name but one of many.

Smit (2007:32) acknowledges that criticism based on rationality alone is inadequate in bringing about transformation, and that this can and should be done by other means such as spirituality, worship, art – and even exposure to alternative experiences (as he reflects on, for instance, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – cf. Smit 1995). Therefore, Smit expands a criticism of rationality with a criticism of experience.

When Piet, after his break-up with Rosina, discovered that he was HIV positive, this experience changed his view on the church's participation in HIV counselling – something he previously

explicitly denied being part of the task of the church. The calling of a woman pastor as tentmaker to the congregation may also change Piet's view on regulating his relationships with women by means of male power only. Exposure to experience is leading Piet to stop rationalising uncritically about the onslaughts on male power and to start publicly critiquing existing structural and cultural powers in favour of the humanisation of relationships.

A CRITICISM OF SURVIVAL: THE "PUBLIC" CASE OF SAKHELWE

The township of Sakhelwe lies high in the hills of Mpumalanga and is for most of the year covered in mist and drenched by rain. Here a congregation in the Reformed tradition exists amongst several African Independent Churches. The people are unemployed and poor. According to the local clinic – a small room in a dilapidated building – the prevalence of HIV infection in the township is 47.2%, almost half of the community. Housing is a serious problem, with up to thirty people and three generations living in a "four room", as the four roomed houses built during the apartheid era are called.

Last year, the young people of this township participated in the countrywide service delivery uprisings to secure better housing for the disadvantaged. During the uprising many of them were shot by the police with rubber bullets and badly wounded. The pastor decided to visit the wounded without thereby displaying a specific political preference, adhering to the biblical command of visiting the sick and incarcerated. However, the church council was wary to join the pastor, since some of the elders were members of the police force that were ordered to shoot at the youngsters.

The reigning political party also invited all the church leaders in the township to attend a meeting. At this meeting they were requested to preach to their congregants not to participate in the service delivery uprisings, and to organise an interdenominational prayer meeting for the whole of the community to pray for peace. Churches – all of which do not have church buildings – would benefit in terms of buildings and property.

For this author, who was representing the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa at the said meeting, the question arose as to the public role of the church in relations to (party) politics and the critical voice of the church's public theology vis-à-vis political structures. From the side of this church, then, it was said that we encouraged a culture of nonviolence amongst our members and would fight for liquor free Sakhelwe – since it was claimed that the youngsters who marched were under the influence. The church would not abandon its critical stance towards the non delivery of services and would not move from this position by being co-opted into development programmes that threatened the prophetic voice of the church. The church would work towards the development of all the people in Sakhelwe, not through party politics, but through non profitable projects that acknowledge both the dignity and the critical voice of the people.

Habermas, of course, could not have foreseen that his ideas would result in the church functioning as a public sphere for criticising political structures or the replacement of his "criticism of rationality" with a "criticism of survival". A criticism of survival leads people to keep their critical stance amidst heavy daily demands for survival. However, this is not a rational stance. It is not a stand taken with the mind and the pen only, but a point of departure where people dirty their hands to work towards transformation. Dirkie Smit will call this the fight for justice. In his article Reformed Ethics and Economic Justice (2007a:379-398), Smit

encourages Christians not to be beneficiaries of justice only, not to see and judge only, but also to act towards realising justice.

Smit's quest for justice is, of course, prominently evident from his writings on and his participation in the formulation of the Belhar Confession (1986). Appropriately, the by now well-known words of Belhar ring out:

> We believe that the church should therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies amongst things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream; that the church as the possession of God must stand where he stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and control and harm others.

Smit himself commented on these words in an essay, On Learning to See? A Reformed Perspective on the Church and the Poor. This essay was based on a paper delivered at the International Academy of Practical Theology in 2001 (2009:473-492). According to Smit, only in seeing the plight of the poor – that is, in experiencing and not in rationalising – do Christians become the public hands for working towards justice.

But has Smit gone far enough? Has he opened up the public sphere for public theology and the church today, in a post apartheid era, for critiquing political, economic and social powers and injustice? To this we turn in the next section.

A criticism of irrationality: the embarassing case of South African churches

It was said above that three characteristics of religion, which includes the church, as a forum for public theology and for criticising power structures, stand out. These characteristics have been described rationally with the help of Jürgen Habermas and contextually via Dirkie Smit. First, religion and the church enter the public sphere as morality, but also as the dirtying of hands for both justice and development. Second, religion and the church see the need in post secular society, express themselves prophetically in secular language, and act on the pre-modern world view of its members. Third, although religion and the church cooperate with public institutions to work towards justice and development, they keep a critical distance vis-à-vis oppressive power structures. They do so not only base on a "criticism of rationality", but also on a "criticism of experience and survival".

Do South African churches today live up to these ideals? If not, does Dirkie Smit as public theologian address their silence and/or their irrationality?

One can detect three tendencies in the (un)public behaviour of churches in post-apartheid South African society. First, mainline churches in South Africa lose about 5% of their members annually to charismatic churches. Charismatic churches in South Africa are known both for their no dogmatic and non-political stance. White people who previously were privileged under the apartheid regime tend to move to charismatic churches where they do not have to feel guilty about the past and are not constantly reminded to confess political atrocities. Furthermore, apart from being non-political, these churches are also fundamentalist in the

way they deal with the Bible as well as in the way they deal with society. Their public voice surfaces only in cases of societal fundamentalism, namely when abortions, homosexuality, gender equality and the like are addressed by legislation.

Second, there are indigenous churches that invite political figures and movements into their worshipping midst, adhering to a world view that integrate politics and religion. The piety that supports this view is similar to that which has informed liberation theologies of the 1980s and 1990s and which brought about democratic change in South Africa. Of course, these churches take a noncritical stance vis-à-vis the political power structures that initially were brought about by liberative action.

Third, silence is currently a primary characteristic of denominations and interdenominational organisations that previously criticised the apartheid regime. Since 1994 and the coming of democracy, religious leaders have been appointed in government positions and church organisations that existed because of their criticism of apartheid have weakened and have lost their voices. The South African Council of Churches is one example that comes to mind.

The churches in South Africa that still have a public voice either make social fundamentalist sounds or consenting noises – both of which are irrational in Habermas' terminology. For Habermas and Smit, then, these churches, because of irrationality and fundamentalism, should not have a public voice at all.

The next question is: What is Smit doing at present to guide religion and the churches in South Africa towards a rational voice, albeit based on experience and survival? This is a subtopic in the next section.

TALKING HOPE: THE CASE OF DIRKIE SMIT

In their discussion of Habermas, Dreyer and Pieterse point to the latter's concept of *communicative rationality* that is to be distinguished from instrumental rationality: "Rationality is not only a faculty of the mind, positioned in a subject, but something that can be traced in acts of communication" (2010:2). Smit obviously finds himself at home in this definition of rationality as communicative action, and describes in numerous articles its contextualisation in South Africa.

If this author finds Smit's approach to public theology too rational and too thinly contextualised with regard to experience and survival, it is not without appreciation for way in which he – albeit rationally – "talks hope" to the South African audience. His public theologising can in fact be designated here under the heading of "Talking as Hope", that is, rationalising aimed towards the hearts of people. With most of Smit's work directed at an academic and/or privileged audience (finding the latter irrational in their uncritical acceptance of racism), his public theologising nevertheless "talks hope" to South Africans across a broad spectrum in at least three ways:

First, Smit places the work of South African theologians in the public sphere to communicate rationality and think critically. In a recent article, Morality and Politics – Secular or Sacred? Calvinist Traditions and Resources in Conflict in Recent South African Experiences (2009a:513-546), Smit points to denominational and interdenominational organisations that remain silent where a critical and prophetic voice against abuse of political and economic power is needed. In this regard he refers to relevant theologians who are arguing on human

dignity in the public sphere. John de Gruchy talks hope on reconciliation and the restoration of justice and places the struggle for human rights, freedom, dignity, justice and peace, and sustainable environmental policies in the public sphere on behalf of Christian humanism for critical discussion with secular humanists. Nico Koopman talks hope when placing morality in the public sphere for a critical discussion between Christians and government policies in a pluralistic democratic society. Piet Naudé talks hope when he opens "cultural justice" up for public debate in a South Africa caught between homogenisation and globalisation. Tinyiko Maluleke talks hope when he invites the South African public (including the churches), to risk critically arguing for moral leadership in the public sphere. Allan Boesak talks hope when he argues for a common life for South Africans without violence and exclusion. To answer the question put at the end of the previous section: Yes, Smit does guide the South African public towards critically and rationally arguing for appropriate values in a new South Africa; and in doing that he does talk hope.

Second, Smit talks hope in calling the interpretation of the Belhar Confession an "on-going task" in his foreword to Piet Naudé's book, *Neither Calendar nor Clock: Perspectives on the Belhar Confession* (2010). The phrase "on-going task" is used by Naudé himself and internalised by Smit to open up the future, albeit indirectly, for public theology. However, this author regrets that Smit rationalises on this on-going task without concretising it into action.

Third, Smit continuously talks hope in his sermons. It is through his sermons that he speaks to the public in words that do not change with governments. He talks hope when he preaches on the experience of God's power through faith (Eph. 1:20-23). He talks hope when he advises Christians to stand for the truth and to resist oppression (1 Cor. 7:29-31). He talks hope when he encourages the religious public to establish a new basis for social justice (Lk. 15:11-32). He talks hope when he speaks out against partiality and discrimination (James 2:1-13). He talks hope when he dreams with his fellow believers about a new heaven and a new earth where transformation towards a just society will take place (Rev. 21:18) and he talks hope when he preaches about reconciliation and tolerance as the main public values of a new South Africa (Acts 2:8-12).

CONCLUSION

Dirkie Smit uses Jürgen Habermas' ideal of a public sphere where criticism of power structures is rationally communicated as a basis for defining public theology locally. Although criticising Habermas for mediating criticism mainly through rationality, Smit's own approach to public theology is based on reason rather than experience.

In this essay the experiences of Piet Sibande and a congregation in Sakhelwe were described to relate in three ways the role of the church in being critical towards present political, economic and social injustices. When the church becomes not only a moral leader, but dirties its hands with development and the quest for justice, when the church speaks prophetically in premodernist societies governed by secular powers, and when the church speaks from the experience of people, a "criticism of rationality" as proposed by Habermas and Smit, is expanded into a "criticism of experience and survival".

Smit's contribution to public theology, then, lies in his critique of the irrationality of racism and other forms of oppression. In a post-apartheid society he talks hope, albeit rationally limited, to people whose lives are still governed by authoritarianism, indignity, gender stylisation, underdevelopment and poverty.

Perhaps Smit's greatest contribution lies in the inter-texts he uses to talk hope. Through him the thinking of European (especially German) philosophers and theologians, and those of local liberation and humanist theologians, has become public property. Through them, his thinking has become part of the common good of the people.

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KEY WORDS
Dirk Smit
Jürgen Habermas
Expanding criticism of rationality – uitbreiding van kritiek van rasionaliteit
Public Theology
Hope

TREFWOORDE
Dirk Smit
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Developing common values in situations of plurality and social transformation

ABSTRACT

Social transformation is always accompanied by a change in basic values. When this occurs in situations with high levels of diversity, it is important for the eventual success of the transition that there is sufficient agreement on what the basic value system of the new dispensation should be. The article discusses the role of foundational documents like the Freedom Charter and the South African Constitution during the transition to an inclusive democracy in South Africa and the challenge to implement the values contained in these documents in various contexts in society. As a case study, the process to develop a set of common values in a major gold mine and the practical implementation of these values in the workplace is analysed. It is concluded that – like the publics of the academy and of the church need a dedicated style of discourse for successful communication with these publics – discourse in the context of general society also needs a specific style of discourse. This discourse must be inclusive and generic and therefore not religion-specfic. Features of this style of discourse are illustrated at the hand of examples from the case study.

INTRODUCTION

Within the almost encyclopaedic scope of his interests, the issue of plurality and the role of values in social transformation have been prominent themes in the work of Dirkie Smit. In his recent project on Faith and Fabric this interest is developed even further. The aim of this chapter is twofold: to honour Dirkie for his formidable contribution to theological reflection over many years and to explore some aspects of the role of values in society. The focus will be on what broadly can be called "social ethics", a topic that was very much at the center of the discussions at the annual conferences of the *Centre for Contextual Hermeneutics* in the Department of Biblical Studies at Stellenbosch University during the 1980s where Dirkie was an acitve participant and contributor.

In his important work on the genesis of values, Hans Joas comes to the conclusion that values have their origin in "experiences of self-formation and self-transcendence" (2005:164). Thus values have a certain dynamic quality which is closely linked to human experience – both on the individual and on the collective level (cf. Joas 1996:199-209). The genesis of values becomes even more acute in situations of major social transformation, such as a number of countries experienced since 1989 after the collapse of authoritarian regimes (cf. the recent study on such transformations across four continents in Van Beek 2005 and 2010). In the case of South Africa, the transformation from the apartheid state to an inclusive democracy was further complicated by the inherent pluralistic character of the South African society – a plurality related to culture, language, ethnicity, religion, identity, tradition, history, privilege, gender,

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class, status and resources. By necessity, the development of common values under these circumstances has to involve different levels in society and requires a diversity of strategies.

For the purpose of this discussion, I shall concentrate on two examples: on the macro level, by looking at the role of foundational documents like constitutions, declarations and confessions; and on the micro level by describing the generation of common values in the workplace. The latter will be the main focus of the discussion.

The role of foundational documents

Social transformation inevitably implies a change of values – whether conscious or unconscious, whether visible or invisible, whether reflected or unreflected. While change on the personal level can be radical and life-changing for the individual, change on this level does not necessarily translate into social transformation. For the latter to take place, the values of political institutions, social structures, economic systems, religious traditions and public spaces – that is, of civil society as a whole – requires change (cf. Wnuk-Lipinski and Fuchs 2005: 52-60). This is why recent transformations to democracy were so traumatic for citizens and so complicated for governments. This is also why it is unrealistic to expect processes to be completed within a short period of a decade or two.

In the case of South Africa there was an additional complicating factor. As far as the values underlying the transition were concerned, there was no unified thrust that drove the process. Society was fragmented in terms of identity, ideology, social location, memory and experience. Specifically as far as values were concerned, individuals and groups found themselves at various stages of transition. There were people who and organisations that were very clear about the set of democratic values driving their actions, but there were also many who were confused and many who actively resisted any change. Under these circumstances, some foundational documents or declarations played a crucial role. Most famous is the Freedom Charter that dates back to 1955 and that became the lodestar of the liberation movement. Another seminal statement was the one made from the dock by Nelson Mandela at the start of his defence at the Rivonia Trial – although this was banned material for a long time (Mandela 1964). Secular statements were augmented by religious documents such as the Kairos Document and the Belhar Confession. In the case of the latter, Dirkie Smit was personally and intimately involved in the drafting and dissemination of this hugely influential document in both religious and non-religious circles.

However, in order to be successful, a new value system needs to be supported by at least the majority of citizens. The documents referred to above were all produced by individuals or groups that already embraced the values of an open, non-racial, participatory democracy – whether from religious or non-religious convictions. However, for the future stability and long-term sustainability of such a new state, support is needed not only from the former oppressed and victimised, but also and especially from the former oppressor and perpetrator. If there is not sufficient consensus on and support for the new value system, the possibility of revolt and of reversal of the liberation remains. The torturous and, at the same time, edifying history of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission vividly illustrates the possibilities and miracles of reconciliation, but also the dangers of unfinished business. The revolt against authoritarian regimes in North Africa and the Middle-East that we witness these days is a timely reminder of the explosive power of values with both constructive and destructive consequences.

What was sorely lacking in the case of South Africa, were penetrating and sustained attempts by the previously privileged to reflect on and embrace a new value system. This was all the more needed in view of the fact that the apartheid system was openly and consistently justified on theological grounds. There were courageous individuals, like Beyers Naudé and others, as well as alternative movements that resisted the dominant paradigm, but the official voices by and large defended the status quo or (in some cases) very reluctantly made some revisions to soften the impact – but still within the existing framework.

What was needed from the circles of the previously privileged was more than a refutation of the theological justification of apartheid – this was already convincingly done (cf., for example, Kinghorn 1986). A positive alternative to the apartheid ideology, based on Christian values, was what was required. One such an attempt – dating from the time before Mandela's release – was *The Option for Inclusive Democracy*. The authors of this brief document were convinced that the country had reached a decisive moment in its history and that a fundamental transformation was unavoidable. The critical question concerned the shape the new society would take and on what values it would be built.

For many years, the order of our society has been built on the criteria of race and ethnicity, resulting in the social and political system of apartheid. Recently, also among whites there seems to be a growing willingness to abandon this system in favour of a morally more defensible one. However, the criteria of race and ethnicity have become so ingrained in people's value judgements and consequently entrenched in the structure of our society that a dispensation free form these criteria is hard to imagine. Many, especially in the white community, who are convinced that apartheid must be abolished, experience a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness because there does not seem to be a viable alternative (Lategan et al. 1987: ii).

Rather than cataloguing (again) the evils of apartheid, the authors attempted to formulate an alternative set of values based on a biblical understanding of humankind and society that would be able to sustain a new South Africa. Exploring theological and ethical considerations related to human equality, human unity and interdependence, human freedom, social responsibility, human government and the threats to a humane society, the authors ended up, first, with a list of unacceptable or negative values and then with a list of positive values. Although based on theological insights and considerations, these values were already framed in non-religious language. In a further step, the values were reformulated in juridical categories in the form of a draft bill of rights compatible with theological principles. (During the 1980s the concept of a bill of rights was still not generally accepted in white circles. It was only after the adoption of the new South African Constitution and more specifically the even-handed conduct of the Constitutional Court that the value of a bill of rights was generally acknowledged.)

Although purposely formulated from a white privileged perspective, it soon became clear that the project could not proceed without dialogue with other segments of society. That in itself was a transforming experience. In the course of (countless) reformulations of the document, the group had penetrating discussions with a wide spectrum of compatriots.

In this way, we have come to know and share something of the incredible richness of our country. In a variety of situations, from book-lined studies to the barren back streets of the townships we have benefitted from the wisdom and practical experience of fellow South Africans (Lategan et al. 1987:ii).

The authors were well aware that ending apartheid will not automatically lead to a more humane and peaceful society.

It is all too easy to rid the house of one devil and to have seven take its place (Mt. 12:43-45.) Therefore it is of the greatest importance that we raise the question of the eventual outcome of the process of transformation during the process itself. Moving away from apartheid is a good thing, but where are we going to? The outcome, as envisaged in this document, is that of a sustained, participatory inclusive but plural democracy in which predetermined classification of groups on the grounds of race, ethnicity or tribe shall not be a feature of the social order (Lategan 1987:1).

What is related here is merely one example of the many attempts to reach out and to find common ground across the racial divide. The point that had to be made was that, in order for a democratic dispensation to be sustainable, a wide as possible spectrum of participants should be involved in this process, especially from the previously powerful and privileged segment.

These often small and incidental efforts finally culminated in the new South African Constitution. Constitutions are rich, dense and multi-layered expressions of the values, dreams and aspirations of the citizens of a state (or at least of the dominant group), of their life experience and their cumulative wisdom, of their self-understanding, of their hopes and fears, of the society in which they want to live, of how this society should function and of the way in which these goals should be achieved. On the macro level, this is certainly the most visible and enduring expression of a shared system of values. In this format – and supported by a dedicated, even-handed, and wise Constitutional Court – it is set to play its role both as memorials to the past and as compasses for the future. (For a more extensive discussion of the role of constitutions in the consolidation of democracy, cf. Du Plessis 2000 and Lategan 2010.)

The language of values – the quest for generic formulation

In order to avoid any misunderstanding it is important to be more specific about the type of value discourse that will be the focus of what follows. The documents mentioned in the previous section already provide a clue in this regard. The values ensconced in the Freedom Charter, the South African Constitution, and even the values proposed in *The Option for Inclusive Democracy* are not formulated in theological, but in secular terms. Although this contribution is written for a theological journal, It is not cast in the mould of theological argumentation. In terms of David Tracy's distinction between the three publics of theology (the wider society, the academy and the church- see Tracy 1981), it is an attempt to develop a discourse that is suited for communicating in and to society at large (cf. Lategan 1995). It is an unprotected environment with no privileged positions and no inherent authority. Unlike the public of the church, there is no guarantee of shared beliefs or divine sanction and unlike the public of the academy, the modus of communication is not that of scientific investigation and intellectual debate.

Each of these publics requires a dedicated form of discourse in order to communicate effecively with the specific audience. The different publics are often misunderstood as merely referring to different *locations* and not to different modes of communication. What is presented as "public theology" is often merely "church language" addressed to a wider public – very much

like the Bible thumping evangelist on a busy street corner who preaches just like he would in church, but now to every passer-by in the market place. What is not taken into account is that "church language" (which proceeds from an assumed shared faith) can be experienced as non-inclusive by those who do not share that specific faith. Public discourse therefore by definition has to be cast in a "secular" mode – or better still, in "generic" terms, because "secular" language can be as non-inclusive as "religious" language.

Of course values expressed in generic terms can be supported on theological grounds. The generic value of "respect for human dignity" can certainly be justified by Christians with reference to the creation of humans "in the image of God", in the same way that this value can also be supported by other religious traditions or even non-religious traditions. In the quest for common, shared, generic values, the question is no longer: Who is right? Or: Who has the best value system? The question rather becomes: What can I contribute from my own religious (or non-religious) convictions that can support a generic set of values like the Bill of Human Rights or of a specific constituion? A pertinent example in this regard is the Constituion of Poland. It is a country with a strong Roman Catholic heritage, but also with a significant part of the population who are non-believers. The Constitution states explicitly that the Polish nation includes those "who believe in God" as well as "those not sharing such a faith". But both groups have the common responsibility to uphold the Constitution "before God or our own consciousness".

If the public sphere requires its own form of discourse and if a set of shared social values is desirable for the well-being of the state or for the successful functioning of an organisation, we are faced with two challenging questions: What are the prospects of developing such a discourse? And: How realistic are the chances to establish such a set social ethical values in real life situations? In order to explore these questions, the following section will focus on a specifc case study at a big mining company in North-West Province where an attempt was made to develop common values in the work place.

Values in action in the workplace

If values are to have any purchase in concrete real-life situations, what is articulated on the macro level in the form of foundational documents must be mirrored, applied, and enhanced on the micro level. The setting of a gold mine provides a good testing ground on the micro level for such an assumption. Here we often find glaring discrepancies between official company policy and actual practices on the ground, while the workplace exhibits all the diversity, tensions, stereotyping and unethical behaviour that are present on the macro level of society.

Some historical background to this specific case: In anticipation of the imminent social transformation in the country, a so-called Values and Policy Programme was initiated at Stellenbosch University in the late 1980s. The aim was to equip students who already had a thorough understanding of the new democratic value system with the necessary skills to translate these values into workable policies in different professional contexts, while at the same time exposing students with policy skills but lacking an understanding of the new value system to the demands and realities of a new dispensation. Inevitably the issue of common values and of dealing with diversity became important components of the programme. A fundamental shift in personal and societal values in mono- or binary cultures is difficult enough (as different countries in Europe, for example, are experiencing at the moment.) In a multicultural society such as South Africa, the challenges are even more demanding.

In 1990, one of the largest gold mines in the country (then known as Vaal Reefs) ran into operational difficulties. These were due not only to geological and technical mining problems, but also (and especially) to the lack of cohesion and increasing political and racial tensions among its workforce. This was just before De Klerk delivered his historic speech announcing the release of Nelson Mandela, but expectations of a new era was already in the air.

In this situation of expectation, fear and uncertainty, mine management was looking for ways to develop a common vision and shared values. They heard of the Value and Policy Programme and invited us to develop such a process at Vaal Reefs. To place the request in context, something more needs to be said about the situation at the mine.

A PROFILE OF VAAL REEFS

Situated in the Klerksdorp area in the North West Province, Vaal Reefs Exploration and Mining Company was at the time one of the biggest gold mines in the country. In 1991 it had 48 000 employees (a number that has decreased considerably by the time of writing this article). It was known as a "mega-mine", created by the consolidation of several independent mines. It had 11 shafts (of which most were operational) on both sides of the Vaal River. The average production was around 76 tons of gold per annum.

The forms of diversity at this mine were quite complex:

- *Racial diversity:* 85% African black, 11% white, while other groups made up the remaining 4%.

- *Cultural diversity:* Of the black contingent, the predominant regions

- of origin from inside Southern Africa were Lesotho, the Free State and the former Transkei. Some employees came from the immediate environment of the mine. Traditionally each mine would draw its employees from specific regions and even districts. White employees all came from around Klerksdorp and Orkney.

- *Political diversity:* Of the black employees, the majority supported the African National Congress, a small minority the Pan-African Congress and almost none the Inkatha Freedom Party (very few employees came from KwaZulu-Natal). Among white employees, most supported parties to the right of the National Party, especially the Conservative Party, but also a strong contingent of Afrikaner-Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) sympathisers. At top management level, there was some support for the Democratic Party.

- *National diversity:* Mostly South African citizens, but a considerable number of foreigners who originated mainly from Mozambique and Zambia (See also union diversity).

- *Language diversity:* Mother tongue speakers of most of the eleven official languages were among the employees, but Xhosa and Southern Sotho were the main African languages, with a fair number of Tswana speakers as well. Most white employees spoke Afrikaans. English was used as the language of official communication, although we were obliged to use interpreters throughout the proceedings and provision was made for at least two (sometimes three) African languages.

- *Union diversity:* Here the usual racial divide existed with most black employees belonging to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). White employees belonged to seven different unions, mostly catering for specific professional categories (surface officials, boilermakers, fitters and turners, et cetera.). The most influential was the conservative *Mynwerkersunie* (Mineworkers' Union), which represented white interests and opposed policies such as affirmative action.

- *Structural diversity:* The mine functioned like a military operation, but with a much more complex hierarchical structure. It recognised 44 levels of employment according to the so-called Patterson scale (devised by a mine engineer to ensure equal payment for comparable, but widely diverse forms of work). Status, salary and perks were directly linked to this grading system (depending on, for example, whether one was an E5, a D2 of a B7).

- *Functional diversity:* Closely related to the previous category, was the functional diversity of employees, which gave rise to secondary forms of diversity, namely set patterns of behaviour associated with the different functions. Accountants, engineers, mine captains, shaft sinkers, shift bosses, supervisors and miners represented different social strata in the mine, but also different styles of behaviour.

- *Shaft diversity:* The mine was organised on a competition basis, which set up section against section and eventually shaft against shaft. The competition never really stopped and spilled over to all activities, especially sport, which took place on a shaft basis. Shafts, therefore, tended to develop a "shaft culture" of their own.

- *Educational diversity:* The employees had the most diverse educational profiles, ranging from engineering and business degrees to illiteracy. In 1991 illiteracy among black mineworkers working underground was as high as 45% in some sections.

- *Gender diversity:* The mine has always been a very male environment with a small number of women employees. The latter were employed above ground, mostly as clerical staff in administrative positions.

- *Religious diversity:* For the purpose of this discussion, this form of diversity was of special interest. Although the mine management kept no statistics regarding the religious affiliation of employees, the participants in the workshops represented a wide variety of "main-stream" denominations (both Afrikaans and English). In addition, there were members of charismatic churches and adherents of African religions, especially from the Zionist tradition. At the same time, there were participants who had no church affiliation or who explicitly stated that they held no religious beliefs. This diverstiy provided an ideal environment to explore the possibility of values supported from both a religious and an non-religious perspective

THE BRIEF

By the end of 1990, the company was under threat. A falling gold price, growing labour unrest, decreased production and the spectre of retrenchments were the most important contributing factors. In response to the situation, management devised a strategic plan (called the "Preferred State" and based on some value assumptions), to spell out where the company wanted to be in five years' time. For this they decided to acquire the services of an outside facilitator.

What made the challenge interesting was that values on at least three levels were at stake: "business" values (continued employment depended on Vaal remaining profitable as a business), "organisational" values (the success of Vaal Reefs depended on the organisational efficiency of its operations) and "democratic" values (the values of an open, equal and democratic society were already beginning to exert its influence). The potential for conflict on and between the different levels was evident.

The brief from mine management to the facilitator was to communicate their strategic plan to employees and "to cascade it down the mine". The plan itself was well designed and contained all the elements needed to turn the mine around. However, it was flawed in two important respects. First, it was the result of a management's initiative without any significant participation by employees. Second, there was no indication whether a strong enough basis for implementation existed. The plan contained important explicit and implicit values, but the measure of support for these values among employees was an unknown factor.

The team of facilitators consequently requested the opportunity to "test the water" in order to get an indication of the measure of support for the values underlying the "preferred state". Management was very reluctant to allow this, for two reasons: First, knowing the diversity that existed on the mine, they were very sceptical that any degree of common ground could be found or developed. Second, they feared that other values than their own would emerge from such an investigation, which will undermine their future capacity to manage effectively.

Eventually, management was persuaded to allow the facilitators to proceed on an experimental basis. After the first series of workshops, the process was expanded and eventually covered the largest part of the mine.

From values to needs and satisfiers

The biggest challenge for the facilitating team was to devise a process that would allow employees to generate values "from the bottom up". The process had to be participatory, non-prescriptive and flexible enough to deal with the high levels of diversity in the workforce.

In this regard, basic concepts of Manfred Max-Neef, a Chilean "grass roots" economist, proved to be of special significance. In his *Human Scale Development* (1991) Max-Neef proposed an "alternative" theory of development. Although originally intended to restore the human dimension of development to its rightful place, his theory had important implications for the process we developed at Vaal Reefs.

Max-Neef's main objective was to broaden and deepen the conventional growth-centred approach to development, which restricted human needs to the desire for objects, particularly (material) goods and services. Max-Neef insisted that this view had to be expanded to include "non-material" needs such as the need for identity, participation and freedom. It also had to be deepened by penetrating to the level of fundamental needs. He identified nine fundamental needs: subsistence, understanding, creation, protection, participation, identity, affection, idleness and freedom. These needs formed an interrelated and interactive system in which there were no linear hierarchies (Van Zyl 1995:4).

Critical for our purpose was the distinction Max-Neef made between "needs" and "satisfiers". A fundamental need, such as the need for freedom, can be satisfied in a variety of ways. These "satisfiers" can be either positive or negative in their effect on quality of life. Examples of

negative satisfiers for freedom would be inhibiting satisfiers (rooted in customs and habits) such as paternalism; pseudo-satisfiers (induced through persuasion) such as indoctrination; or destructive satisfiers (imposed on people) such as authoritarianism or censorship. Positive satisfiers can be either singular (for example, the right to freedom of expression) or synergetic – satisfying more than one need at the same time (for example, participating in democratic structures and processes).

For the process that was followed at Vaal Reefs, the distinction between positive and negative satisfiers was very important. It made clear that there were a number of ways in which the same basic need could be satisfied. Whether members of the group preferred to satisfy their need for leisure (recreation) by playing soccer or rugby, was neither here nor there. These "harmless" or positive forms of diversity are not only admissible; they should in fact be encouraged. In the same vein, members of a team need not sacrifice their identities in order to complete a task successfully. Much more important was to concentrate on the destructive satisfiers, that is, where a need was satisfied at the expense of others. (Stealing the week's wages from a team member may be a very effective way to satisfy one's own need for subsistence, but it is very destructive as far as your colleague is concerned.)

The concept of needs and satisfiers was used as the framework for more than a hundred representative workshops stretching over a period of four years. The workshops were designed to take participants through specific phases. The first step was to create a climate where people were willing to share their perceptions of the country, the company and of the "other" in their direct work environment. From the perspective of diversity, this was potentially the most explosive phase. Careful facilitation was required to create a climate of openness. If done well, submerged tensions, the "hidden transcripts" and the stereotypes people had of each other were to be brought into the open. It was of crucial importance that these stereotypes were articulated and experienced in the presence of the other.

The second step was to shift the attention from present perceptions to the future. By asking about hopes and fears, it usually becomes clear that the same fears (increased violence, crime) and the same hopes (economic security, good education, stability) are shared across the lines of diversity. Some sense of communality started to emerge at this stage.

To reinforce this tendency, participants were asked in the next phase what they expected from their supervisors, colleagues and subordinates. Starting with the role of supervisors, it was not difficult to compile a long list of desiderata (fairness, empathy, decisiveness, respect, good communication, leadership). When the list of expectations for colleagues and for subordinates followed, the commonalties immediately became evident.

Critical for the success of the workshop was to translate these expectations into needs (the need for respect, safety, et cetera) and then to recognise these needs as values. In this way, the dynamic nature of values was accentuated (in the spirit of the beatitudes: "Blessed are those who *hunger and thirst* for righteousness …"). Thus a list of shared values emerged, whatever other diversities existed in the group. The result was reported back to the larger group that elected the representatives. A typical set would include values like teamwork, communication, respect, trust and honesty, fairness, education and training, responsibility, leadership, safety and health, and profitability. These became the building blocks from which a final set of values was compiled for the mine as a whole.

It is important to note that all these values and satifiers were phrased in generic terms. In the

discussion, proposals for values were often motivated on religious grounds or by an appeal to cultural customs. The need for respect for others could be reinforced by a quotation from the Sermon on the Mount, or the need for teamwork could be argued on the basis on the traditional sense of community and reprocipical responsibility. However, the formulations themselves were neither cast in theological language nor were they religion-specific.

It should also be kept in mind that these were values and satisfiers applicable to the specific work situation. The teams were not trying to solve the county's problems as a whole, but to find a workable code and a set of practices that would enable them to operate constructively and effectively in their specific context. This "peacemeal approach" made the task more achievable. Wider issues naturally impacted on their thinking and their "local" solutions no doubt had wider ramifications for society at large, but in order to get a very complicated and difficult process off the ground, this (initial) narrower focus proved to be a productive strategy.

The next phase was to find positive satisfiers for the shared values. It became clear how often stereotypes, cultural differences and misunderstanding hinder the discovery of shared values. One example: a mine manager enters his office. A mineworker sitting on a chair does not rise, does not greet the manager, and averts his eyes. For the manager – coming from a culture where the person lower in rank stands up, salutes the superior officer first and looks him straight in the eye – this is highly disrespectful behaviour. But the mineworker – coming from a culture where you must be lower than your superior, where you do not speak unless your presence is recognised and where it is highly disrespectful to look somebody directly in the eyes – is just trying to show respect. Both share the value of respect – they just satisfy the need for respect in different ways.

Another example, coming from a workshop in a large forestry company, illustrates how the concept "respect" was deepened and defined more precisely by a variety of satisfiers: 1. Trust is achieved when work is started with foremen at the beginning of the day. 2. Calling each other by name – do not use nicknames. 3. Carry out instructions. 4. Respect the superior knowledge of your supervisor, even if he or she is younger than you. 5. Respect older people in the community. 6. Learn more about the culture of others.

These are satisfiers developed by mostly illiterate forest workers and their supervisors. Number 1 refers to a problem where foremen were in the habit of coming late, while workers were penalised when they did the same. Number 2 touches on a sensitive issue – in some cultures the use of nicknames is sign of disrespect. Number 3 was obviously contributed by the supervisors. Numbers 4 and 5 were formulated after many debates. The problem was that, in traditional culture, young people should show respect for their elders. In sending young promising candidates to be trained as supervisors, who subsequently became the leaders of work teams (composed mostly of people much older than the supervisors) created a problem. The solution was a compromise: elder people were willing to accept the instructions of the young supervisor because of his or her expertise during working hours. After working hours, the young supervisors were expected to show the customary respect for their elders. Number 6 refers to the diverse cultural composition of the local community. It is important to realise that the satisfiers accepted in the end carried the support of the group as a whole, regardless of who suggested them originally.

The list of positive satisfiers forms the basis of the group's strategic plan that is not only

in line with their values, but a blueprint for their actions. At the same time, the content of values and satisfiers is not static, but can be redefined through a participatory process. One example of such an interaction was an interesting discussion on the value "profitability". It started out as "productivity", predictably proposed by management. The resistance to this formulation from the side of employees was based on the argument that production without a clear indication of what role production plays within the total operation of the company, how it affected performance and how profits were used, will only be- come a tool in the hands of management to manipulate the workforce. After an intense discussion, "productivity" was replaced by "profitability" as value. Employees accepted that the survival of the company and their own job security depended on the company staying profitable, but they wanted information on how production was used and managed in order to attain the goal of profitability. This was further enforced by the values "communication" and "trust and honesty", which again illustrated the interdependence of various values and their non-hierarchical relationship to each other.

This approach is neither a quick fix nor a magic solution for all problems. The spectre of negative satisfiers and destructive modes of behaviour always hovers in the background. But the process does offer a practical way to move forward.

Apart from being dynamic, this type of discourse is also self-regulating. One of the practical results of the values process at Vaal Reefs was the establishment of representative work place forums at the various shafts, which used the common values as basis for their planning and operations. It also became the framework to decide on future developments and for the solving of new problems. The success of the forums as examples of effective worker participation and joint decision-making was such that it had an effect on subsequent labour legislation. One of the mineworker trade unions' regional representatives who was directly involved in the values process was later elected as member for parliament for the ANC. He became a member of the drafting committee for the new Labour Relations Act, which made the formation of work place forums a legal requirement.

This process of developing shared values was subsequently applied in a wide variety of companies and organisations – noticeably in the field of agriculture and forestry, state and semi-state departments, institutions for higher education, community organisations and other institutions as part of the much wider process of social transformation.

Conclusion

For Joas, who distinguishes between values and norms (2005:1), there is a certain attractiveness associated with values – in contrast to norms, which carry an aura of restriction. The preceding discussion gave ample evidence not only of the attractiveness of values, but also of their creativity. This creativity can be destructive, but we have also seen in what ways they can play a constructive role. This is also (or, rather, especially) the case in situations of conflict, uncertainty and transition, where the "democratisation" of both the process of value generation and the participatory development of positive applications can lead to constructive outcomes.

At the same time, the case study of Vaal Reefs demonstrated that it is possible to generate a set of common social values through a participatory process despite even in a very diverse environment. Furthermore – in the same way as styles of discourse suitable for academic and

for church communication, it is also possible to develop a style suitable for a discourse on values in the context of the wider society. The requirement for such a styl is the use of language that is not exclusive nor religion-specific, but generic in formulation. This approach makes it possible to disvocer shared values despite diverse religious beliefs and cultural traditions, exaclty because it allows for these generic values to be supported from the perspective of a specific religion, value system or cultural traditon.

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KEY WORDS
Diversity
Common values
Values in the workplace
Constitutions
Freedom Charter
Max-Neef
Needs and satisfiers

TREFWOORDE
Verskeidenheid
Gemeenskaplike waardes
Waardes in die werkplek
Konstitusies
Freedom Charter
Max-Neef
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Rhetorical appeal and the uncertainty of hope

ABSTRACT

The article examines an article that Dirk Smit wrote about rhetoric and theology against the background of other of his articles, particularly about the Confession of Belhar. It argues that Smit's article is "judiciously sceptical" about rhetoric because he is committed not only to faith, but also to the uncertainty of hope. This commitment is, it is argued, compatible with rhetoric, but only with a certain type of rhetoric. Such a hopeful rhetoric, which does not accept the closure of tragedy, reaches out to others across tragic divisions as the Confession of Belhar did. The final section examines how Smit's article is itself a rhetorical act and tries to identify the particular appeal he makes on readers.

The machinery of language is so made that, either rightly or wrongly, either grandly or in fragments, we stretch forth our hands through love of the farther shore.

(Burke 1966:200, adapted in part from Virgil)

THE VIRTUE OF SCEPTICISM; THE VICE OF CYNICISM

That Dirk Smit, whose ability to survey broad landscapes of theology never ceases to amaze, also wrote about "theology as rhetoric" (Smit 1996) is not very surprising; that he did so with erudition, insight and a hint of judicious scepticism is not surprising at all. Whereas erudition and insight are recognised scholarly virtues, it is seldom recognised that a degree of scepticism is a virtue in a Christian theologian. Christian faith, in its concrete scope, is dialectically related to equally concrete doubts that it permits, encourages and demands.[1]

Faith permits Christians to doubt, in an ordinary human way, whether the latest academic trend is really a gospel worthy of belief. It encourages them to be mindful of human frailty and thus to doubt whether even their own constructs are better than makeshifts. It demands of them that they severely doubt theories of such a mechanistic and deterministic cast that they apparently leave no room for God's creative and redemptive acts.

Although he does not, to my knowledge, deal with the matter directly, Smit seems fully aware of the need for "Christian scepticism". Drawing on the old image of a rhetorical performance as a feast or "dinner party",[2] he asks at the start whether his "divergent eating habits" as a Reformed *dogmatikus* will allow him to partake of the dishes set before him (1996:3-94). At the close he again asks whether he can really be party to the party or whether he should remain outside, "eating his crackers in his cabin" (1996:4-22). Question marks are found in his title, in his penultimate sentence, in all but one of the section headings and frequently in the

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1 This was frequently stressed by Chesterton and noted in passing by Burke (1935:107).
2 The image is at least as old as Plato (1931b:325; 1931a:431) and was a commonplace at least until the Renaissance (Jeanneret 1991:91ff.),

rest of this article (indeed in many of his articles). The point is well taken: Who sets the menu and decides who eats whom? "Theology as rhetoric" might mean that the one digests and transforms the other. Smit is legitimately concerned lest Reformed theology be sacrificed to furnish the festive meal.

Scepsis is not cynicism. Sceptical questions await answers; cynical ones, by assuming that all answers are equally inadequate, conclude conversations in the style of Pilate. Smit (1996:421) rightly warns that a form of rhetorical criticism may become "a powerful cynical tool in a new cynical discourse", an unmasking without an apocalypse.[3] Smit's reasons for rejecting cynicism are theological. He devotes several pages (1996:395ff.) to explaining why he cannot give up commitment and persuasion, why he cannot adopt the position of the neutral analyst. In this regard he mentions the Belhar Confession of which he was a coauthor (1996:396). Christian scepticism loses its warrant when it excludes the possibility of a confessional stance issuing in a substantive confession, one that has substance. While such a confession is rhetorical in that it speaks from commitment (being persuaded!) towards persuasion, it can have no truck with postmodern "rhetoricality" (cf. Bender and Wellbury 1990:25ff.) as a condition of permanent flux, which denies, as its first article of faith, any notion of substance.[4]

To answer Smit's questions about rhetoric systematically would require a book studded with further questions. Rhetoric, just like theology, can be defined in countless ways.[5] Instead of this, I shall approach some of the questions obliquely, drawing on, among others, some of Smit's other articles, particularly about the text and context of the Belhar Confession, and on Kenneth Burke, my mentor in these matters. In the final section I return to the article in question and make a stab at finding Smit's own rhetorical strategy.

ENCOMPASSING TRAGEDY: INVIGORATING HOPE

Cheryl Exum (1992:15) quotes with approval Sewald's view that the tragic vision is "not for those who cannot live with unsolved questions or unresolved doubts". This may hold for observers; virtually the opposite is true of protagonists. Much tragedy ensues from our failure to attain our purposes, yet we are virtually always able to ensure tragic endings. Unable to unravel the tangle of our lives, we bring matters to a close through literal or figurative suicide or homicide, thus determining our destiny by a process of termination. Closure comes, as it were, naturally in literary tragedies: they conclude because virtually all the main characters

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3 A hermeneutics of suspicion can be virtuously sceptical or viciously cynical. Burke frequently warns against the cynical variant, which he calls debunking (1952:97, 407; 1955a:36, 66f., 74, 93, 165, 256, 338): it approaches positivism, it is either antisocial or limited to the group, it is dangerous to the character of the debunker.

4 In this vein Vorster (1999:287f.) objects to the "objectivism and foundationalism" (he conflates the two) that he still detects in biblical rhetorical critics with their focus on the ancient text. They might insist that one should first know "as well as possible" the language to read "the original text", the literary codes (genres) and rhetorical practices of that time and society, and the whole corpus (of the Bible). Then one has to get to know the history of the language and the society, and the theological and rhetorical traditions, in brief, the historical context. Finally, one has to assess "probabilistically" what the author meant to say and how the author was heard. All this comes from that notorious foundationalist Derrida (1988:144), telling us how we should begin to read Rousseau (I put "theological" for "philosophical").

5 One possibility that I reject is simply to rejoice in the proliferation of discourses about rhetoric. I am not convinced that Wuellner (1989) avoids this and find his account diffuse. Nor do I find a slavish copying of the classical terminology helpful.

are dead.

A dual reading of the tragic eventuality is usually possible. The grammar of tragedy speaks of inevitability, of vast internal or external forces foreclosing on the plans and ideals of the human actors. The sheer imbalance – the human against the cosmic (cf. Burke 1955a:42; Exum 1992:11) – lends grandeur to tragic heroes, who, by the grammar of tragedy, lose only because victory was humanly impossible. Precisely this frequently permits a rhetoric of tragedy in which the emphasis falls on supreme and defiant human action. Thus those who feel, rightly or wrongly, that they are bereft of other significant power may affirm their "agency" and the importance of their lives by manufacturing tragedy. "I am the captain of my soul" – and I prove it by steering the ship on the rocks. Shooting people at random in a public place is arguably the easiest and surest way to make it to the headlines. Simultaneously the assumption is invited that such extreme measures imply an extreme motivation: the tragic occludes the trivial. By shuttling between these two readings, one can encompass (embrace) tragedy6 and aver that one is encompassed by it, thus reaping the benefits of tragic "magnification" (Burke 1955a:43) and victimhood simultaneously.

Hope too allows for a double reading. Uncertainty belongs to its grammar,[7] but in Christian rhetoric hope, being linked to faith, is an expression of a firm conviction. Grammatically, what one hopes for lies beyond one's absolute control: something or someone else can frustrate or realise one's hopes. In this sense, hope implies the openness of the future.[8] If, however, one affirms that the future is in God's hands, hope is firmly anchored in God's חסד, unpredictable in form, but unchanging in substance. Here too a double benefit accrues. No present "certainty", however grim, can trump the uncertainty of hope, yet, since the unknown future belongs to God, not fate, hope offers remarkable security. When I "hope that", uncertainty prevails; when I "place my hope in" someone trustworthy, I am secured by the other. Hope, which invigorates us in the face of adversity, is itself invigorated by trust. Whereas tragedy isolates (cf. Exum 1992:11), Christian hope lives from and towards community.

The Belhar Confession could have been a statement of heroic resignation in the tragic mode, a dramatic act of symbolic homicide directed at the apparently all powerful enemy, although it would then not have been a confession of Christian faith. When Synod decided that the Accompanying Letter should always be published with the Confession, it removed possible doubts in this regard, as Smit (2007c:157) recognises. The Accompanying Letter reaches forward, confronting the apparent certainties of the present with the openness of God's future. Equally clearly, the letter, by reaching out to the "enemy",[9] refuses to accept division as a predetermined cosmic reality (an order of creation). Finding itself in a de facto order of division and ordered to accept this "reality", URCSA appealed – to a higher Judge and its human critics. If the Confession in itself was faithful rhetoric, the appending of the letter made it eminently hopeful rhetoric, a rejection of tragic closure.

6 I agree with those who believe that Judaism and Christianity exclude a tragic view of the world. Cf. Lawrie (2011, particularly n7) to which may be added the view of Jaspers (quoted in Glicksberg 1963:36ff.).

7 Wittgenstein (1968:129) says something like this about wishing and expecting; it clearly applies to hoping as well.

8 Thus hope does not eliminate suffering. Cilliers (2007:394ff.) rightly regards lament as part of the language of hope.

9 Thus Smit (2007c:163, 165) says that the letter is "almost like an outstretched hand"; it speaks "pleadingly".

Appealing rhetoric; rhetorical appeal

Smit (1996:398ff.) says that, precisely as a Christian theologian, he would want to speak persuasively; he also knows that power enters into rhetorical transactions (1996:396f.). Ideally, perhaps, rhetoric persuades an audience, yet audiences may be swayed, if not fully persuaded, by many factors. Both a gun held to one's head and the offer of a bribe are powerfully "persuasive"; so are their rhetorical equivalents. Thus rhetoric can be most appealing precisely when it is least rhetorical, least dependent on verbal performance. But there is a curious dialectic of strength and weakness in the rhetoric of power. When I flaunt my power rhetorically to attain my ends, I acknowledge my weakness – I cannot attain my ends and secure my power without the cooperation of others. Often simply exercising my power would defeat my ends and end my power. Conversely, when I play on the weakness of another, I have to assume that the particular weakness, say greed, is strong enough for my purpose.[10] Rhetoric, even at its most corrupt, depends on cooperation and embodies an appeal.

What one must ultimately make of "theology as rhetoric" is anybody's guess, for, as Burke (1952:503f) pointed out, "X as Y" is the formula of metaphor and metaphor embodies one perspective without excluding others. In some ways theology can usefully be seen as rhetoric; in other ways not.[11] Is it ever useful to see rhetoric as theology? Kenneth Burke sometimes comes close to saying this, without, I believe, simply replacing "God" with "language" as some postmodern theorists tend to do.

When Burke (1970:1) notes the close relationship between "theology" as "words about God" and "logology" (his coinage) as "words about words" and later draws seven analogies between "words" and "the Word" (1970:7-34), it seems as if theology is reduced to logology. But still later he adds that "logology fails to offer grounds for the perfection of promises and threats that theology allows for" (1970:300). Moreover, language as symbolic action (not mere motion) always contains a creative moment that cannot be encompassed in a science of cause and effect.[12] In as much as language is meaningful, it is imbued with purpose, for meaning is an attenuation of purpose (1952:290f.). As creative, purposeful act, language always involves a form of transcendence, a reaching out (as in the quotation at the top of the article). Although the reaching out can be misguided and trivial and the transcendence "downwards", language always and by its nature aims beyond itself (cf. 1952:420ff.): this is one reason why Burke retains a notion of God (1955b:178f., 290f.). Also, since human language is rooted in the "hortatory no", language "ethicises" and introduces hierarchy (1966:9-16, 359-378, 419-436). Finally, rhetoric – the use of language "to induce cooperation" (1955b:43) – both assumes and creates community: its aim is identification in which people become consubstantial with one another (1955b:19ff. and passim).

This is a sketchy account, but adding a little more would not help much, for Burke is nothing if not convoluted. He has, however, persuaded me that when one views language as symbolic action, questions appear that are entirely overlooked in both structuralism and post-structuralism. These questions can only be dealt with in theology or in metaphysics, which Burke regards as coy theology (1970:300). Burke himself remained coy, arguably because

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10 This is the point that Socrates successfully establishes against Callicles (Plato 1931a:369ff.).

11 The metaphor is a useful reminder that theology does not describe a state of affairs "out there" or inside the believer, but is always an appeal, a reaching out.

12 Burke often harks back to the distinction between action and motion (1952:59ff.; 1966:53, 63; 1978:32f.).

he could not muster the hope (rather than faith or love) for which his insights made ample allowance.

Constructing audiences; constructed audiences

As Smit (1996:419) notes, the construction of the audience is a live issue in current rhetorical debates. Perelman set the ball rolling when he pointed out that "the rhetorical audience" is always a construction of the rhetorician. Arguments and appeals that are not ad hominem beg the question (cf. Perelman 1982:21ff.). The subtext here is frequently overlooked. The rhetorical audience is, to be sure, a symbolic construction, yet if the construction is not a reasonably accurate reflection of the real audience, the rhetorical act will fail. Thus, one has to be a good listener in order to be a good speaker or writer. Others shifted the emphasis to how audiences are constructed (called into being, interpellated) by the dominant rhetoric. "Audience construction" gained a sinister ring, because powerful rhetoric and the rhetoric of power could amount to an imposition. We convince others by making them convicts, incarcerated in discourses that deter mine what should count as "meaning".

At roughly the same time, it became fashionable to say that audiences construct the meaning of texts, which have no authority to impose any particular meaning. It is sometimes added that these constructing audiences were themselves constructed by interpretive communities. This leads to the final permutation, in which audiences, texts and everything else are constructions, reconstructed and deconstructed in an ineluctable, opaque process. Indeed, it is hard to say what constructs what, for subjects and objects disappear in the all that may be called, apparently without significant difference, rhetoric, text, context, writing, discourse, ideology or interpretation. The subtle juggle the balls expertly; the epigones, when they are not trivially incoherent, often suggest, with an unconvincing nod at Nietzsche's *amor fati,* that one simply has to keep abreast of the times – whatever is, is good.[13] This provides fertile soil for cynicism to flourish, though few would admit to being cynics.

Versions of the last three views remain common, often in bewildering combinations. Thus it is sometimes said that in theory audiences do "make meaning", free from the dead hand of the text, and that in practice audiences are putty in the hands of ideology, therefore we should take responsibility for our rhetoric, thereby willingly binding ourselves to … what? The first view has all but disappeared, yet it seems to be the only truly hopeful one. It recognises the appeal of rhetoric and the dialectic of strength and weakness implied by it. It makes no claims to certainty, but it locates the uncertainty in the everyday play of human interaction rather than the distant play of signifiers. Thus it is also the only view that features what we normally call "human society", the society in which we grope somewhat blindly for one another – to strangle and rob and also to embrace and caress.[14] It acknowledges that we often construct others and are constructed by them in constricting ways, but adds that construction can sometimes also imply edification. It is such an all too human rhetoric that I advocate, also for theologians (cf. also Smit 2007b:151).

Yet rhetoric as humanistic discourse (cf. Hunt 1984:13ff.) cannot be the last word for theologians

13 Thus I am not surprised to find Vorster saying: "these turns insist that …" (1999: 294) and "language acts …" (1999:308).

14 I have previously argued that gainsaying, going up against someone, may end in consensus, in each saying again what the other had said (Lawrie 2001:414). The transition between fighting and friendship is dramatised effectively in the combat between Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

(cf. Smit 2007b:153). The other views have something to say about human bondage (view 2), about creativity and responsibility (view 3) and about the beyond of our acts (view 4). I suggest that theology, in speaking openly about sin, ethics and God, may deal with these aspects more clearly and directly than any rhetorical theory can.[15] In Burke's terms, Christian theology has a more rounded terminology, one which includes rhetoric without simply passing into it. Rhetoric has been used to dominate; so have ethics and theology (cf. Smit 2007a), for sin always gets its word in. Nevertheless, God is the Word and God's is the first and last word. This is our "uncertain" security, which allows and bids us to reach out in appeal, mustering what creativity and responsibility we have, neither arrogantly nor unduly abashed.

GUESS WHO'S BEING SERVED FOR DINNER

Smit (1996:422, citing Alves) ends his article by referring to Ghandi, who "ate crackers in his cabin" because he feared being marginalised at a table where different rules prevailed. Some Indians might have done the same for a different reason: a Brahmin might refuse to dine with people from outside his caste for fear of contamination. Although Ghandi personally shared a table with all sorts of people, he wrote that he did not consider refusal to eat with someone from another group a sin (Shirer 1982:118). So, two very different attitudes can lie behind the hesitation to join the rhetorical feast; that of the marginalised outsider or that of the aloof Brahmin.

Smit is committed to Christian witness and also wants (sometimes) to speak in the Name of God. Whence then his hesitation? Can public theology as witness, confession and proclamation (kerugma) shun the forum, given that all these words are forensic in the broader or narrower sense? I suggest that the hesitation is itself rhetorical, Smit's way of entering the forum discreetly. For long some churches and theologians in South Africa specialised in authoritative, dogmatic pronouncements, often in the service of political power brokers. These pronouncements, quite apart from their gross insensitivity to marginalised outsiders, presented a closed case, leaving no room for the uncertainty of hope and God's future. The rhetoric spoke of a status quo of enclosed spaces, group areas, in which the purity of the Brahmin was ensured at a tragic cost for others. Yet, none knows better than Smit that the marginalised did take a stand, opposing to the status quo a *status confessionis* and saying authoritatively: "Jesus is Lord." When early Christians said this in the forum, their witness could make them martyrs, for some saw it as a confession of guilt. Some were served for dinner – to the lions – because they chose to serve their Lord rather than the emperor.

Perhaps, as Smit (2008:178f.) suggests regarding Barth, Christians are postmodern in that they reject the subject-object split. Though the danger of subjecting and objectifying others is real, I remain sceptical: the distinction between subject and object is entrenched in language. In another respect Christians cannot but be outsiders at the postmodern feast. Sooner or later, Christians have to take a stand and speak the dreaded words *arche* (of origin and authority), *telos* and Substance (for God, though more than the Substance of philosophers, is not less). They do so as humans among others in the milling forum, from within the flux of human language. If they refuse to resign themselves to the inevitability of flux, it is not because they have an Archimedean point beneath their feet, but because they are stretching forth their

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15 In particular, theology does not have to make abstractions (power, ideology, discourse, et cetera), perform all sorts of unlikely actions. Wartenberg (1990:138f.) rightly sees this as a "fundamental flaw", a streak of mysticism, in Foucault.

necks (cf. Rom. 8:23) in hope towards the One who called and promised. For this they may have their necks stretched or cut through.

We probably still have no better guide to Christian rhetoric in this situation than the one provided by Paul in 2 Corinthians 36 and few better recent examples than the Belhar Confession (read with the Accompanying Letter). But did the latter persuade? To this day, the hands stretched forth in love have not been grasped by those to whom the appeal was primarily made. Even within URCSA the Confession often functions as a treasured possession, a relic to muster the community of faith, a paradigmatic grammatical exercise in the language of the group. Sadly, few necks from either side are stuck out today. Should we wistfully accept that "after Babel" our languages are inevitably and tragically confused and that eating our crackers in our cabins is the best we can do, thereby returning very precisely to what the Dutch Reformed Church had said years ago?

Smit's hesitation, his virtuous scepticism, requires careful reading: he voices his doubts about entering a certain forum at that very forum. Smit the *dogmatikus* is also Smit the practical, wily rhetorician. First, Smit 1 stands squarely before us, vulnerable, somewhat nervous, even slightly naive. Next we are confronted by a series of tricky questions emanating from Smit 2, whose own position is not apparent. We have to fight it out with the spirits we have called (Wuellner, Schüssler Fiorenza, Foucault, and others) and that are now creating pandemonium in our ranks, those we thought we had swallowed and are now swallowing us. Rhetorical theorists, eager to include in the realm of rhetoric all disciplines, theology included, have not even arrived at consensus as to what rhetoric is and does! What concern is this of a *dogmatikus?*

It took me several readings to locate Smit 3 in the margins of the text, in the questions behind the questions, in the order of the presentation. He stands where he has always stood, humbly confident and never far from the Reformed tradition expressed so clearly in the Belhar Confession. Since the relative invisibility of Smit 3 in the article implies no theological shift, I take it to be a rhetorical move. He could, in the style of the Confession, have taken his stand both positively and in opposition to those rhetorical views that he would have to reject. He could have concluded with an explicitly appealing "accompanying letter". Instead (as Smit 2), he directs his questions from all angles, leaving his audience to do the triangulation. Those who finally find him beyond the questions will meet someone very like Smit 1, but much less easy to dismiss casually. In this powerful statement lurks a powerful appeal – the appeal of the elusive, which reaches out by enticing others to reach out. Should those who fret about the rhetorical abuse of power complain that this is too subtle, are they not admitting that they respond only to forceful rhetoric?

Clearly much depends on who is being served for dinner. That rhetoric always explicitly or implicitly stands in the service of someone or something is a correct insight, not a new or profound one. A theory or method that told us unfailingly who is served by what rhetorical act would be profound – or perhaps merely positivistic. I'd say "rhetorical criticism is itself a rhetorical act"[16] and leave it at that. But I also recognise that in rhetorical acts people can get

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16 This amounts to the "rhetorical full turn" that Schüssler Fiorenza (1996:36) calls for, but it includes the warning that the "posture of scientific certainty" (1996:52) can invade ideological criticism and the hermeneutics of suspicion as well. The subsequent debate (Combrink 1999:29, Robbins 2002, Schüssler Fiorenza 2005, for instance) was sad rather than edifying. Without singling out persons, I append these remarks: Rhetoric invariably has an oppositional or adversarial aspect, but responsible rhetoric does not present a closed case: it appeals to the uncertainty of hope. The former is seen in the Belhar Confession,

eaten alive. Among peers this seldom matters much: those who take a bite out of you often incorporate something of your view and become to an extent consubstantial with you. What, though, of those who cannot, as academics obviously can, bite back? Should (and can) we save them from the voracious by incorporating them ourselves and then (re)presenting them, suitably digested, as items on the menu at our symposia?

It seems to me that the Bible (not rhetoric or hermeneutics) tells me that I should go as a lamb (not a plenipotentiary) among the wolves, as prey among predators. I seldom manage to serve God by serving myself up in this way. Dirk Smit has reminded me that Jesus provided the lambs with advice about protecting themselves: they should be innocent as the *dogmatici* and wily as the rhetoricians! Above all – this is built into the entire structure of the Bible – they should go in the uncertainty and security of hope – after Pentecost – reaching out in love because God's love reached them first.

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the latter in the Accompanying Letter. Moreover, since "ethical interpretation" also involves responsibility towards one's interlocutors (dead ones included), a certain "scientific" concern with accuracy cannot be eliminated. Finally, ethical discourse has to ask about its own "ulterior motives" lest it become an imposition (cf. Smit 2007b).

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KEY WORDS
Rhetoric
Hope
Tragedy
Appeal

TREFWOORDE
Retoriek
Hoop
Tragedie
Appél
Belhar

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Theology for the twenty-first century – Going beyond Barth?

ABSTRACT

Dirkie Smit is honoured in this contribution as a theologian who has persistently and ingeniously held together two poles in Reformed theology: Karl Barth's emphasis on Christology: God's salvation and free grace as incarnated in Christ, and Van Ruler's emphasis on pneumatology: the appropriation, application and working out of God's grace in humanity, nature and history, through the indwelling power of God's Spirit. The article, based on cryptic notes in which Van Ruler offered "Critical comments on Barth's theology" (1965), provides an English translation of this unique text with explanatory footnotes. It is suggested that Van Ruler's sixteen pertinent questions to Barth, almost fifty years ago, once again deserve our careful attention and that our task remains to keep in balance the work of the Creator, the Saviour and the Spirit, which persists in working on the pneumatological question of how we as human beings are incorporated into God's ongoing, sanctifying work in nature and history.

BACKGROUND TO THE QUESTION

The voice of special friend and colleague, and one of South Africa's leading theologians, Dirk J. Smit, rings out near and far via an enormous range of publications – inspiring ordinary Christians, challenging aspiring theologians, faithfully serving his own church and its structures as well as the Reformed tradition and ecumenical agendas, and constantly addressing issues of general concern prophetically and pastorally in church and public media. What stands out – even stronger than the sheer brilliance of his tireless stream of contributions on all fronts – is the characteristically articulate and humble way in which he operates, avoiding controversy and seeking ways and means around unnecessary confrontation and pettiness.

In the late seventies, during my first years of teaching biblical studies at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Dirkie finished his postgraduate theological studies and became minister in one of the Stellenbosch Dutch Reformed congregations – at least one church where one could hear the gospel ring out clearly during those desperate times when some of us left the "Mother church" to strengthen the anti-apartheid movement in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. Soon Dirkie became a colleague at UWC. Here he and Jaap Durand famously brought together in the Belhar Confession the theology of unity, reconciliation and justice which they developed with their students while teaching theology at this "university of the struggle".[1]

In 1984, when I moved to Namibia to chair the Department of Biblical Studies at the newly formed Academy for Tertiary Education, a research programme with the aim of developing a Department of Religion and Theology was soon started – with Dirkie Smit as our chief

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1 Allan Boesak's involvement in the Belhar process, while he served as Chaplain at UWC, resulted in his election as President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the declaration of a *status confessionis* against the heresy of theological support for apartheid.

researcher and resource person. When we finally submitted our extensive research report, backed up by prominent church leaders and other stakeholders, the Department of Religion and Theology was one of the few departments at the newly formed University of Namibia (1993), whose existence was so thoroughly debated and motivated.[2] It has been a joy to move back to South Africa after almost twenty years of Namibian indulgence and once again find myself in the theological circles where Dirkie Smit operates – hopefully contributing towards a theology in service of church and society.[3]

In writing a short theological essay to honour and thank my friend and theological comrade it is not easy to think of a specific "point" that one could make to catch his attention – or to challenge his considerable intellectual capacities. His theological mind is so alert, his reading and thinking has always been so diversified and adaptable, so ingeniously weaving together seemingly opposing perspectives from different ages, backgrounds and paradigms, that it is difficult to find serious points of contention. We share much in terms of our own formation, our own struggles with our apartheid backgrounds, our love of the Reformed tradition in spite of its many pitfalls, our affirmation of the theological line that runs from Calvin through Barth and Bonhoeffer and further, with inclusion of strong notions of contextuality, Christian praxis, and "embodied confession" in real and ordinary daily life. I particularly appreciate Smit's consistent combination of pious, evangelical groundedness in the mystery, the gift, the surprise of God's abundant grace (Kierkegaard, Luther, Barth) and the contextual embodiment of that faith of the church through the ages, in new contexts (Calvin and the Dutch Reformed passion for sanctification of all areas of life, as represented, for example, by Bavinck and Van Ruler). Through this combination Smit strikes deep theological cords.

Nevertheless, in spite of this close affinity, but also because of it, in this contribution I wish to ask one simple question to all of us who share this vibrant, albeit contested, Reformed background. It is a question I have picked up from my struggles with the very original Dutch Calvinist theologian Arnold Albert van Ruler (1908-1970): Does the theological approach of Karl Barth, the theological giant of the twentieth century, still suffice for the challenges of the twenty-first century?[4] This is, of course, an enormous question to ask and one which cannot find a meaningful answer in this restricted format. It is almost equivalent to asking whether one can jump over one's own shadow!

It is evident though that Van Ruler himself could not rid himself of this question. In his own words, he saw himself in his early years, in relation to Barth, as the little dog on the famous gramophone label, simply sitting there listening to "His Master's Voice" (Puchinger 1969:356; cf. also Van Keulen 2009:94-111). When Barth died in 1968, Van Ruler movingly wrote in memoriam columns in church magazines and in the secular press (following up on similarly positive congratulatory pieces he had written two years earlier when Barth turned 80), asking "this master" only a few mildly critical questions (Van Ruler 1966a; 1968a). However, when

2 In fact, this was one of the first departments called by that name in Southern Africa as well as the first to include the teaching of ethics.
3 Much of this fruitful collaboration now takes place under the auspices of the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch – a wonderful historical irony!
4 This question was also asked by Jürgen Moltmann (1998:15): "After Karl Barth's monumental Dogmatics, I thought, there could be no more theology (just as there could be no more philosophy after Hegel), because he had said it all and said it so well. Then in 1957 I got to know the Dutch theologian Arnold van Ruler. He cured me from the misapprehension. I discovered the Reformed kingdom of God theology and the Dutch apostolate theology."

one studies Van Ruler's own theological development carefully, it becomes more and more apparent that his whole oeuvre can be understood as an attempt to answer this question about an adequate and relevant theology for the "twenty-first century", one that goes beyond Barth's "Christological concentration" and one which can adequately address the issues of nature, history, ecology and the socio-political realm.[5]

During my studies in Utrecht, in Van Ruler's study (kept in perfect order by Mrs Van Ruler for more than a decade after her husband's death), I "discovered" a handwritten note. It bore the unassuming title: "What I have against Barth", also in typed format: "Critical comments on Barth's theology" – the text of a lecture presented to a few small audiences in the mid-sixties (Van Ruler 1965).

Instead of tracing all the open and hidden battles with Barth in Van Ruler's oeuvre,[6] I shall translate that telegram-style text here, adding a few selected comments in the footnotes.[7] In this straightforward way Van Ruler's tentative questions are again posed as a challenge to us, modern-day followers or critics of Barth's theology. If I am not mistaken, Dirk Smit's theology shows signs of grappling with several of these critical points with regard to Barth's massive theological construct, in spite of his overwhelming enthusiasm for Barth's firm "No!" to natural and liberal theology, and "Yes!" to evangelical affirmation of God's grace for the whole world in and through Christ.[8]

Van Ruler's text: "what i have against Barth"

In what follows, I simply give my English version of the cryptic notes from which Van Ruler formulated, "hesitantly and provisionally" (see Van Keulen 2009:104), his critique against Barth in this unpublished lecture. One cannot help but think that, being sharp, imaginative pointers that could be pursued in different directions, these enigmatic notes are comparable to Bonhoeffer's prison letters. Only a few of these directions can be suggested here. It must be left to the reader to ponder the possible (and considerable!) implications of the sixteen "points",[9] here arranged under five self-chosen headings to order the presentation to some extent:

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5 See Van Ruler in Puchinger 1969:366: "In our time people can only laugh at the idea of theocracy, but I am convinced that it will be discovered again, in the twenty-first century, that is the punch line of the joke". He links this comment to the way of thinking that deals with reality as an ellipse with contrasting poles, such as church and state, word and reality; cf. Aalders 1973:9-27. Van Ruler's concern about Barth's monism (only Christ is "real") but also about Anabaptist impatience (only the "new creation" of the future is real) and Catholic or Neo-Calvinist dualism ("nature" must be supplemented by "super-nature"), is spelled out vividly in 1989:105-148, especially 128-132.

6 For this cf. Lombard 1996:189-206; on Van Ruler and Calvin, cf. Lombard 2009:23-36.

7 Due to space limitations, very little scope for additional comments on Van Ruler's text is left; I limit myself to one footnote per caption and concentrate on key references. In the text Van Ruler mostly gives his own perspective directly, but in some cases it is clear from the context that he first describes Barth's position before commenting on it.

8 For Smit's own wrestling with such issues of e.g. "nature, history, ecology and the socio-political realm", see part four, dealing with "Contemporary challenges", of his Essays on being Reformed (2009:395 ff.). My purpose in this exercise is not to try and answer Van Ruler's question on Smit's behalf, but to openly pose the question to all followers of Barth - via this sketchy and surprising lecture of Van Ruler from almost 50 years ago.

9 See Van Ruler's comments (1966b:175) on Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison: should they actually have been published; were they ready for publication?

I. Barth's monistic ontology and epistemology

i) The strict methodology of Barth:

He [Barth] really seeks only one methodological starting point from which he wishes to direct all attention on theology's "own job" in complete, concrete and consistent concentration on its "object". He thus tries to do what systematic theology, by its nature closely resembling art rather than science, could never quite tolerate historically. This strict methodological emphasis also leads to enormous speculation by Barth, who strangely, with his followers, rejects this kind of speculation. This gives Barth something extremely exact, positivistic and absolutistic, especially when one sees theology as a function of the church. Dogmatics and preaching are simply bound together too closely in such an approach.[10]

ii) Barth's *principium theologiae* is Christ only:

This is problematic because the first to say that were the Gnostics! Better would be: Scripture + tradition + reason + history of religion + history of philosophy. In Barth's theology God and Christ are mixed up in each other. The Old Testament is interpreted entirely in a Christ centric [sic] way. Each periscope is approached via the question: How can one speak about this in such a way that one preaches Christ? No![11]

iii) A hyper-realistic theory of knowledge:

According to Barth, our knowledge of the object is given to us completely by the object itself. The object contains and is its knowledge. Barth knows only a *theologia unionis*. Everything we

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10 Van Ruler agrees with Bonhoeffer's accusation of Barth's *Offenbarungspositivismus*: that he approaches the one "object" of theology, God, via a positivist construct (in an attempt to make theology appear scientifically focussed on an "object"), which leads to a speculative over-application of the one hermeneutical key, God's revelation in Christ. The result of this is that those who think that theology has a wider task than informing the church's preaching of the significance of Christ and thus also needs philosophical speculation to apply the work of the Trinity, may stand in awe but without access to Barth's own impregnable, speculative "castle" (Van Ruler 1970:159). Van Ruler also firmly believes in speculative, "scholastic" reason (cf. Van Ruler 1947a:402; 1968b:66-67; 1970:165-169; Puchinger 1969:357) but he posits three hermeneutical "keys" (cf. Van Ruler 1969a:45-46; 1969b:79; 1969c:213) for what appears to be a "combination lock": eschatology ("the end" or outcome, not merely the "means"), Trinity ("the full God" involved in means and ends!), and predestination ("consenting humans" as God's partners). The task of theology is to understand God's involvement in history (not merely "God" as "object") within a "philosophy of revelation" (Bavinck) that combines God, creation, humanity and history (cf. Van Ruler 1989:92-98). Thus Van Ruler seriously questions Barth's ontological and epistemological monism. For Van Ruler's broad definition of the task of theology cf. Lombard 1996:148-63; especially Van Ruler 1969b:200-13; also 1968b.

11 Van Ruler's monograph The Christian Church and the Old Testament (1971) was written (originally in German) as a direct counter to Barth ("No!") and the typological exegesis of the *Biblischer Kommentar* series of Von Rad, Kraus, Wolff and others. In saying "Christ alone is the key to understanding God's revelation", one easily leaves behind the whole Judaic tradition fulfilled by Christ: the tradition of Israel's calling, the Torah, the prophets, and the expectation of God's rule in the world (and the tools needed to think and talk about it: reason, religious history and philosophy) – and Christianity becomes "Gnostic", not based on real creation and the known history of humankind, but on a totally "new reality" of the future. In this Barth and the Anabaptists seem to reach the same result! See Van Ruler on the Gnostics and Christ as principium of theology (1967:103): instead of choosing Christ or some "content" in Scripture, Van Ruler would choose Scripture plus the whole tradition of integrating the Bible and our understanding of history and the world in a "philosophy of history or revelation (Bavinck)"! (1989:22; 1978:19-20).

say is only true through "predicative participation" (Van Niftrik). This is, on the one hand, too much ("participation") and, on the other hand, too little ("predicative"). Is nothing of what we say true in and by itself?[12]

II. Barth's view of creation, nature, and contingency

i) Total rejection of natural theology:

Is it "abstract" when I look at the world or at myself? Is one only concrete when one looks at Christ as *concretissimum* of God? A total rejection of natural theology is problematic especially for the process of Christianisation.[13] Even as a natural person one knows quite a bit about creation. One does not need to be born again to know that 2 x 2 = 4. In creation there is no *salus* (salvation) because in and by itself it is not "lost". That does not mean that, therefore, creation is *a-theos* and consequently it is blasphemy to suggest that God is not served by creation. Therefore, also the scheme of nature and supra-nature does not work.

ii) Creation as prefiguration of incarnation:

With creation God intended something different than with Christ. That I exist is something different than that I am saved. (We celebrate our birthday and not our baptism; I have not been born in the church). To ontological questions we should not give soteriological answers (contra Barth). With creation God expresses something other than mere love over the creature's being there, namely joy. In Barth's theology we find pure supralapsarism. That is the heart of the matter, not Berkouwer's notion of the ontological impossibility of sin.[14]

iii) Contingency as a state of being threatened:

12 Van Ruler placed great emphasis on a realistic ontology and epistemology – one that allows ample space for human "being" and "agency", and genuine human involvement in reality: we have our own being (we do not participate in God's being) and we have our own knowledge (we are not only "predicated" by God, by kerygma – the preached message). Cf. Van Ruler 1989:92-93.

13 In this regard my colleague, Ernst Conradie, working on science-religion dialogue and ecological issues, has pointed out that all theology is in fact a form of "natural theology", and that the conversation with science on "nature" is only possible when creation is not only understood as *creatio* (God's deed) but also as *creatura* (the outcome of God's deed, for example, "planet earth"). For Conradie's engagement with the "Kuyperian" Reformed perspectives, searching for answers beyond and behind Barth, see Conradie 2011.These insights have been put forward by Van Ruler as early as 1956 (in 1989:19): "If one rejects this Gnostic solution of soteriologising the entire world, and its consequence, namely, the irreconcilable conflict between the church and the world, then it must simply be accepted that the realities mentioned above thrust upon us theological questions which cannot be resolved in a theology that is worked out from a radically Christological viewpoint. It is not possible for the church to do without a small flicker of natural theology, be it only that of the natural laws governing the essence of earthly realities. On the other hand, it seems to be excessive poverty to be limited only to a little bit of natural theology. It is only in a fully developed trinitarian framework that one is able to determine theologically the meaning of reason, history, the state, art, and what it is to be human."

14 This point deals with Barth's supralapsarism: the idea that creation is merely the "stage" for God's acts of salvation; that God's saving act in Christ was already foreseen and "planned" before (supra) the fall (lapsus). See Van Ruler 1969b:210-211 where he argues that this idea ends in "Christosophism". He protests that it makes a joke of God's decision to create the world and humanity as "good" and taking pleasure in it. The pinnacle of his theological "speculation" centres in the idea of God's pleasure, joy in creation; in having a partner and having a world. He even corrects the Apostle Paul: yes, faith, love and hope, these three, but the greatest of these is joy! (cf. Th.W. V (1972), 16-18, 27-31).

There is a problem with Barth's view of being as a necessary and unavoidable but simultaneously also as a problematic given or fact. Israel, however, is not necessary, its being there is, nevertheless, good. In this way *conservatio* is no *creatio continua* but *creatio continuata*. Here we witness a piece of worldliness of systematic theology. Through the notion of contingency as "threat of being" creation receives a dose of salvation. *Das Nichtige* is in fact threatening, but for Barth, humanity's attempt to deal with this threat (through the human faculty of will) pours down to the reality of sin. Contingency as threat to being is equivalent to stepping out of Christianity.[15]

III. Barth's Christological concentration and lack of pneumatology

i) Absolutising Christ:

There is not only a contraction and confusion of everything in Christ (with the result of history in Barth's theology becoming Christosophy), but especially also a contraction of God in Christ. God chooses and posits and constitutes God self as the God of humans in Christ. Comment: when one tries to be too biblical in systematic theology, it will result in misfits (*gedrochtelijkheden*). *Salus* (salvation) is something quite different from ontological estrangement between God's being and human existence. *Salus* relates more to guilt, death, perdition and all other secondary issues. It is of prime importance to speak of Christ-in-the-flesh in a mediatory way only.[16]

ii) The Holy Spirit is limited purely to Christology:

According to Barth, the Holy Spirit is equivalent to the power of the risen Lord: pneumatology needs a corset. However, the eschatological reach of pneumatology is much more important (than allowed for by Barth's restricted view). The Holy Spirit is the organ of or sense for the *eschaton*. Christ brought us the Spirit and is there for the sake of the Spirit. The kingdom is not God self (Ruusbroec), but the kingdom is us "before God's countenance". The Spirit is also God the Spirit "himself". Thus God dwells with us. We are a dwelling place of God in the Spirit, in a more real sense than Christ is the dwelling of God on earth.[17]

iii) Faith is not seen as a second wonder of grace by Barth:

For Barth, humanity must be dethroned. There is only one *Selbst* (one self, acting person) and that is God. In Barth's theology there is only *applicatio salutis objectiva* (application in the object itself). One must ask whether our humanity is not at stake here; and thus God's partner?

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15 Van Ruler would rather write a strong essay on "God and chaos", linking God with the contingency, the chaos, in creation (1958, in Th.W. V 1972:32-43), than conceding the point that "contingency" as such illustrates the human inclination to sin and thus justifies God's soteriologising of his own creation ("we were born to be saved"): No, we were born to be humans living in front of God; because of sin (specifically guilt!) we need God's grace (and Christ's intervention), to become human "again"! (See Lombard 1996:95-103).

16 Incarnation was necessitated by sin only, therefore, in Van Ruler's conception, the incarnation falls away eschatologically! This is the consequence of his "speculative reason"! Sin and death are "secondary" issues that were "added" to human life, which was created "good". Van Ruler follows Anselm's vicarious, mediatory logic in understanding why God became human: to add that in order to counter this work "for us" we need a strong pneumatology to ensure God's work "in us".

17 See for this Van Ruler's distinction between Christological and pneumatological perspectives, 1989:27-46.

Is this not in essence an undermining of tolerance? Is this, in political terms, not a threat to democracy? Is it not deeply inhuman if there is no eternal state of "being lost"? There are at least five points of decision involved in faith: the eternal council of God, the historical deed, the actual preaching, the mystical state, and the eventual result. As a human being I must take up and confirm the position of God; that is faith; that is doing theology.[18]

IV. Barth's problems with human agency and identity vis-à-vis God[19]

i) The open kerygmatic situation (Offene kerygmatische Situation)

This notion of Barth does not imply *apokatastasis pantoon* (the full restoration of everything in the end). It refers to a situation being created that is "open", and in which a person can fall or stand. This *offene Situation* is an abyss, deeper and darker than the doctrine of predestination of Dordt: no word is spoken, no human form comes into play. Not only the situation of kerugma but even the fact of the kerugma itself remains in the dark with Barth. Why should kerugma be needed if salvation is already perfect? One does not receive any answer to the question what really happens when kerugma takes place. In Barth's scheme preaching pales into a function of the congregation. The notion of "characteristics" is better than this "situation". One needs characteristics (*syllogismus mysticus et practicus*) of election in the mystic life, while acknowledging that this doctrine of characteristics is also a labyrinth. Even so, it is much more human and articulated than the "open situation", which is an abyss into which one falls silently.[20]

ii) Barth has not written one letter about predestination:

Not even KD II, 2 [*Kirchliche Dogmatik*] deals with this since the question of predestination is not the question whether God is gracious to me (that is the matter of reconciliation and salvation); it is not even the question of justification. The question of predestination is the question whether I am prepared to live and die based on God's grace, to say yes to this gift. I must want and will it![21]

iii) The being, the council and the deed of God need to be distinguished:

This is necessary to avoid the *Vergeschichtlichung* (historicisation) of God, which assails God's divinity. I am human and creature, and God is the Uncreated (One): this needs to be acknowledged since one lives with God in thousands of ways, not merely in a strictly personal

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18 Theology is our activity before God and with God, *coram Deo*. Van Ruler lists the five activities between God and the human agent in Dutch rhyme: "Gods eeuwige Raad, de historische daad, de actuele praat, de mystieke staat, en de eindresultaat". If all of this is only God's one-sided initiative, the relationship is undemocratic, intolerant, inhuman and far from a partnership.

19 The next five digits deal with God's action and human agency within the ambit of the work of the Spirit, illustrating Barth's deficient pneumatology. For this, see Van Ruler 1989:1-88, the three articles summarising Van Ruler's attempt at a "relatively independent pneumatology", in which he also deals with "predestination".

20 Van Ruler's point here is that the attempt to provide certain mystical and practical signs or characteristics of what Dordt called "predestination" is much more human than the uncertain "open situation" in Barth's understanding of kerugma, preaching, offering of the gospel. Van Ruler deals with this in his detailed approach to what happens through the work of the Spirit in a believer (cf. 1989:47-88, "grammar of pneumatology").

21 Predestination is for Van Ruler a matter of will, choice, but then from the perspective of the mystery of how God's choice can become my choice (Lombard 1996:283-289).

relationship. This *huperousia*, the super-essentiality of God, which stands close to the *mé on* (Being itself) must be acknowledged. With Kraemer we should affirm: God is not *cogitandus sed amandus et laudandus* (not to be thought but to be loved and praised). God can miss us, live without us, like toothache, but it pleased God to create us; that is the luxury of God's creation: the cosmos as "ornament". God took pleasure in willing and creating the plurality and singularity and solitariness in creation. In this way we can retain ontology: there is not only "history" (things happening), there is also "being" – both functionally and substantially. We can only think purely functionally, and not substantially, about one single reality, and that is: sin. These distinctions, not properly made in Barthian theology, include the reality that in God there is also an abysmal element.[22]

iv) The Holy Spirit as sheer eschaton:

In this conception, found in the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* and in Bultmann, the Holy Spirit is equivalent to "historical reality". This means that the actual decisions made in factual reality is without choice. According to Barth, the Holy Spirit speaks the final word. However, it is certainly not true to think that saying "Spirit" means saying a final word. In fact, the last word is spoken when I say "yes" and choose myself as chosen. Would Part V of the KD (on salvation) really deal with pneumatology so that the logic is as follows: KD III on the Father, KD IV on the Son, and KD V on their Spirit? Or was Barth actually done with the Spirit in the last paragraphs of KD IV, 3?[23]

v) Incorrect conception of the person and work of the Spirit regarding the mediation between God and humanity:

What is given in the Mediator must still be appropriated (*zugeeignet*) and internalised (*angeeignet*) through the Spirit in the human person. There is too little of this in Barth, too little attention to the mediating character of the work of the Spirit. The Spirit seems to be in Barth totally unmediated, a flash of lightning (*Senkrecht von Oben*). However, the Spirit works through means: words, bread, water. Various aspects of mediation: tradition, office, sacrament, preaching, liturgy and congregation are all soft-soaped ("The Spirit is all of them, they are not the Spirit"). In the appropriation (*Zueignung*), appears various human "forms": choosing, judging, deciding. "Wait a moment, God and Christ are not all there is, I am also there!" The Holy Spirit works historically, horizontally, since the *eph hapax* (once and for all) of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is "available", "at our disposal".[24]

V. Barth's views on Christian witness and the role of the church in the world

i) Can being a Christian merely be equated to Christian witness?

Am I not also a goal, a resting point, a dwelling (*kat'oiktèrion*) of God in the Spirit? Is the neighbour really more than the self? May I see myself merely as a means for the other? My

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22 If Van Ruler stresses the "separateness" of our human "being" or ontology, the flip-side is that God's being is a much bigger transcendent reality, with abysmal aspects. Mystics, therefore, all know "the dark night of the soul" in close dealings with the real God.

23 At least Barth acknowledged towards the end of his career that he needed to work through everything once more: under the perspective of the Holy Spirit.

24 Outpouring is a fact, a historical reality. Like the cross it is also "once and for all" but results in the Spirit's being there for, in, around us continually, horizontally, historically.

own salvation is more important than my witness! This also more strongly accentuates the separateness of the Christian. Jesus Christ is also a separate figure (*gestalte*) in history: with Athanasius and Barth there is too much emphasis on the inclusive and universal Christ. As Christians we are anchored in the historical Jesus, Israel and the Bible. This "separateness" is also found in the church; it is another distinguishable "form" next to and separate from the concert hall, the marriage bed, et cetera. Similarly, Christianity is a *tertium genus,* a third species all by itself. Why are Christians seen by Barth merely as "the head of Jut"? The sectarian aspect of the church is her catholicity, which is not the same as universal humanity. The brotherhood of all people is only found around Yahweh and Jesus Christ. Also the church service is to some extent an end in itself. "When you sit in the church and you meet the Bridegroom, you should not engage in prostitution by thinking how should I serve the world?"[25]

ii) The church and the world:

Contra Barth it must be stated that the church is not the destiny of the world, just as Christ is also not the destiny of the world. Indeed something must happen to the world: it must be Christianised. However, even this Christianisation is not an end in itself but also a means. The world as created reality is the purpose, the end, not grace, nor Eucharist. With creation God had something else in mind than *salus*, salvation, viz *nostra fruitium*: that we should enjoy God and God's creation. But we should also have something in mind for the world and not be content to merely say that it has been reconciled. We must will something Christian, viz imitation of Christ. Christianisation is articulated in mystical experience and configuration: there my heart is Christianised and my inner life modelled. The same with ethical stamping in *eirènè* and *charis* (peace and grace), and the social world: the transformation of structures (contra the revolution). The end of Marx in the West is the Buddhist Nirvana. That is why culture needs to be Christianised. Suppose that our Western culture lived under the dogma that being is absurd, would science still be possible? That is why politics is the axis around which everything revolves. The demons always withdraw themselves into the state and there they must be cast out more than anywhere else. The antidote is kingdom of God and Christ as *kurios* (Lord) and King. Christianisation is a flexible war of aggression and synthesis. Christianisation is also a deterioration of the world; taking out of it what is available, viz sin. In this process the Old Testament plays a major role. For Barth the Old Testament is merely the mirror of the negative. According to Israel, the world is creation and not theophany. Is the state only a human matter, a matter of appropriate social institute, or does God act there also as creator? In such a conception Christianisation is a mixture of particular and general revelation.[26]

25 The being of the church, as a species all by itself, with its own existence, is here accentuated over against the idea that the church is "nothing in itself" (cf. J. C. Hoekendijk's idea, in line with Barth's missio Dei of the church as a wagon pulled around in the world in service of the kingdom, influencing ecumenical thinking in the 1960s. "The head of Jut" was a look-alike "head" of a notorious murderer H. J. Hut, placed on a block at a village fair for people to hit, to vent their anger at, while the real head was actually preserved in a bottle. Countering such a "functionalist" view of the church, Van Ruler delivered a lecture to Moltmann's students in 1966 (1978:53-66) on *"Die Kirche ist auch Selbstzweck"* "The church is also an end in itself", a place of rest, a place simply "to be"). On Barth's notion of the Christian as mere witness, see Van Ruler 1970:168-169.

26 Here the counter-position on the church is stated: it is not an end unto itself; it is indeed in service of the process of Christianization, which has the purpose of the world becoming fully the world and humanity fully human to stand before God eternally. In this process the state plays a central role. All demons drawn into the operation of power, given to the state, must be exorcised – something which can only happen under the auspices of the only real "king", with real authority over evil. Both the philosophies of Marx (revolution of the masses without proper structural change based on justice) and Sartre (life

Beyond barth? Whither?

We need to walk on two legs as theologians, the "legs" serving both the church and society at large. Of Dirk Smit I have said that his theology is deeply grounded in the church's faith, in the mystery of God's grace, but that he is also deeply concerned about extending, giving form, applying that faith in all life contexts. In a sense this agenda asks for a combination of, and not a choice between, the theological agendas of Barth and Van Ruler. Even though Barth at one point could say "I have something better to do!" (which in context meant: "write a church dogmatics!") when asked in his early German period why he did nothing about the threat of Hitler and Nazism, he was the one who also wrote the famous Barmen Declaration. And, even though Van Ruler's whole life seems to have been spent on the agendas of "Christianisation" (of applying Christ in culture, politics and real life), he preached more than 2000 sermons on the good news of the gospel during his lifetime. Which contemporary minister – let alone university professor – can do that?! Both these great theologians have walked on both legs of "Christ and culture", "Good news and its embodiment", and the question is rather what kind of theology is better suited for the constant to and fro between the two.

Van Ruler identified certain problem areas in the Barthian approach: a too rigid monistic scheme for speaking about reality (ontology) and knowledge based on the adage of "Christ only" (epistemology) – which makes conversation with "common sense", "science" and "nature" very problematic; thus opening the door for Gnostic notions, especially when the Old Testament and the place and role of Israel in God's revelation is neglected or seen as only a negative mirror of what is to come in Christ,[27] when infant baptism (and thus the reality of the covenant through generations) is shunned, and when the Spirit of God is not fully acknowledged as third person of the Trinity (restricted to only the "power of Christ"). It is especially on this point where Barth's relation to Calvin ("the theologian of the Spirit!") has always been questioned in Dutch Reformed circles: How does that which Christ had done for us, outside of us, on our behalf, once and for all, become our own internalised, confirmed and willed reality, to be extended in life, given form and applied in all contexts – if not through the work of the Spirit, who is not incarnated in us, but dwelling in us? There are many more questions that could be asked.

The point is this: Should we not admit these questions as real questions in our appropriation of the Barthian gift to the twentieth century and should we not work towards more refined theological solutions instead of simply building further on a fortress that in the twenty-first century really may become impregnable, lost in cosmic or a-cosmic Christosophism, a language to which the ordinary believer has no access? (cf. See Van Ruler 1969b:211).

That Dirk Smit has long since tackled these issues and tasks can be heard on almost every page he writes but nowhere better than in his answer to the question: "Can we still be Reformed?" (2009:437-438):[28]

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is meaningless; all we have are dreadful choices) miss the proper authority, ordering principle needed for a philosophy of history. Only the Christian "philosophy", seeing history as a *syntaxis* of guilt and reconciliation, can offer a true eschatology – dealing with the central problem of history and humanity: human sin and guilt (Van Ruler 1978:36-38; 1989:100-103).

27 For Van Ruler the Old Testament is the "positive mirror", reflecting what God had in mind with creation: Israel, living from God's Torah, knows what life, family, work, sexuality, community, true governance, etc. mean (see Van Ruler 1971:24-35).

28 In this passage, which may at first glance seem staunchly "Barthian", various "Van Rulerian" accents

The public church in a civil society needs responsible public theology. The particular contribution of Reformed theology to this essentially ecumenical task would include, amongst others, reminders to keep searching for *a fully Trinitarian theology, responsible biblical hermeneutics, a faithful church and socially involved and responsible believers.* Reformed spirituality is about life *coram Deo,* but specifically before the face of the *living and Triune, speaking God.* Because we claim that we hear this God's word in and through the Bible, it is crucial that we *read and interpret this Bible in responsible ways.* And because we claim that the content of this word and will calls the church to obedience and to continuous reformation according to the message of this Bible, we should be concerned about how that is *implemented in the concrete, everyday life – order, structure, worship, ministries, services – of the real church.* As the – continuously transformed – members of this – continuously reformed – church, we are called to live *soli Deo Gloria,* to enjoy and to serve the honour of the living God in the theatre of God's glory, God's history and world, amongst God's creatures [italics in original].

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are inserted in ways which do make a difference to Smit's theology: the public character of the church in civil society (an aspect of Kuyper's theology which also fascinated Van Ruler); the search for a truly Trinitarian theology (which Barth acknowledged towards the end of his career as one of his failures); the accent on interpreting Scripture as Word of God (versus Barth's more esoteric Logos theology); the strong focus on implementation, embodiment, form-giving, of faith in everyday human life; in temporal and contingent forms and structures of history and the world (for which Barth's critical dialectics were not particularly well suited). It may be interesting, and a pleasant surprise, to study Smit's carefully chosen supplementary formulations "beyond Barth" throughout his oeuvre.

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KEY WORDS
Barth
Van Ruler
Pneumatology
Twenty-first century
Christology

KERNWOORDE
Barth
Van Ruler
Pneumatologie
Een-en-twintigste eeu
Christologie

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"What is a woman that You are mindful of her?" Aspects of irony and honour in Luke 7:36-50[1]

ABSTRACT

Unlike the other three gospel writers, Luke places the account of a woman anointing Jesus outside the passion narrative, in the context of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. The article explores rhetorical mechanisms through which the narrator of Luke 7:36-50 presents the story of Jesus' anointing by a woman publicly known as "a sinner", while eating with a Pharisee named Simon. The passage is firstly situated within the broad literary context of Luke's gospel. A brief analysis of the narrative focuses secondly on Jesus' identity and authority as "a friend of sinners". The essay finally investigates aspects of irony and honour in the passage, with particular reference to the reversal of roles—both of the Pharisee and the woman.

> The task of hermeneutical appropriation requires an integrative act of imagination … (W)henever we appeal to the authority of the New Testament, we are … placing our community's life imaginatively within the world articulated by the texts.
>
> *(Hays 1990:45-46)*

I was privileged to contribute to a previous collection of essays in honour of Dirk J. Smit and am grateful for the opportunity to follow it up here (cf. Mouton 2007a). The previous essay discussed aspects of Smit's contribution to an ethos of responsible (biblical) hermeneutics, and his appropriation of biblical perspectives in contemporary Christian ethos and ethics. The crucial starting point of such an ethos, I argued, is the gift of "seeing" differently, of discerning *faith*fully, of imagining God's radical presence in the world. It is in this sense, I believe, that the significance of Smit's work – especially from within the dynamic yet complex interface between the biblical sciences and systematic theology – has to be appreciated.

As a celebration of and a humble tribute to Smit's lifelong devotion to the interpretation of the Bible in numerous church and societal contexts; as a token of my respect for his personal ethos and wisdom, his academic excellence and integrity, his passion for righteousness and the dignity of creation, I offer him my ongoing journey with Luke's account of an unnamed woman anointing Jesus (Lk. 7:36-50).[2] The art of "seeing" – of recognising, of being aware, of acting boldly – plays an important role in the text, and in my analysis throughout.

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1 The main title is derived from Psalm 8:4 and Hebrews 2:6.

2 An earlier (shorter) version of this essay was published as part of a Society of Biblical Literature project on Character Ethics and the New Testament as The Reorienting Potential of Biblical Narrative for Christian Ethos, with Special Reference to Luke 7:36-50 – cf. Mouton 2007b. It is used here with the permission of the publisher.

Jesus' liberating and healing ministry

Luke – unlike the other gospel writers – places the account of a woman anointing Jesus outside the passion narrative, in the context of Jesus' ministry in Galilee (Lk. 4:14 – 9:50).[3] The Lukan narrator reconfigures the story of Jesus in a socio-political context probably after the Jewish-Roman war of 6670 CE. Of all the Jewish religious groups, only the Pharisees seem to have been able to regroup after the destruction of the temple, evidently with greater emphasis on the observance of (their interpretation of) torah than before. By 85 CE the Pharisees had accepted a clause in which the Jesus followers were cursed and banned from their synagogues (Bosch 1993:210).

Against this background the question may be raised of *how* Luke's audience was supposed to (re)imagine God through Jesus' response to the unnamed woman in Luke 7. I start with a brief look at the immediate literary context within which the anointment story is situated. In the Lukan narrative, 7:36-50 occurs *after* Jesus' authority as a teacher and healer has been revealed – inter alia by his sermon on the plain (6:17-49), the healing of a centurion's servant (7:1-10) and the raising of a widow's son from Nain (7:11-17). The story unfolds according to the programme Jesus announced in Nazareth (Lk. 4:16-21), whereby his earthly ministry would focus on ἄφεσις (4:18) – his encompassing power (δύναμις – 4:14; 5:17) to heal, and his authority (ἐξουσία – 5:24) to forgive sins and to free all kinds of captives (such as the poor and socially disowned, the sick and demonpossessed, strangers and outsiders).[4]

Beginning in 5:17, the narrator shows special interest in Jesus as proclaimer of the release from sins by artfully connecting a diverse group of stories related to this theme. As each new episode is sounded, the audience is able to recall and compare related episodes with enriching harmonies (Tannehill 1986:103-109). The story of the healing of the paralytic in Luke 5:17-26 is Jesus' first encounter with the scribes and Pharisees, and the beginning of a series of controversies with them (cf. 5:27-32; 7:18-50, et cetera). It is also the first reference in Luke to Jesus' forgiveness of sins, and is presented in such a way that the audience may know that Jesus' authority is epitomised by his divine power to release sinners (5:24).

Luke 7:36-50 is the final unit of the section 7:1-50, in which the relationship between the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus has been the leitmotif. Luke 7:18-50 has a number of points of contact with previous material. John's question in 7:19 (σὺ εἶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἢ ἄλλον προσδοκῶμεν; – "Are you the one who is to come?") allows Jesus to summarise his and John's ministries in 7:22-28.[5] In 7:29-30 the narrator remarks that all the people *except the Pharisees*

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3 Scholars are puzzled as to how these accounts (Mk. 14:39; Mt. 26:6-13; Lk. 7:36-50; Jn. 12:18) are related. The resemblances and differences among them (and whether or not they refer to the same event or oral tradition) have been much debated. For discussions on these issues see Malone 2000:48-49; Pesonen 2000; Schaberg 1998:373-375; Bock 1994:689-693; Johnson 1991:128-129; York 1991:118-119.

4 All references to the Greek New Testament are from the UBS4/NA27 text. References to the English New Testament are from the NRSV except where indicated otherwise. The Greek verb ἀφίημι (to cancel a debt) often has a financial connotation (cf. Lk. 11:4; 16:5,7). The noun ἄφεσις literally refers to the remittance of trespasses or the acquittal of a legally required sentence, without penalty or further obligation. This is the most common word group that Luke appropriates and reinterprets for the forgiveness of sins (ἄφεσις – freeing/releasing – ἀφίημι – to free/release). He uses the same metaphors with regard to the uplifting or strengthening of the weak and the healing of illness. In all these instances uses of the profound image of *acquittal* of debt or *release* from prison (cf. Bosch 1993).

5 With reference to Jesus' response in 7:22-28, Sharon Ringe (2002:72-73) comments as follows: "If we look closely at the paraphrase of the Jubilee motifs from the texts of Isaiah found in the response to John

and lawyers acknowledged God's purpose and were baptised by John (cf Mt. 21:31-32).[6] In 7:31-35 Jesus responds to criticism of his association with tax collectors and sinners. This leads to the anointment story of 7:36-50, which illustrates the narrator's observation in 7:29-30 by way of an extreme example (cf. Corley 1993:122, 130-133). Jesus' response is concluded by an idiomatic expression in 7:35 (καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς – "Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children"). It is probably a revised version of a saying from Q (cf. Mt. 11:19; Sirach 26:29), and suggests that Luke understands Jesus to say that "wisdom shows her true potential when a broad range of humanity is enclosed in her family" (Danker 1988:168) – including tax collectors, sinners and (other) outsiders. In the Lukan context divine wisdom is justified ("proven right" – NIV) over against/despite her children who have rejected her (Marshall 1978:303). It would also imply that wise people "prove their social abilities by the outcomes of their behaviour" (Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003:254-255). The narrative of 7:36-50 will exemplify this saying.

The anointment story of Luke 7:36-50 occurs directly *before* references to (other) women who served Jesus (8:1-3) and various parables that are all about *listening, perceiving and understanding* (cf. 8:4-21). This is followed by Jesus calming a storm, to which his disciples respond with fear and amazement, asking: "*Who then is this,* that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" (8:22-25). Further healings are reported (8:2656; 9:3743), Jesus sends out the twelve (9:19), feeds five thousand people (9:1017), and subsequently confronts his disciples with: "*Who do you say that I am?*" (9:18-21). Jesus announces his death for the first time (9:22-27), where after his identity is affirmed by a voice from the cloud ("*This is my Son, my Chosen*" – 9:28-36). He refers to his betrayal and death a second time, but the disciples (still) do not understand the meaning of his words (9:44-45). Jesus then uses a little child to explain what it means to be the greatest in God's kingdom (9:46-50), followed by the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem (9:51), where he will be executed by the religious leaders who "rejected God's purpose for themselves" (7:30).

Luke 7:36-50 thus occurs in a literary context of utterances on the radical nature of Jesus' divine power and authority (ultimately to forgive sins), God's alternative kingdom, prophetic wisdom, the Pharisees' (and the disciples') lack of understanding and the crowds' responses of amazement and awe.

With reference to the internal structure of 7:36-50, it may be helpful to analyse the story of the "woman in the city" in terms of three successive judgements about her (Cosgrove 2005:686):

> an initial set of impressions prompted by the description of her in verses 37-38, Simon's interpretation of the woman's behaviour (v. 39), and Jesus' interpretation of both Simon's and the woman's behaviours (vv. 40-50).

… we are struck by something missing. There is no mention of 'release' or 'forgiveness'. Luke's story of the anointing of Jesus by the woman at the banquet in Simon's house (7:36-50) fills in that blank" (cf. n. 4 above).

6 Though Luke does not state it explicitly, the structuring of 7:18-50 suggests that the anointing woman's acquaintance with forgiveness (v. 47) may be an indication that she had been influenced by the ministry of John, and that her coming to Jesus is to express gratitude for the forgiveness proleptically bestowed on her by John (3:3; Corley 1993:125-127).

AN IMPURE WOMAN NEAR A PHARISEE'S TABLE?

The pericope's literary link to the previous passage is established at once by the introduction of the first (as yet unnamed) character, "one of the Pharisees" (7:36), and the fourfold repetition of "Pharisee" in 36-39. Jesus is invited by a Pharisee (later referred to as Simon) to have dinner at his house.[7] Jesus "took his place at the table" (v. 36 – NRSV)/"reclined at the table" (NIV)/ (κατεκλίθη – aorist passive of κατακλίνω), which indicates that the Pharisee was hosting a significant meal, probably a luxury meal (Robbins 1996:90) – a formal banquet or Sabbath meal. "It was quite common to invite a visiting rabbi or teacher to the Sabbath meal after he had taught in the synagogue. If it was a banquet meal, Jesus may have been invited because of his reputation as a prophet" (Stein 1992:235-236; cf. Fitzmyer 1981:688). They were dining "in the Hellenistic manner which was to lounge on one's side, with the feet pointing away from the table" (Johnson 1991:127; cf. Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003:256; Taylor 2004:30-31, 42-45). The reclining posture (which the Jews had adopted for festive banquets) would have made Jesus' feet most accessible, and probably accounts for the coming attention to the feet. It may also be noted that in the ancient Near East the door of the dining room was left open so the uninvited could pass in and out during the festivities. They were allowed to take seats by the wall, listening to the conversation between the host and guests (Talbert 1984:86; cf. Cosgrove 2005:689 n. 49; Bock 1994:694).

In continuation of the theme of 7:34 (Jesus being called "a friend of sinners"), a second character is introduced: an unnamed "woman in the city who was a sinner" (γυνὴ ἥτις ἦν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἁμαρτωλός – v. 37). By introducing the woman at the beginning of (what appears to be) the Pharisee's story, the narrator emphasises her role from the outset. Of particular importance is the introductory καὶ ἰδοὺ in verse 37 (cf. 7:34), which alerts the audience to an unusual development and important point to be made (Danker 1988:169), often associated with a prophetic utterance. According to Nolland (1989:353), it is best to connect ἐν τῇ πόλει ωιτη ἁμαρτωλός and to give it a meaning like, according to Semitic idiom, "publicly known". He continues by saying that "(t)he dramatic impact of the woman's actions appears most strikingly if 'sinner' is understood as a euphemism for 'prostitute' or 'courtesan'" (cf. Corley 1993:124-127, 24-79).[8] As a member of the (silent) spectatoraudience, she takes initiative and boldly steps

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7 This is the first of three such occasions where Jesus eats with a Pharisee, found only in Luke (cf. 11:33-54; 14:1-24; Corley 1993:123). On each occasion Jesus' authority is put to the test, and he ends up at odds with his host. In fact, on each occasion Jesus' behaviour scandalises the host (cf. York 1991:122). These encounters emphasise the Pharisees' main shortcoming from Jesus' perspective, namely that their particular interpretation of Torah have resulted in a harsh view of, and a lack of compassion towards, socially disowned people (cf. references to *seeing, watching, the eye* in Luke 7:39, 44; 11:33-38). The fact that Jesus dines with Pharisees does not mean that they endorse what he has been doing, but rather gives an indication of his social standing as a wellknown teacher (Nolland 1989:360).

8 Luke introduces the woman as "a sinner" even though the context suggests that her sins were forgiven before she entered the Pharisee's house (note the repetition of the perfect passive ἀφέωνται in vv. 47-48; cf Corley 1993:125). This seems strange, bearing in mind that Luke – more than the other Gospels – generally focuses on marginalised groups while rendering women visible (cf. Dewey 1997). Is this a fair observation of her (historical) position at the time, or does it reflect the narrator's ironical way of drawing attention to her particular status in the presence of Pharisees? (cf. York 1991:122).

By identifying the woman as "a sinner" (cf. v. 39) Luke seems to emphasise her shameless status in the sociocultural context of his audience. (For a discussion on the probable audience of Lk. 14, cf. Van Staden 1991:199). Feminist critics such as Jane Schaberg and Mary Malone, assuming that the four Gospel accounts refer to the same event or tradition, point out that the Lukan interpretation of Mk. 14:39 changed the context and purpose of the woman's act remarkably. Schaberg (1998:375) argues that Luke

forward, bringing with her a precious alabaster jar of perfumed oil (ἀλάβαστρον μύρου). The expensive soft alabaster was believed to help preserve ointments and perfumes (cf. Mk. 14:3).

The woman comes prepared in a way fit for anointing a king. Crossing her sociocultural boundaries (cf. Corley 1993:75-78), she steps into a public space where a ritually impure woman would not be expected to appear – least of all at a Pharisee's table![9] She stands behind Jesus at his feet, weeping, and begins to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair.[10] The story intensifies as the narrator reports: "Then she continued kissing his feet (katefi,lei – imperf.) and anointing them with the ointment" (v. 38).[11]

Jesus' passivity in the face of this behaviour is extremely eloquent (v. 39). That he allows the woman to act in this way evokes a negative response from his host. In a moral world where collective honour was a pivotal value, associating with, accepting the actions of or serving a shameless person would bring shame to oneself. In fact, to take a shameless person seriously and to show courtesy to her or him would make one a fool (Malina 1993:39, 45, 53-54; Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003:255; cf. York 1991:123 n. 4). When the Pharisee saw what the woman did, he said to himself (v. 39): οὗτος εἰ ἦν προφήτης, ἐγίνωσκεν α‡ν τίς καὶ ποταπὴ ἡ γυνὴ ἥτις ἅπτεται αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἁμαρτωλός ἐστιν (*If this man were a prophet,* he would have known *who and what kind of woman this is* who is touching him – *that she is a sinner*).[12]

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erased the female prophet by reducing the original story "to a display of unusual affection on the part of an intruding woman". Malone (2000:49) describes the Lukan version as "a remarkable gesture of sorrow by a repentant woman [that] has been beloved by countless numbers of artists in the Christian tradition. This is the conventional image of the woman, daughter of Eve, who knows her place because of her sinful nature." What most people remember about the anointing woman in Luke, they claim, is that she was a *sinner* (cf. Ringe 2002:73), presumably a prostitute (sometimes with reference to her unbound hair, even though unbound hair could also be associated with women prophesying – cf. 1 Cor. 11:56; Taylor 2004:3942; Cosgrove 2005:687691; n. 11 below). Schaberg (1998:375) then concludes: "Given the emphatic nature of Mark 14:9, Luke's editing displays real arrogance. Politically, prophetically, what she has done will *not* be told in memory of her." From the point of view of the narrative's probable redaction history, and history of interpretation, the point is valid. However, I shall deal with it as a distinct event in the Lukan literary context, presumably with a particular implied rhetorical purpose.

9 According to Malina (1993:39, 51), an honourable person in the firstcentury Mediterranean world would be "one who knows how to and can maintain his or her social boundaries in the intersection of power, gender, and social respect, including God. The shameless person is one who does not observe social boundaries … one outside the boundaries of acceptable moral life, hence a person who must be denied the normal social courtesies." Moreover, this woman's behaviour would probably not comply with ritual purity laws of (popular) Judaism at the time (cf. Neyrey 1991a:375382; Malina and Neyrey 1991:3438, 63; Sanders 1992:229230; Moxnes 1986:160161; n. 12 below).

10 For a discussion on the social symbolism of a woman's unbound hair in the ancient Mediterranean world, see Cosgrove 2005. With reference to Luke 7:3650, Cosgrove (2005:691; cf. 687688) concludes "that the woman's gesture with her hair is not sexually provocative, indecent, or even a breach of etiquette". Since unbound hair on a weeping woman in the firstcentury Mediterranean world would naturally be associated with grief, supplication or gratitude, Luke's audience could have interpreted the woman's emotions along similar lines (cf. Cosgrove 2005:689; Corley 1993: 127-130).

11 Commenting on these actions, Nolland (1989:354355) remarks that "the accidental fall of tears on feet begins a chain reaction: with nothing at hand to remove the offending tears, the woman makes use of her letdown hair; the intimate proximity thereby created leads to a release of affectionate gratitude expressed in kissing the feet … and the anointing perfume, no doubt intended for the head (since only this has a place in Jewish custom) but finding no ready access thereto, is spent upon that part of Jesus' body with which the woman has already made intimate contact."

12 As with table fellowship, the separation between the pure and impure had much to do with what or whom could be *touched* and what or whom not (Johnson 1991:127; Malina and Neyrey 1991:54-58; cf.

Apparently it is not the intrusion of a woman per se that was such a shock and a scandal to Simon's Pharisaic sensibilities, but that it was *this particular woman:*

> *Yet worse* … was the failure of his guest, Jesus, to repulse her attentions … Jesus accepts it all and Simon is confirmed in his scepticism about the popular view that Jesus might be a prophet (cf. 7:16; 9:19). *Ironically,* Jesus, aware both of the woman's condition and of Simon's state of mind, fulfils precisely Simon's conception of prophetic awareness (Nolland 1989:361) [emphasis mine].[13]

(Re)imagining God through Jesus' response

The Pharisee's observation in verse 39 puts the central issue of the narrative, namely *Jesus' authority and identity* – and thus *his honour* – on the table (cf. v. 49).

> By accepting the actions of a shameless person, Jesus was bringing shame to himself. He therefore could not possibly be God's prophet. However, the story makes clear that … rather than losing his own honour, Jesus restores the honour of the woman (York 1991:123).

At the same time, two ironic references to seeing in verses 39 and 44 – ἰδὼν and βλέπεις respectively – emphasise the Pharisee's inability *to see, to observe, to perceive, to recognise, to be aware, to understand, to discern prophetically* (by implication, like Jesus and like the woman; cf. Taylor 2004:72-76; Smit 2002; 2003; Mouton 2007a).

Jesus subsequently becomes the first character to speak in the story. Aware of the Pharisee's thinking, he takes initiative – addressing the Pharisee by his name[14] – and tells him a brief story of a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed 500 and the other 50 denarii (a denarius being around the usual day's wage for an agricultural labourer – Johnson 1991:127). When neither could pay him back, he cancelled the debts (ἐχαρίσατο – v. 42) for both of them, without any further obligation. The spare reporting of the parable may suggest that the focus

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Lev 5:23; 6:18, 27; 7:20; 22:49). On touching an unclean woman, see Lev. 13; 15:19-32; Num. 12:10-15. "The host's identification as a Pharisee … suggests that the purity of the table may have been a significant issue, especially if the woman was a Gentile" (Taylor 2004:35; cf. Sanders 1985:212-221; 1992:438-443; Elliott 1991).

For a second time the woman is referred to as "a sinner" (vv. 37, 39). According to Malina and Rohrbaugh (2003:251), making judgements about people was a common feature of the gossip network in honour-shame societies. In such societies gossip functioned "as an informal means of social control. 'Judging' … is largely a matter of stereotyping, usually entailing negative judgement or condemnation. Labels placed on people (sinner, tax collector, woman of the city, artisan's son) are shorthand honor designations that pigeonhole them and thereby both describe and determine honor status. They also provide others with a guide and control for social interaction." The main quality of such relationships is *favouritism* (cf. Mouton 2002:72 n. 21).

13 It is not clear from the context whether the idea that Jesus might be a prophet "was one to which Simon had himself been inclined, or whether he repeats popular sentiment (cf. 7:16; 9:19) only to criticize it. The latter is more likely … Behind Simon's thought lies the unexpressed assumption that a prophet would maintain the same respectable distance as Simon himself would from a notorious sinner. The underlying scandal of Jesus' behavior is here once again that he is a friend to tax collectors and sinners (v. 34)" (Nolland 1989:355). In verse 40 the Pharisee addresses Jesus as διδάσκαλε (teacher) – the way in which Jesus was usually addressed by *non-disciples* (cf. 8:49; 9:38).

14 This is unique to the passage – elsewhere in Luke, Pharisees are not introduced by name. For the relation between honour and *naming* in Mediterranean culture, cf. Malina and Neyrey 1991:32-34.

of interest is on what is to come in Jesus' followup question. Jesus interrogates Simon in the socalled Socratic style (Danker 1988:170-171; Talbert 1984:86) by asking: "Now which of them will love (ἀγαπήσει) him more"; that is, would be more *grateful?* (Johnson 1991:127). The Pharisee responds rather half-heartedly by saying: "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt" (ἐχαρίσατο – v. 43). In spite of possible reservations on the Pharisee's side, Jesus commends his answer.[15]

Turning towards the woman, Jesus then says to Simon: "Do you *see* this woman?" (Βλέπεις ταύτην τὴν γυναῖκα; – v. 44); that is, "Do you not recognize in this woman's behavior the love of one who has been forgiven much?" (Nolland 1989:356, 361; cf. Pillay 2005:448-450). Jesus now interprets her courageous actions towards him by contrasting it to the Pharisee's omission of the appropriate hospitality rituals – water for cleansing his feet, a kiss of greeting and oil for anointing his head (vv. 44-46).[16] Jesus uses the parable in vv. 41-42 ironically to show *why* she has performed such a special act of hospitality, thereby implicitly unmasking Simon's failure to accept God's forgiveness and love.[17] Since Simon does not recognise the relationship between the woman's actions (37-38) and the parable, Jesus uses the latter artistically "to uncover the equivalence, by *retelling* vv. 37-38 in light of vv. 40-42" (Nolland 1989:357) [emphasis mine]. In the new version,

> Jesus describes not only Simon, but also the woman, as performing the role of the host. As a host Simon has not been impolite or rude. Throughout, his behavior has been correct, but *only* correct. By contrast the woman has shown those marks of thoughtfulness and honor which would mark the hospitality of a host who owed a debt

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15 See Malina 1996:143-175 on patronclient relationships as a probable analogy for the theologies of the Synoptic Gospels. As usually happens in the Gospel accounts, in this story too Jesus (and in the final instance God) ironically becomes the ultimate patron who shows compassion to socially disowned people. Such a shift would necessarily have generated social dynamite in Luke's day.

16 To provide water for guests to wash their feet after travel is well attested, but is not indicated in Jewish literature to be a normal provision for guests (Nolland 1989:357; cf. Marshall 1978:312). Likewise, in firstcentury Palestine, it was customary to anoint the head with oil at formal meals. As a sign of honour, a host would generally pour oil on the hair of wealthy guests as they arrived at the meal (Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003:255; Taylor 2004:45-50). However, it would not necessarily be expected of a host to extend this courtesy.

As with providing water and oil to guests, neither the kiss of greeting was mandatory as a mark of hospitality, even though it was an accepted form of greeting (cf. Lk. 22:48). The use of the verb katafi,le,w in this context "is the more intense form of the verb used to describe the kiss of the father at the return of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20) and the kiss of the elders upon Paul's farewell in Ephesus (Acts 20:37). The act of kissing and anointing the feet expresses deep reverence" (Bock 1994:697; cf. Malina and Neyrey 1991:55). Jesus hyperbolically allows the woman's kisses of greeting to be part of his welcome, thereby ascribing honour to her and casting her in the honorary role of hostess (cf. Cosgrove 2005:690-691; Malina and Neyrey 1991:47-49).

I have not found any evidence to suggest that different social codes applied to Sabbath meals than would be applicable to general firstcentury Jewish meals, except for considerable focus on the precise time for the Sabbath meal, i.e. when the Sabbath began (cf. Neyrey 1991a:367). Hence I assume that these general codes would also be customary at a Sabbath meal.

17 Whatever the significance of the anointment of Jesus' feet (cf. Jn. 12:3, versus the anointing of his head in Mk. 14:3; Mt. 26:67 – cf. Malina 1993:39-42; Taylor 2004:50-58), the point seems to be that her actions went beyond the normal courtesy of washing a guest's feet with water (cf. Fitzmyer 1981:691). In fact, olive oil would have been a cheap substance for anointing in comparison to perfume (Marshall 1978:312). The narrator powerfully expresses this dramatic contrast and irony through the rhetorical mechanism of word order – cf. the threefold repetition of αὕτη δὲ in verses 4446.

of affectionate gratitude to his (sic) guest. It is precisely in that which goes beyond the immediate polite demands of respectability that this woman's true attitude comes to expression (Nolland 1989:361).

Jesus then concludes their dialogue in an explicit way: "Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, *have been forgiven* (ἀφέωνται – perfect pass.); hence she has shown great love" (ὅτι ἠγάπησεν πολύ). The point seems to be clear: *Because her many sins were forgiven,* she honours Jesus lavishly in a moment of sacred affection and gratitude (cf. v. 42). She was prepared to welcome God's mighty intervention into her life – literally and ironically to *host* God's love and forgiveness. "But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little" (ᾧ δὲ ὀλίγον ἀφίεται, ὀλίγον ἀγαπᾷ – v. 47).

At this significant moment in the narrative Jesus turns to the woman and says to her (v. 48): Ἀφέωνταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι ("Your sins are forgiven"), your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v. 50).[18] Up to this point it seems that Jesus has (quietly) allowed the woman's display of affection without directing his attention to her. However, by deliberately turning towards her, Jesus now draws together the threads from 37-39 and 40-43. As a result the other guests are amazed and ask: Who is this who even forgives sins? (τίς οὗτός ἐστιν ὃς καὶ ἁμαρτίας ἀφίησιν; – v. 49). Could this amazement reflect their recognition of God's wisdom behind the actions of both Jesus and John – wisdom which here has found yet another of her children (v. 35)?

The unconventional story of Jesus' anointing by this woman in Simon's house conveys an ironical reversal of the roles of both characters initially presented in the story:

> In the beginning the Pharisee is the host, the woman is a sinner. He is inside; she is outside. He has honor; she is shameless. As the story develops, she acts hospitably; he fails to show any special kindness towards Jesus. She understands him to be a prophet; he rejects Jesus' prophetic character. She is forgiven much and loves much; he is forgiven little and loves little … She now has honor; Simon is shamed. The outsider has become an insider; Simon, the supposed insider, has become an outsider (York 1991:125-126; cf. Corley 1993:130).

As Jesus applauds the woman's actions, she becomes an exemplary figure. The suggestion that she (metaphorically) becomes Jesus' host, associates her with the women mentioned in the next narrative. They are his patrons, "providing for him out of their resources" (Lk. 8:23).

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18 Whereas the connection between the woman's forgiveness and Jesus' authority has been implied throughout the pericope, it now becomes explicit by means of Jesus' authoritative word (in 5:20 for the first time, and here as confirmation of the restored relationship with God). Of significance is the recurrence of the two semantically related verbs cari,zomai (to forgive/release) and ἀφίημι (to cancel a debt) in verses 42, 4749 (cf. Ringe 2002:73; n. 4 above). To send someone away with "go in peace" was a common farewell formula in Judaism (cf. Lk. 8:48). Here it takes on deeper significance in the coming of God's eschatological salvation. Jesus' pronouncement of peace to this woman (v. 50) is the pronouncement of God's encompassing righteousness and conciliation (wholeness, salvation, holiness, shalom) to her (cf. Bosch 1993:33).

Since the grammar does not make it clear, there is, however, a possible contradiction between the woman's receiving forgiveness from Jesus (v. 48) and Jesus' attesting to some other forgiveness she had already received (v. 47). This would influence the interpretation of her gesture – as either asking for forgive ness or expressing her gratitude and devotion for having received it before (cf. Cosgrove 2005:689-692). "Does forgiveness evoke love, or does love earn forgiveness? Which came first …? With that debate, we, like the host in the story, miss the point, since really forgiveness and love are inseparable" (Ringe 2002:73).

Both the sinful woman and these women take care of him (Cosgrove 2005:691; cf. Moxnes 1986:161163; Pillay 2005:447-448).

In the final analysis the narrative of Luke 7:36-50 portrays Jesus as the one who has compassion for sinners, who liberates and heals them, and who allows them to serve him, even lavishly. This is how the Christian communities towards the end of the first century CE remembered Jesus of Nazareth (cf. MoltmannWendel 1982; Neyrey 1991a:378-380; Dunn 2003:543-611).

Yet, what would be the implied rhetorical effect of the passage? What was it supposed to do to its audience? How were they supposed to (re)imagine God through Jesus' response to the woman and the Pharisee? It seems that Luke was creating a particular frame of reference, a moral horizon, glimpses of an alternative world (with its own distinctive atmosphere and language, images, values, dispositions, habits) that was meant to be inhabited by Jesus' followers (cf. Meeks 1986; Elliott 1991:104-105; Ringe 2002:78-79; Smit 1991:59, referring to Lindbeck). How was this supposed to happen?

The narrator uses the story of a most unlikely character from within that moral world as a parable, a metaphorical lens through which the radical nature of Jesus' identity and ministry can be recognised. Jesus' prophetic wisdom – his reversal of the expected order – challenges the usual assumptions about what would be regarded as 'honourable' in a fundamental way. Although the anointing woman is mute throughout the story (cf. Dewey 1996; 1997), she is "open to God's mercy" and reveals "a more basic orientation to God" than does the Pharisee (Fitzmyer 1981:687). Through her actions she acknowledges Jesus' liberating, healing authority. Her great love for and gratitude towards him allows her to act freely and creatively, to boldly risk and be vulnerable, to imagine new possibilities of serving God amid sterile sociocultural and religious conventions.[19]

The story, however, remains open-ended with respect to its outcome. Later audiences are to fill gaps such as where the woman would find a safe moral environment after Jesus sent her away in peace (7:50), and as to where the Pharisee would find an alternative, creative space to engage his position in light of his encounter with the "friend of sinners".

What seems to be clear is that Jesus ironically and prophetically subverted the socioreligious status quo of popular Judaism in his time by recasting both the woman and the Pharisee in the honorary role of hosting God's love and forgiveness. Through the imaginative lens of the Lukan narrator, followers of Jesus – then and now – are invited to do likewise.

On the occasion of Dirkie Smit's sixtieth birthday, I extend my profound gratitude and respect to him for the extent to which he has been seeing differently, and has been grappling imaginatively and intelligibly with the radical consequences of Jesus' encompassing ministry for church and society – over many years and through numerous presentations and writings, in various contexts and genres.

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19 Passivity and unwillingness to risk would be typical characteristics of (positive) "female shame" in an honourshame society (Malina 1993:50-53; cf. Malina and Neyrey 1991:44-46).

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KEY WORDS
Forgiveness
Pharisee
Honour & shame
(Im)purity
Irony
Art of "seeing"

TREFWOORDE
Vergifnis
Farisieër
Eer & skande
(on)reinheid
Ironie
Kuns van "sien"

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A homiletic credo – A firm belief in the preaching event

ABSTRACT

From 1981 to 2002 the author, together with Dirkie Smit and Coenie Burger were responsible for the publication of 22 volumes of Sermon Helps, which embodied a specific theological and homiletical approach to the preaching event. The author finds it remarkable that after 30 years these homiletical premises are still adhered to in what he describes as his homiletical credo regarding the preaching event (event here as translation of what leading German homileticians describe as a "Wortgeschehen". He concentrates on this event as an encounter between listening to the living voice of God in the text and its modern context. This is in essence a hermeneutical encounter, striving to incarnate the Living Word in the language of the day, taking the text "into the night" of hard exegetical labour – and all consuming prayer. Thereby the preaching event issues in joyous celebration of the glory of God.

I started my research in homiletics in the late 1950s. This was followed by teaching homiletics since the 1970s, lasting more than thirty years. In the pivotal times after World War II, preaching was in a crisis. No wonder that Karl Barth and many other Reformed theologians with him spoke of the *Not und Verheissung der Predigt*. Wrestling with the actuality, the authority and power of the preaching event, I followed the homiletic discussions of theologians like Barth, Thielicke, Wingren, Berkouwer, and especially Bohren in his epoch making *Predigtlehre* (1974) and Brueggemann in his *Cadences* (1997). Our own Willie Jonker, Cas Vos, Coenie Burger and Johan Cilliers strengthened my homiletic convictions. However, it was in the 1970s that Dirkie Smit, a student in theology, influenced me most of all. I was struck by his passion for preaching the Word of God in a theological sound and responsible way. As part of a special course in preaching, he was the dynamic leader in the discussions. After he became a minister, we discussed how to design a scheme whereby ministers of the Word could be helped in their preaching task. Together with Coenie Burger the well-known and much used series *Woord Teen die Lig* (Word Against the Light) came into being. In the meantime, Dirkie became part of several research projects, initiated by me and funded by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), dealing mostly with the public proclamation of the gospel. Later both of us also became interested in liturgy, especially in its ethical role in transformation processes. In all these activities Dirkie Smit's thorough theological stance was the inspiration as well as the spearhead that moved the church in many directions. In this article I continue my homiletic dialogue with Dirkie Smit. *As in the 70s, I think that both of us believe that the church has once again reached a critical point with regard to the preaching event.* It once more has become urgent to reflect on the essence of the preaching event as the fountainhead of the church's ministry. In 2011, in my homiletic credo that follows, I will still adhere to the basic format of all editions of *Woord Teen die Lig*.

The preaching event as encounter between the living god and the living church

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i) When I say that I believe in the preaching event, I am not saying that all sermons are ipso facto the Word of God bringing us to an encounter with God self. The many words uttered on the pulpit cannot automatically be regarded as the Word of God. Too many sermons are full of *human* words, without containing the Word of God! When a sermon is preached in the Name of God without bringing a congregation to an encounter with God, it is a "misuse of the Name of the Lord" (cf. Ex. 20:7). I do not believe in the preaching act in itself, but in a preaching event wherein God reveals God self by the proclamation of his incarnate Word. Focussing on and testifying to the saving act in and through Jesus Christ, the God event comes to its completion and fulfilment every time this good news is proclaimed. Pieterse, in a well argued article on the question of how God speaks his Word in the preaching event, comes to a final conclusion, using Heitink's concept of bipolarity in the intermediary relationship between Gods Word and the word from the pulpit (see Pieterse 2005:77f.; 2007:118f.; Heitink 1998:69f.). In my homiletic credo I want to postulate that the preaching event, from beginning to end, is an encounter with the living God, in and through his Word. This implies the following:

God comes to us by speaking through his Word. This confession is the foundation and rock on which the church is built (cf. Mt. 16:18). Both Luther and Calvin regarded the preaching event as the arena where the struggle between God's salvation and human depravity is fought out (cf. Luther WA 34 1,308 on the relationship between preaching and absolution). In one way or another, all the Reformed fathers, even down to Barth, agree with the confession of *praedicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei* (the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God) (Barth, 1929:158f.). This est. is not based on any epistemological, exegetical or homiletical skills; it is an expression of faith, namely that God speaks in and through his Word in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Calvin *Inst.* III.2.33: *sine Spiritus Sancti illuminatione, verbo nihil agitur* – without the illumination of the Holy Spirit the Word has no effect). Thereby the miracle of his living Word encountering the human context in the preaching event is performed. Preaching as speaking in the Name of God refers to the fact that it is done in the presence of the living God. The preaching event is the most important revelation of the *praesentia Dei realis.* All dynamic and true preaching lives by the grace of this divine presence only. How sad that it is often missed.

ii) I believe with Jonker that the essence of preaching is the proclamation of the good news embodied in the life and work of Christ. Luther formulated this in his well known dictum *nihil nisi Christus praedicandus* (nothing but Christ must be preached) (WA 16, 113; cf. also WA 15, 485: "Das Evangelium ist nichts anderes als Absolution"). This Christocentric focus does not extinguish the Trinitarian character of all preaching, but rests on the work of the triune God. The saving gospel of Jesus Christ is a "thick description", focussing on the full Word of God. This focus gives the preaching event a significant clairvoyance, a *clara et distincta* (cf. the title of Rossouw's dissertation (1961); on thick descriptions, see Geertz in Brueggemann, 1995:73 and Ricoeur 1995:230). In the proclamation of this Christocentric epicentre of the whole biblical revelation, all preaching reaches its grand summit and final purpose.

iii) With Barth I also believe that preaching is done at a risk (1991; cf. also Miskotte 1941). So easily the human "product" on the pulpit is tendered as something divine, pretending that this is the voice of God self! In the homiletic ministry the preacher, his sermon; or the listener and his often closed universe; or the biblical text itself can easily be deified. In the preaching event both preacher and listener are captives of the Word (2 Cor. 10.5). It puts both the lives of preacher and listener at stake. Preaching is never a part of a literary pleasure trip, using popular communication techniques to impress. It is a *ministerium,* a service to the Word which

draws blood: in the minister's study, on the pulpit and in the pew (cf. Jer. 20.7 – 9; Jn. 6:60). Bohren puts it well: preachers are not so much fire extinguishers, more firelighters! (1974:73f.). This means that preachers cannot "peddle the Word of God for profit but [have] to speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God" (2 Cor. 2:16, 17). The burning issue in all preaching is not whether the minister puts up a good show, or whether the congregation listens attentively, but whether God is present or absent in the preaching event… Preachers can never abide by listeners saying at the end of the service: "Thank you for the nice sermon." Sermons are never "nice"; sermons speak with passion, liberating people from their captivity from sin and evil. This passion is elemental and instrumental in presenting the good news.

iv) I believe in the authority and power of such preaching, because it rests on the active presence of the living God, wherever his Word is proclaimed. This God is a "consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29) and his Word is "like fire a hammer" (Jer. 23:29). Preaching the Word is giving voice to the living God *himself* (Calvin witnessed to this fact in his well-known dictum *Deus loquentis persona*). God speaks his own Word in a tongue tied, inarticulate world – and often in an inarticulate church. God *self* has to make the true sermon a *vox clamans in deserto* (voice calling in the desert) (Luther). The living Word is God's dabar, a Word that creates and works, always a *verbum efficax* (efficacious word) (cf. Gen. 1:1; Heb. 4:12; also Jn. 1:1). It is a Word that reveals, that speaks, that opens minds and hearts, that creates new life worlds to inhabit. Preaching listens to this voice, following God's "footsteps" in the text (what Luther called the *vestigia Dei*). Therefore, the sermon never ends as a manuscript on the desk or on the pulpit. It is produced and written down *in order* to be heard as God's living and compassionate Word, as the *viva vox evangelii* (the living voice of the gospel – to quote Luther once more). Christ still sends his church with the same authority and power to proclaim the good news in the assurance that He is present in it "to the very end of the age" (Mt. 28:18f.). In his abiding presence, preachers are his servants and instruments, his fellow labourers with a *ministerium* to fulfil (cf. 2 Cor. 6.1; in general also Col. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:1). In his active presence and through the Holy Spirit, their message comes with the same authority and power as that of Christ. This mandate to the church must protect preachers from false modesty as well as from false pride, remembering that we have the treasure of this living voice of God "in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7). All powerful and efficient preaching must remain a miracle – but this miracle needs to be made true in and through hard and skilful theological expertise. Waiting on the Spirit and hard textual and exegetical labour go hand in hand. It is hard work to be blessed from above.

v) In the Reformed tradition the preaching event is regarded as the womb and incubation chamber of Christian faith, nourishing the "optics of faith", defining the identity of the church as living, faithful and obedient body of Christ. Living faith is a question of seeing the face of God, thereby to live *coram Deo*. Johan Cilliers has continually underlined this basic character of preaching (1998). Seeing God breeds the clairvoyance of faith, nurturing faithful obedience and Christian living in practice, following God in all kinds of diverse and alien situations. In this way the preaching event also nurtures wise readings of Holy Scripture whereby congregations become communities of character, communities of interpretation, acting as apostolic "letters of Christ, known and read by everybody" (2 Cor. 3:2b, 3; on communities of character, cf. Hauerwas 1981).

The preaching event as the interpretation of a specific Biblical text

I regard a specific biblical text as the concrete embodiment of a specific Word of God in a

specific and concrete situation. The legitimacy of preaching as a Word from God is built upon this commitment to a specific text. *This* text gives the sermon its defining basis, meaning and relevance. Through the work of the Holy Spirit texts speak in a variety of voices; texts are indeed polyphonic in character! However, in a specific situation the preacher has to look for the one, single voice of the text, its *monotony* on that Sunday. Texts are specific lenses whereby a congregation gets a microscopic and telescopic view of a specific aspect of the great deeds of God (see Acts 2:11). In the specific text that is preached, minister and congregation follow in the footsteps of the living God on that Sunday. Preaching is following the *movement* of the good news of the text; it interprets the word events of the text as "God events" *in* the text (cf. Long 1989:17f.). It is concretely proclaiming the saving activity of God as it is revealed *in* the text, in particular in its Christocentric focus. Preaching is, therefore, not a matter of producing gripping and moving stories *about* some text, discovering interesting dogmatic principles or moral challenges. It is not an occasion for logical argument. It is an act of proclamation whereby the God driven contents of texts come as words from above directed at the varied human situations. Bohren quite rightly warned against the Bible becoming a book to be analysed by exegetical and literary devices (1974:39). Preaching a biblical text means to follow diligently the surprising twists and plots deeply embedded in its Hebrew and Greek and cultural garb.

As the basis of and governing all preaching, texts are narrative in character. They invite and expose us to the meaningful new world of God. Preaching texts does not merely repeat the bruta facta of significant events that happened in biblical history; they are not eyewitness reports *about* grace, on which all types of impressive arguments can be based. Texts are indeed reminders of what God has done in salvation history. This often lies hidden in amazing twists, foreign words and expressions, cultural customs, literary genres. It will be the task of *exegesis* to unlock these secrets of how God worked in history. However, the *additional* task of exegesis is to assist texts to be *performed homiletically* in a way that they open a perspective on what God can still be doing today. Texts are indeed the divine raw material of God's storied revelation, aiming at leading the Church through history on its journey following in the footsteps of God. This raw material must be mined *exegetically* in order to find its meaning and claim (cf. Long 1989:117), which gives the sermon its inherent energy. In the exegesis preachers have to look first at the movement of saving grace in the garb of the text. To do this, they have to look closely at the texts, looking also *behind* the "alien" text with all the theological and exegetical tools and skills at their disposal (on this, cf. fully Ricoeur, 1975:31, 127). Eventually they have to look *through* the lens of the text, asking how the text can be performed in the church once more, with the same power as the original text did in its historical context. In this way the exegetical conclusion forms the firm and necessary basis for the hermeneutical task of interpretation. The voice of the old text must now be "prolonged", revitalised and energised in the new modern day listening situation.

The preaching event as hermeneutic encounter with its contemporary context

In the hermeneutic encounter two contexts are brought into *confrontation*: that of the text and that of listeners in their concrete situation. In hermeneutics we move from the narrative structure of texts to their interpretation. Whereas the exegesis emphasises the movement of the good news *in* the text and in the world *behind* the text, in the hermeneutic encounter we are looking *through* the text at the world *in front of* the text (this lies at the heart of Ricoeur's interpretation theory, cf. Ricoeur 1975). It can be called an "elongation" of the text in the actual

situation. Moltmann said it another way: In the proclamation the preacher should move from the past of the text to its future, to the worlds ahead (1967:113f.). He convincingly argued for the necessity to interpret all theology from the perspective of the future – but then a future built on the past as the "ancient grandmother" of faith!

This hermeneutical (re) interpretation is in essence a necessity for all preaching. In the hermeneutic encounter the text is continually challenged to speak a word relevant in the homiletic situation. Although a bit exaggerated, Lange regarded this homiletic situation as the real "text" of the sermon (1968:45; cf. critique by Bohren 1974:449f.). Hermeneutics designates a move from the question of understanding the text to its *application* in a sermon and its *appropriation* by the congregation. It deals with the *performance* of the text, which is more than an interpretation of present realities. It is a radical, evangelical, "apocalyptic" redescription of total reality. This is what Ricoeur called the "inter-signification of reality" (1975:102f.) or Brueggemann the "counter-world of evangelical imagination" (1993:26f). This nurtures the "optics" of faith, opening new imaginative visions and possibilities for faithful living in the midst of current realities that are often expressed in the distressing language of insurmountable facts. Preaching deals with more than these so called facts. Preaching deals with the possibilities of texts!

The following are to my mind the most important contexts of the preaching event:

The *present day, living and existential context and cultural environment* in which the church lives. There is an urgent need to accentuate both the treasured memory contained in the text as well as the demands and claims it makes on the listener. It requires a revisioning of the text, or better: a production of meaning, becoming an impetus to a new way of seeing, a change of heart, and a new way of life. Imaginative faith is, after all, the ability to see, to see better, to see further, to see differently, to see the Invisible (cf. Heb. 11:27). To see in faith needs a creative and imaginative hermeneutic, looking through the multidimensional lenses of the text. Texts, being adventures in wonderland, also require a hermeneutic of *amazement* to reveal the fascinating new possibilities hidden in the text. Interpretation has to be both responsive as well as a challenge to the situation. Referring to the *prophetic critical* task of preaching, Brueggemann remarked that "prophetic theology concerns the unmasking of idols… has exposures to make… false claimants to power and legitimacy must be delegitimated" (1994:238, cf. also 207f.). In the modern day context it also requires a hermeneutic of *suspicion* in order to interpret where the text goes "against" the corrupting power of all different types of human preferences, habits and schemes in the surrounding culture and in the church itself (on this cf. Bonhoeffer 1970:181). According to Luther, preaching is often at war with its context, opening the eyes of the congregation to see more clearly the often hidden evil surrounding it (on Luther cf. Wingren, 1960 and Eph. 6.12f.). As in the Book of Revelation, the eyes are opened for God's aggressive counter world only then, generating energy and hope in often perplexing situations. *Sermons take their rightful place in a local and ecclesial context.* This requires that interpretation should focus on the identity formation of communities of faith, nurturing both the vision as well as the *mission* of the church. Preaching has to *inform* the congregation of the biblical basis of this identity, in order to *transform* it in the light of changing situations and challenges. It serves the process of revisioning and reorientation, guarding against the temptation to become assimilated and domesticated by and subservient to the powers of the day. In preaching the church often has to be marked as an odd, strange and marginal community. It is at the interface between true identity and the challenges of (an often alien) society that the witness of the church can be reenergised, the focus on marginality becoming

the fountain of a new creativity. Part of the ecclesial hermeneutic is to look at the text in sermon workgroups consisting of members of the congregation. The full and final interpretation of texts is manifested only in the reading and performance of the texts by communities of faith and faithful living (on this see the excellent study of Fowler and Jones 1991). The practice of the *Roundtable Pulpit* (as advocated by McClure 1995) must be incorporated in the production of meaning in the sermon.*Sermons take their rightful place in a local and ecclesial context.* This requires that interpretation should focus on the identity formation of communities of faith, nurturing both the vision as well as the *mission* of the church. Preaching has to *inform* the congregation of the biblical basis of this identity, in order to *transform* it in the light of changing situations and challenges. It serves the process of re-visioning and reorientation, guarding against the temptation to become assimilated and domesticated by and subservient to the powers of the day. In preaching the church often has to be marked as an odd, strange and marginal community. It is at the interface between true identity and the challenges of (an often alien) society that the witness of the church can be reenergised, the focus on marginality becoming the fountain of a new creativity. Part of the ecclesial hermeneutic is to look at the text in sermon workgroups consisting of members of the congregation. The full and final interpretation of texts is manifested only in the reading and performance of the texts by communities of faith and faithful living (on this see the excellent study of Fowler and Jones 1991). The practice of the *Roundtable Pulpit* (as advocated by McClure 1995) must be incorporated in the production of meaning in the sermon.

Interpretation must be done in a pastoral context. Preaching lives in a world and situations that are often without hope, situations of suffering, poverty, hunger, pain, illness, uncertainty of all kinds, situations that give rise to feelings of utter loneliness and despair. Cilliers (2007), Pieterse (2009), and De Klerk (2009) emphasise the pastoral value of sermons in reenergising and revitalising the church by proclaiming the sustaining power of the God of the text in depressing situations. Sermons should generate hope – for the *sinner* as well as the *sufferer.* Of course, sermons rest on the foundation of a *theologia gloriae,* having its firm basis in the victory over sin and death on the cross. Thereby men and women can rejoice in receiving eternal life. But, I believe, there is at the same time a need for a *theologia crucis,* for a hermeneutic in which the Broken One is encountered in the text – *before* he can be lifted up in the sermon, "drawing all men to him" (cf. Jn. 12:32, 33; 3:14, 15). This requires a homiletic of the alienated, of the poor, of the heartbroken, of suffering and pain. This hermeneutic does not only ask what the text says *about* the sinner or the poor. It asks the question how the situation of *being* lost in this life or in the world to come is expressed *in* the text. By being submitted to this broken hermeneutic and broken homiletic believers are helped to learn a new grammar, a new speech in order to communicate as disciples of the Broken One with the broken parts of their own lives and that of others.

I believe that in the full liturgical context the preaching event comes to its clearest expression, its most vivid and final manifestation. Homiletic revisioning, expressing the true identity of the church, is a process of continual and persevering reorientation, helping the church to see more clearly in the encounter with God the meaning of the text – and then to see what must be done in the modern context in faithful obedience to the God of the text. Seeing the God of the text in the text precedes doing the text in faithful obedience. Believing and doing faith rests on this optics of faith. The liturgical context of preaching should help the congregation both in the seeing and doing functions called for in the preaching event. Ricoeur stated that texts "reach their meaningfulness when re-enacted in a cultic situation" (1995:243). A fundamental function of the liturgy is to articulate and

celebrate the core memory referred to in the preached text. Every Sunday the rhythm of the complete liturgy integrates the memories and hopes expressed in the text with the tradition of faith in all ages. In the liturgy the identity of the church is celebrated in accordance with both text and tradition. Furthermore, identity formation and moral transformation are highly dependent on faith communities as safe locations, becoming agents and energy points of faith (on this cf. Wuthnow, 1993 and 1995; Burger 1995).

THE PREACHING EVENT AS A LANGUAGE GAME

Eventually, all the exegetic and hermeneutic work have to come to fruition in words on the pulpit, directed at the congregation. Dead letters have to become life creating and life changing words. Instead of referring to language as an elocutionary act, having an indicative, signifying character, pointing to worlds outside it, I would rather stress the referring function of language, pointing to a revelation, whereby the veil is removed (the meaning of *apokalips*!). In Ephesians 6:19 Paul speaks of this "fearlessly making known the mystery of the gospel". Often this mystery is expressed in parables, in metaphorical language of all sorts. Abstract exegetical and dogmatic expressions must be transferred into bearers of the good news of the gospel, bringing the fullness of life eternal; It consists of a language game as an inter*lude* between listening to the full meaning of the text and its application in a situation where there is a hunger for the word. It is a game. It follows the trail and trajectory of the text into the present, into the life worlds of real people, into time and space. How can this be done, how can a preacher produce or make a sermon? In general, two things are essential. First, meditation is a genuine play with the words of the text in con junction with modern day words, ideas, examples and narratives that serve as explanations of the meaning of the text. This remains a dangerous game: the voice of the living God can easily be substituted with the voice of the preacher; the fear of a listening "public" can easily dominate the fear of God. Quiet meditation is important. Make time for it to play and mature into words of wisdom. In meditation we have to allow room and ample time for fantasy and prayer. Bohren emphasised this by saying that we have taken the text "into the night" (1974:382). And, as was argued above, the preacher has to do this in conjunction with the congregation. Second, these words have to become part of a *manuscript,* in a form that serves *proclamation, the communication* and the hearing of the gospel contained in the text. All the preparation that has been done as groundwork in the study must now be delivered using good elocution and communication skills.

This communication has to be effective and persuasive. Unfortunately, many preachers wish to produce sermons that are relevant, interesting and effective. On the correct premise that God's word is powerful and efficient, they often end up in *forcing* this effect at all costs. In desiring to appeal, various techniques are introduced to "make" the sermon relevant. The effect of the sermon becomes the criterion of a "good" sermon, not the activity of the text in its divine context. Where God speaks his Word and acts in Christ through the Holy Spirit, preaching is truly relevant and effective. Effective preaching gives "space" to the work of the triune God, who imparts the relevant dynamic and punching power to the preaching of his Word. This is the wonder and profound secret of preaching. Lately renewed emphasis is placed on the persuasive power of biblical preaching. Resner, after a survey of the classical rhetorical tradition and the history of homiletic theory, comes to his final conclusion: In search of the right rhetoric "the cross event proclaimed is the church's on-going epistemological reorientation. By these standards a community of discernment is formed and grows" (1999:185).

The preaching event begins and ends in prayer and doxology. Preachers must do their work, from beginning to end, "praying without ceasing" (1 Thes. 2:17; cf. Eph. 6:19). Being a deep spiritual confrontation with the living God, preaching requires a hermeneutic of prayer. Preaching should lead to the opening of the inner eye, to see and behold God (cf. Rev. 5:5, 6). With Mozart preaching ends in doxology: *laudate Dominum* (cf. *Vesperae selenne de confessore* KV 339). To reach this sublime end, both preacher and congregation should read the Bible with closed eyes.

Finally, it is a joy to preach. Bohren emphasised this in the opening pages of his *Predigtlehre* (1974:17). Preaching is nothing else than to dance joyfully to the tune of the kingdom coming close, "at hand" in the text (see Mk. 1:15). It is a joy that heralds the gospel of the birth of the Saviour, shared with heavenly hosts, proclaiming the "good news of great joy that will be for all people" (Lk. 2:12, 13). It is the joy of preachers pairing their voices with the Spirit and the bride crying "come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:17). Preaching is not an information session on believing in God, or on theology. It is serving and sustaining a love affair between the Bridegroom and his bride. Preaching should help the bride to wait upon, no, to *await* the Bridegroom. This can only be accomplished with infectious joy. In the time between the first and second coming of Christ, preaching is a joyous act, celebrated in the interlude between two advents. It is a joy experienced in the presence of God and his anointed children. It is done in fear and trembling, but also with joy in the presence of the holy God. In essence, the preacher is *homo ludens* – playing, praying and preaching before God, reaching out to the congregation in joy.

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KEY WORDS
Preaching as encounter
Preaching as an interpretation of a text
Preaching as hermeneutic encounter
The language of preaching
Preaching as prayer

TREFWOORDE
Prediking as worsteling
Prediking as interpretasie
Prediking as hermeneutiese worsteling
Die taal van prediking
Prediking as gebed

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"Am I my brother's keeper? An African reflection on humanisation

ABSTRACT

In this article, a short typology of Dirk Smit's theology is set out in terms of the words "contextual", "Reformed", "ecumenical" and "public". This is followed by a homily on the narrative of Cain and Abel as recorded in Gen. 4 in an attempt to illustrate the features of Smit's theology. The Genesis narrative is analysed under the theme of (de)-humanisation in Africa. At first the strategies of de-humanisation are outlined, followed by the devastating consequences of these strategies. A Trinitarian approach is then used to argue for the restoration of humanity on the African continent.

DIRKIE SMIT: PROFILE OF A GIFTED THEOLOGIAN

"Justice, compassion and worship – these three together. The one cannot do without the other."[2]

It is a great honour to participate in this *Festschrift* for a long-time friend and inspirational theological teacher and writer Dirkie Smit. If one would dare to profile Smit's extensive writings and work over many years, four words come to mind: "contextual", "Reformed", "ecumenical", and "public".

Smit understands his theology as deeply contextual, and that context is primarily linked to the "geography" of (South) Africa. One could also say that his work, probably in no minor way shaped by one of his teachers, Jaap Durand, witnesses to a keen sense of historical consciousness.[3] Not only did he write the dictionary entries on "South Africa" and "apartheid" in influential international reference works,[4] but he has also become one of the foremost theological voices to assist us and others outside South Africa to interpret from a theological perspective the social, spiritual, historical, political and ecclesial developments in this country over the last thirty years. This is why "in South Africa" or "from a South African perspective" so often appears in titles of his essays.[5]

Smit, however, also acts as translator of classical theologians, philosophers, and social scientists into the realities of South Africa. In other words, he makes Luther, Calvin, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Niebuhr, Habermas, Marty, Wolterstorff and many other voices "speak" in the South African

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2 A quotation from Smit 2009a:378.

3 Cf. Smit's incisive (and agreeable) analysis of Jaap Durand's theology from the perspective of historicity or the struggle between historicism and a-historicism (Smit 2009b).

4 On South Africa, cf. Smit 2007:11-25 and on apartheid, cf. Smit 2006 and 2008a.

5 Cf., for example, the recurring South African references in his collected essays, published as *Essays on Being Reformed,* especially Part 2, on the historical contexts (Smit 2009a:185-294).

context. Thus, he both achieves an enlightening reading of the original texts and contributes to a fresh (re)interpretation of these tradition-making authors via an incredibly wide engagement with primary and secondary literature.[6]

Dirkie Smit is an unashamedly *Reformed* theologian. The massive third volume of collected essays (Smit 2009a) witnesses to his tireless interpretation of this specific theological tradition. He stands in the tradition of the Scriptures, the creeds of the early church[7] and the trajectory of Anselm,[8] Calvin, Barth[9] and the confessing church tradition, and follows in the footsteps of his predecessor and teacher at Stellenbosch, Willie Jonker. His theology is fundamentally shaped by this tradition: a keen exegesis of Scripture;[10] the importance of confessions as unique mark of this tradition;[11] the church and liturgy or worship (Smit 2009a:461-472) – especially in its local form – as central to the embodiment of faith (Smit 2007:425-454); and ethics with a focus on justice in all spheres of life.[12] No wonder he has become a leading theological figure in regional and world bodies of the Reformed tradition, and a committed and involved member of the local Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).

This overt confessional stance in no way implies a "closed" view of theology or a keeping of the Reformed faith as sectarian truth. In fact, in his most recent contribution on trends in Reformed theologies, Smit (2010) again emphasises the plurality of views and the divergent opinions that all go under the term "Reformed". As he wrote in 1992 already, the Reformed story is a story of many stories.[13] This deep sensitivity for plurality led him to become an ecumenical theologian in the broad sense of the word.[14]

Smit understands that one's participating in the global church is best appreciated from a deep foundation in at least one tradition. He knows the other traditions well, and often engages with them precisely to point out the strengths and weaknesses of his own tradition – he wrote

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6 I have many times (in a good spirit) remarked that Dirkie Smit's bibliographies are probably as useful as his articles. One should not underestimate his contribution towards giving many of us a broad orientation in diverse fields of theological reflection.

7 Cf. Smit's discussion of the Trinity in the Reformed tradition where he states that "… the early Reformed theologians did not invent the doctrine, but received it from the tradition since the early church …" (Smit 2009a:35).

8 Cf. Smit's programmatic essay on the nature of theology (Smit 2008c:387-428, his 2002 inaugural lecture at Stellenbosch) as second-order reflection on the faith, following Anselm's understanding of *fides quaerens intellectum.*

9 Smit wrote many essays on and in dialogue with Barth. For an interesting article on the core trends in Barth's thinking, cf. Smit 2008d.

10 We must not look only at Smit's purely academic work here. The extensive series *Woord teen die Lig* Word against the Light) is an example of a Reformed systematic theologian.

11 Cf. the many essays on confessions, Barmen, Belhar and Accra, some of which are grouped together as Part 3 of Smit 2009a:295-394.

12 Cf. the four essays on justice – with a specific focus on economic justice – in the collection Smit 2007:343-422. These essays function at various levels of the debate: on the role of theory or paradigms in economics, Barth's views on justice, the link between Reformed ethics and justice, and an exposition and critique of the *processus confessionis* of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Cf. also Smit 2009c

13 Smit goes so far as to write: "It is therefore impossible to find consensus on any description of Reformed theology. Any picture will be subjective and open to contrary claims. The Reformed story is by its very nature a story of many stories" (2010: 2). He, nevertheless, attempts to sketch in the subsequent pages what he terms "the Reformed ethos" as "… a way of being the Christian community in the world,

14 His contribution to Jonker's *Festschrift* already demonstrated that this openness and fairness to learn the truth with others is what he found attractive in his former teacher of dogmatics – cf. Smit 1989.

his doctoral dissertation on the influential Catholic theologian Karl Rahner (Smit 1979). Smit engages with Luther himself and with leading Luther scholars and ethicists like Wolfgang Huber and, more recently, Heinrich Bedford-Strohm (Smit 2008:35-66). He has great respect for ecumenical theologians like Edmund Schlink (see Smit 2008b), Geoffrey Wainwright, Konrad Raiser, Dietrich Ritschl, Lukas Vischer and many others. He himself made several contributions to the authoritative *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (1991), and has written numerous articles on developments in the modern ecumenical movement as represented by the World Council of Churches, WARC and Lutheran World Federation.

Although the technical term "public theology" was not in vogue when Smit began his theological work, he has seamlessly become one of the leading interpreters and proponents of what is now known as "public theology". On the face of it, there are at least two reasons for this:

First, Smit is a keen student of Western philosophy and wrote his master's treatise in philosophy on Jürgen Habermas – probably the most influential proponent of modernity in the twentieth century.[15] Smit interprets the rise of modernity since René Descartes as a redefinition of "public" and "private" with the danger that religion be relegated to the private realm only. Second, he has always understood Reformed theology to be a public theology in the many senses of the word, including transforming public institutions and public life. He could, therefore, never relinquish his own calling to shape public debate[16] and to work on an interdisciplinary level with political scientists, legal scholars, historians and economists.

The gospel is by nature not a private gospel. With this concise (and inadequate) summary of Dirkie Smit's theology, it seems apt to honour him and his work with a short piece that shares some of these emphases, and links with core themes (such as justice, human dignity, and human rights) that are widely discussed in his dogmatic and ethical writings.[17] What follows is a substantial reworking of an address given on invitation at the annual Ugandan parliamentary breakfast on 8 October 2010 in Kampala. It is, therefore, a deeply contextual address – given by an African in Africa and for Africans. Although not a treatise on Reformed theology in any overt way, it draws its content from an exegesis of a specific scriptural passage with a firm conviction that humanity is embodied in civic and political life. There is a close connection with the insights of the ecumenical church on issues of justice and humanity. By its very nature, it can be seen as public theology in action, as the address was given "in the open" with President Museveni, the speaker of parliament, cabinet ministers, judges, generals and MPs all in attendance, including dignitaries from several other nations from Africa and around the world.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" was chosen as theme for the 2010 event and it was left to the speakers themselves to interpret the topic and give content to it.

STRATEGIES OF DEHUMANISATION

Africa confronts us with deep ambiguities. It is a continent of immense natural beauty and

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15 The unpublished MA treatise is entitled Demokrasie en Dialoog (Democracy and Dialogue) (Smit 1975). Cf. also Smit's extensive use of Habermas in his exposition of the "publics", Smit 2008c:3-34.

16 Cf. his weekly column in *Die Burger* (a prominent Afrikaans daily) published over many years, in which he succinctly addresses issues of public concern from a theological perspective

17 Cf. footnote 12 above. For a specific application to the economic sphere, cf. Smit 2008e.

bountiful resources. It is home to just under a billion people, with a rich diversity of cultures, languages and religions. According to paleontological research, this continent is the cradle of *homo sapiens,* the origin of all people on earth. Its benign weather conditions in most parts and fertile soil make this a wonderful continent on which to live and work.

Yet, the dominant perception of Africa – by itself as well as by others – is pessimistic. On many international indices, Africa – specifically sub-Saharan Africa – fares proportionally the worst.[18] The continent has been subjected to dehumanisation over the last 450 years: slavery, colonialism, postcolonial misrule, immersion into the global financial system (Naudé 2010a; 2010b:170-174) and now also climate change. The WARC declaration at Kitwe, Zambia (October 1995, see Smit 2007:402-406) speaks of "the irony of this painful situation" and concludes that "instead of rivers of economic prosperity and justice flowing season after season in Africa, poverty, misery, hunger and chronic unemployment have become endemic in Africa" (Smit 2007:403).

Africa has become a continent suffering under dehumanisation. Some of the factors behind this are historical. Their impact and effect are still evident, but the fact of their existence cannot be denied or altered. Other factors contributing to dehumanisation are contemporary and fall into two categories: There are indeed global forces over which Africa has little or limited control; and then there are factors like regional and national policies and actions that are more within the reach of African leaders to determine.

One of the problems with us in Africa is that we have fallen into what can be called a "victim and blame mentality", implicitly giving up on the possibilities to determine our own destiny. Recent church documents like the Kitwe Declaration and Accra Document are helpful in putting economic and ecological justice on the agenda, but unhelpful in two ways: They almost completely deny the complicity of Africans in their own misery.[19] And, they analyse the situation from a supra-personal and global "systems"-perspective only, with the unintended result that ordinary Christians and local churches are disempowered to act, which reinforces a victim and even an entitlement attitude.[20] With this in mind let us look a little closer at the strategies of dehumanisation in Africa.

The misuse of language

It was the existentialist philosophers who helped us understand that language does not have a descriptive function only, that it is, assisting us to make sense of reality and communicate information about that reality to third parties. Martin Heidegger, to name but one example, saw language in its ontological function, that is, not only passively describing reality, but actually constituting and shaping reality. "Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins",[21] became a famous adage and was one of the bases on which Heidegger and others distinguished between authentic and inauthentic existence. If one is able to use language creatively – opening up new realities

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18 Cf. the annual United Nations Human Development Index, which combines a number of indicators such as life expectancy at birth, educational levels (including literacy), and GDP into one index, and how the bottom 30 countries are dominated by African states online at: http://hdr.undp.org/en/data. [2011, January 19].

19 The confession in Kitwe of "our sins of omission" is not an acceptance of co-responsibility, as it refers to a confession that "we did not resist enough" (Smit 2007:405).

20 For Dirkie Smit's wider critical analysis of the Accra Document specifically, cf. Smit 2009:177-184.

21 Literally: "Language is the house of reality."

– one lives authentically, in contrast to the mere repetitive language of "das man".[22]

People who start out on the road of inhumanity know this intuitively. In- humanity starts with name-calling. Name-calling is a vicious strategy to categorise people in a derogatory manner. It creates the sharp boundary between "we" and "them": "we" the conquerors, and "they" the lesser, indigenous ones; we the Arian race and they the Jews; we the Europeans and they the Africans; we the whites and they the blacks; we the mighty South Africans and they the lowly and unwelcome *makerekere.[23]*

Derogatory language further serves the crucial strategy of making sure that the "other" is seen as "less than human". It is difficult at first to socially isolate or physically remove or attack other human beings that are equal to or just like oneself. "They" must be made to appear inferior or even not-human. That is when language moves to words calling other people "cockroaches"[24] or "dogs" or "hyenas". It is easier to kill animals or crush cockroaches beneath our feet than actual human beings.

The gradual process of dehumanisation can end in the actual killing or displacement of millions of people, or both. The histories of many postcolonial countries tell the same sad story: to ensure power, ethnic cleansing takes place; warlords control parts of geographical areas so that chaos rules and those who are out of favour are forced to move (mostly by foot) to somewhere where they might or might not find temporary shelter. The worst cases remain genocide or religious wars. Once you fight with God on your side, it is a holy war you dare not (cannot?) lose – peace is a slap in the face of God (god).

It all starts with what we say to and about one another. Whether in Africa or elsewhere around the globe, we need to attend to the ethics of language. Words, in fact, do kill – socially at first, and then physically.

THE LOSS OF UBUNTU AND MARGINALISATION OF THE "POOR"

Since John Mbiti's famous book on African philosophy and religions (Mbiti 1969), we as Africans have proudly claimed *ubuntu* as our original contribution to theology, anthropology and sociology. The Cartesian cogito ergo sum, we said, fosters not only individuality but also self-referential or even "narcissistic individualism" (Smit 2007:84) and loss of community. Rationality ("I think") heralded the *Aufklärung* with its benefits of science and technology, and – in the famous Kantian formulation of an enlightened person – the questioning of traditional authority, as each person discerns the truth for and by him-or herself.[25] We in Africa said that this also led to rationalism and scientism where truth is reduced to the empirical only; and the freedom of secularity had turned into closed secularism and even anti-religious sentiments in

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22 This is a very free interpretation of the complex argument made by (for example) Heidegger on the constitutive role of discourse and understanding in the disclosedness of Da-Sein. Cf. Heidegger 1996: 150-156, and 180.

23 A reference by South Africans to the strange-sounding languages of foreigners (frequently attacked since 2008) to this country.

24 This word was used during the Rwandan massacres, and has now appeared again in South African political discourse (introduced by Julius Malema, ANC Youth League leader, describing the leader of the opposition).

25 "Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstand ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen" (Kant 1999/original 1784:20).

some European countries. Ubuntu – "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am"[26] – makes the ontological point that we constitute each other's personhood. Dirkie Smit, in his interpretation of ubuntu, writes:

> Human beings are only human in their interdependency on other human beings. Sociality, belonging, mutual responsibility and service, connectedness, solidarity, caring and sharing are all important values, constituting our very being (Smit 2007:119).

Progress and success are not meant for self-enrichment, but for the enhancement of society. The vulnerable (children, the sick, the dying, the aged) will never be alone because *ubuntu* is the unwritten social security of societies without advanced systems of government care. A deep culture of sharing marks Africa, we say, and even if we have very little ourselves, we shall still show compassion to those who cross our path. It is sad to see the corruption and even complete loss of *ubuntu* today.

Ubuntu is corrupted when it loses its universal sense and is interpreted in a narrow nationalistic, ethnic or familial fashion. The question is how inclusive the "we" really is (Smit 2007:119). Consequently, *ubuntu* means that I use my power in society to benefit those who are "of my own". I am a person through the ones close to me; and they benefit from my patronage to the exclusion of others who are not from my nation, tribe, family or political party. This tribalisation of *ubuntu* lies at the heart of factionalism in Africa. It knows no conflict of interest and is blinded by the pursuit of power, money and positions.

There are also signs that *ubuntu* has disappeared completely. The annihilation of *ubuntu* has its roots in the combined effect of Africans being swept off their feet by an "accelerated modernity" (Smit 2007:83) and cultural globalisation (see Naudé 2007) together with the interiorisation of the colonial master's image of us. The former implies an attitude of cultural diffidence ("global is always better than local"); the latter a deep sense of inferiority – that, if we do not look, act and talk like our former master (now the centre of the global village), then "we have not made it" yet.

The sad and ironic twist is, therefore, that we embrace the corrupted Enlightenment values – individualism, materialism, rationalism, secularism – against which we at first protested.[27] But the more we adopt this new (so-called global) lifestyle, the more we make ourselves believe that we are good and successful people. In the meantime, the weak and the vulnerable fall by the wayside; the old sit alone; those dying of AIDS are socially shunned; foreigners – many of them desperate – are attacked; and tax money (the small proportion that does reach the state's coffers in many African countries) is spent on sport stadiums and airports for the rich and benefits for the ruling elite, instead of being in- vested in education and basic health care for the poor.

The result is that the terms of the contract between the state and the people (in those African countries where there are forms of democratic rule) are not complied with. Many African countries cannot be seen as "well-ordered societies" (as described by Rawls) and find themselves mostly in the opposite position, of "burdened societies" where many of the

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26 Cf. Mbiti's discussion of this in the context of kinship, Mbiti 1969:108-109.

27 Read Smit's account of the moving Mandela Lecture by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, who laments the loss of communality: "With every passing second, they (the demons embedded in our society) advise, with rhythmic and hypnotic regularity – Get rich! Get rich! Get rich!" (Smit 2007:116).

burdens are self-inflicted (Rawls 1999). Even in resource-rich countries like Nigeria, Angola, the DRC, Sudan and South Africa (and, with its newfound oil, in Uganda as well), the question remains whether the benefits reach ordinary people in the form of improved infrastructure and living conditions.

Why must we speak of the African "curse" of resources instead of "blessings?" One of the reasons for this lack of service delivery is corruption in its many forms. The Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International (see bibliography) may be criticised on academic grounds and may show a degree of geographical bias. Nevertheless, it has become an international benchmark of progress or not against the millions of dollars lost to Africa (and others) on an annual basis. Amongst the countries with the lowest scores on this Index, we should admit – to our shame – the majority are from Africa.

If we in Africa could translate *ubuntu* philosophy into political and governance terms, this continent would have a prosperous future in the encompassing sense of the word. The philosophy is in place; it is the policies and actions that are missing.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEHUMANISATION

Let us look at the biblical passage from which the theme of this essay was selected (Gen. 4).[28] I assume this narrative is known to most people reading this piece. Cain, driven by jealousy, could – from his own perspective – claim victory over his brother Abel. This was in fact an ultimate victory, as Abel was no longer there to taunt him or seek favours ahead of him. When confronted by God (who had called him to restraint in advance[29] with the simple question, "Where is your brother?" Cain follows the well-known strategy of denial: "I do not know." He quickly attempts to turn possible exposure of his misdeed into relinquishing the responsibility for his brother. His rhetorical question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is a hollow question, because Cain knows what the answer is (and he knows that God knows).

Inhumanity may seem like a victory over "the other", but it usually has destructive relational consequences: As we learn from the psalmist, acts of inhumanity against others are at its deepest level acts against the will of God. "Against you alone I have sinned", says David to God in Psalm 51, though he has (horizontally speaking) sinned against Uriah, Bathsheba and Nathan (by lying about his act). Cain's troubled relationship with God reaches a low point as God calls him to account and pronounces judgement on him to the point of cursing him in his personal capacity (Gen. 4:11). An act of dehumanisation first and foremost strains one's relation- ship with God.

The effects of this one act of inhumanity are then vividly portrayed in other relations:

- The familial bond between Cain and his parents are severed. The unity of the first family is destroyed. The joy of Eve's firstborn ("I acquired a man with the help of the Lord", Gen. 4:1) turns into sorrow as the first parents in fact lose both their sons.

- There are also ecological consequences. The relationship with the earth, the source of our survival for Cain and others in an agricultural economy, turns nonproductive

28 Quotations from this and other biblical passages are taken not from a specific translation, and is a free translation/interpretation by the author.
29 Cf. Gen. 4:4-6, where the Lord addressed Cain's anger and warned him not to give in to his sinful desires.

in the real sense of the word: If Cain works the fields, the land will no longer yield according to its potential (Gen. 4:12).

- The "political" consequence is that Cain's bond with his homeland is threatened: as he is sent into exile with no fixed future address (Gen.4:12). He is to wander aimlessly – always on the run – with no opportunity to establish a stable future home and family life.

- His relationship with all other people is affected: they will turn against him as his reputation as first killer haunts him and makes him the object of other people's revenge. He himself knows now that violence begets violence, and that it is very difficult to escape the circle of attack and counterattack. Hence his own admission that "whoever finds me will kill me" (Gen.4: 14).

It is clear: one act of so-called victory spins out of control and affects the whole network of relations at stake. We cannot dehumanise others and still retain our own humanity. The "victors" are – often without realising it – themselves "victims".

THE RESTORATION OF HUMANITY: A JUDEO-CHRISTIAN VIEW

We need not accept inhumanity as normal pattern of interaction on the African continent. In fact, our hopes for a changed continent can be shaped largely by the Judeo-Christian tradition. In situations of inhumanity, the question is not only: "What is the state of affairs?", but also and definitively: "Who is God?" "Whenever we speak about compassionate justice," writes Dirkie Smit, "we should begin by speaking about *God*" (2009a:377, Smit's emphasis). This should then be followed by a call to return or to turn back from our ways to this God. The Genesis narrative tells us who God is:

A return to God as Creator

The Bible commences with the simple but startling confession: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth." By God's creative word everything that is, is called into existence. As part of this (first) creation narrative, the creation of humankind stands as the pinnacle of God's work; as creatures created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27).

The ethical implications of these confessions are now clear to us: First, we are stewards of this creation, given to us as gift by God to use responsibly. In theology the development of ecological ethics and environmental justice has strongly built on this creation tradition. Second, the fact that humans were created in the image of God has been seen as powerful support for the notion of human rights, particularly the first-generation and non-alienable right to life. We shall not kill another person (either by word or attitude, or by physical means), because all people – no matter of what race, class, gender, HIV status, sexual orientation[30] or level of education – are image-bearers of God. – for whatever reasons – no court of law is able or willing to ask this piercing question of us regarding our brothers and sisters, God does so indeed.

A return to the Creator-God will serve Africa well: we shall act responsibly to protect and enhance the numerous natural gifts God freely gave us on this continent. We shall understand

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30 At the time of the original speech, a fierce debate raged in Uganda about punishment of gay and lesbian people, even to the point of instituting the death penalty against them.

that we are but stewards of the natural resources at our disposal to use for the good of all people and future generations. And we shall see all other people – on this continent and elsewhere – as image-bearers of God, and therefore as brothers and sisters whose keepers we are. This is the religious foundation of our indigenous philosophy of *ubuntu.*

A return to God as Judge

In civil life we have created the law as judge of our actions. No ordered and just society is possible without a sound and independent legal system. Healthy democracies are known, among other things, for their efficient and fair systems of jurisprudence. The law is important, and is usually seen as the ethical minimum below which we should not fall.

But, for a variety of reasons, the law is not a perfect guide to action: Laws may have legal force, but may also be unjust in principle and in effect; laws are slow to capture and regulate new realities, so that for a while there may be a vacuum in which no clear guidelines exist and where we have to wait for new cases to be heard to create precedents for future cases; and laws may exist or be applied ununiformly across the nations of the globe – creating loopholes for many who seek to flee from justice in one country to the next.

At a global level, we have created the International Court of Justice in The Hague, but even this institution is not recognised and its injunctions not respected by all – a fact that limits its possibilities for establishing a court of appeal.

From a Judeo-Christian perspective, God is seen as the ultimate Judge. The values and requirements of God's law should be our guide, as this law in many cases asks more of us than the law of the land. Because in God there is neither darkness nor inhumanity, God cannot accept our actions of inhumanity, either towards nature or towards other human beings. Like Cain, we are first and foremost accountable not to other people (or the electorate), but to God. When – for whatever reasons – no court of law is able or willing to ask this piercing question of us regarding our brothers and sisters, God does so indeed.

God's question to African leaders is straightforward and simple: "Where is your brother Abel?" This question is a metaphor for the millions of killed, maimed, displaced and marginalised people who suffer not because of natural disasters, but because of inhumane, wilful actions of those in power or seeking power.

We must not trivialise the seriousness of God's judgement. However, we must not see this judgement as "active revenge" on God's part. No, God's "judgement" consists mostly in leaving us to face the consequences of our own ill deeds. God's judgement is first and foremost realised via the self-inflicted disastrous consequences of our inhuman actions. Like in the case of Cain, the destructive con- sequences spread fast in concentric circles from personal relations to the farthest corners of the earth on which we live.

However, the Old Testament teaches us that God's fury and sorrow over sin also cause him to act. God does – according to some biblical traditions – curse people and cities and countries and the earth. Therefore, we need to live "in the fear of the Lord" – a fear characterised by deep respect for God's holiness, mixed with a fear characterised by love for God's justice.

As African leaders we stand not only before earthly forms of justices (or vigorously attempt to avoid even this justice); we are confronted by the living God, in whom there is no injustice. To this God we are accountable, and by this God we are judged.

A return to God as graceful God

God the Creator-Judge is also a God of grace and restoration. "God's justice is a saving justice, a caring justice, a merciful justice" (Smit 2009a:377). It is to the same God who cursed him and the earth (Gen. 4:10-12) that Cain turns for help: "My guilt is too big to carry", he says, explaining to God that he will be an ever-fleeing fugitive on the earth, and that all who meet him, will want to kill him (Gen. 4:13-14).

God does not reject a humble and contrite heart. Confessing guilt and debt is the first step towards restoration. God's successive acts of grace are amazing in the context of this narrative. He makes good precisely on the consequences of Cain's inhumane act:

Cain will not be murdered. Instead, he will be protected by a sign so that others will know that whoever kills him will be repaid sevenfold for this act (v.15). Instead of becoming an ever-fleeing fugitive, Cain finds a fixed abode in the land Nod, east of Eden (v. 16). Instead of being alone and cut off from human community, Cain marries and receives a firstborn son, Enoch, after whom a city is named. Verses 17-23 describe Cain's family tree and tell of the agricultural and economic achievements of his descendants.

In theology we (rightly) focus on God as the God of the oppressed and the marginalised. We need not forget that God also extends undeserved care to the oppressor; to those who cause suffering and commits inhumanities. When oppressors turn to God to seek grace, forgiveness and restoration, God is faithful and makes new beginnings possible.[31]

Not only to Cain, but also to the first parents, God extends God's grace. Eve gives birth to another child, called Seth, "as God gifted me another child in the place of Able, because Cain killed him" (v. 25). The long genealogy starting in Genesis 4:26 and extending to the whole of chapter 5 is an enumeration of God's faithfulness to Adam and Eve and their descendants.

The best place for African leaders is on their knees before God. We must openly bring the enormous burdens and ambiguities of this continent, and our own irresponsibility's and misdeeds, before God. Some of us might say with Cain: "My guilt of neglect and burden of responsibility are too big to carry." Be sure of God's restorative response – our only hope for a new African future.

The future of humanisation

Genesis 4 tellingly ends with a simple but important observation: "Then they (Adam's descendants) began to call on the Name of the Lord" (v. 26).[32]

This is the ultimate act of a restored humanity: to give honour and praise to God; to acknowledge God as Creator, Judge, and the source of grace; to elevate God's Name above all other names known to us; to rely not on our own power and ingenuity, but on God to

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31 Cf. Smit's essays on reconciliation, confession, guilt, truth and seeking forgiveness in the Christian tradition; Smit 2007:287-342. On restorative justice and grace, cf. Naudé 2010b:201-210.

32 I interpret this verse in a doxological sense. The ecclesiological theme of worship is a key feature of Smit's theology. He maintains the public and political significance of prayer and liturgy, drawing on the insights of diverse authors like John de Gruchy, Douglas Hall, Dietrich Ritschl, Nicholas Wolterstorff and Geoffrey Wainwright. Cf. Smit 2007:425-53. Cf. also his short statement, "Justice, compassion and worship – these three together. The one cannot do without the other" (2009a:378).

create and co-create with us a blessed future in which culture, technology and economy work together to make Africa a continent of humanity.

We need to dream a new dream and build a "transformative vision" for this continent in the good faith that God makes possible the impossible.[33] The dissonance and distance between Cain – guilty before God – and his subsequent history demonstrate how far God's restoration can reach. Tradition has painted Cain mostly in a negative way, as representing the power of sin from the very beginnings of humankind.[34] This view is only partially correct, and not in line with the witness or structure[35] of the Genesis narrative:

Cain, the condemned, receives protection from God. Cain, the lone fugitive, receives land to live on. Cain, the murderer of his brother, receives his own children and is rich in descendants. Cain, the simple farmer whose sacrifice was rejected, turns into an architect and the builder of a city (4:17). Cain, remembered in tradition mainly for his fratricide, brings forth generations of achievers in the field of agriculture (Gen. 4:20), music (4:21) and technology (4:22).[36]

In many political and economic circles, Africa is the continent of negativity; the land that fell off the global radar screen. Even among Africans themselves there are some who share in a general Afro-pessimism and who will do all in their power to leave this continent, as they have lost the expectation of a new and different future. That is quite understandable if the concept of "future" is nothing more than the prolongation of existing potential. This type of orientation towards the future will always sway between optimism and pessimism, depending on perceptions about the current situation.

However, what we call hope in the Judeo-Christian tradition is different. It does not look at the potential or constraints of the current situation and then make up a balanced scorecard of how the future might look. No, Christian faith is rooted in God's promises and God's ability to make all things new far beyond our calculations, efforts and highest expectations.

Only God can turn a Cain into a blessing to himself, to others, and to the world in which he lives.

Why not Africa as well? God bless Africa … and her leaders.

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33 Dirkie Smit refers to Niebuhr's idea of a transformative vision as having both an affirming and critical function: affirming the important potential of politics, culture and economics, and "at the same time criticizing the sinful aspects of a particular situation" (Smit 2007:414, note 9).

34 Even the intra-canonical reception of the Cain narrative demonstrates this negative interpretation: Hebrews 11:4 mentions that Abel brought a better sacrifice than Cain; Matthew 23:35 speaks of Abel in the context of the shedding of innocent blood; 1 John 3:12 calls to brotherly love in contrast to Cain, who killed his brother because he was filled with the Evil One; and Jude 1:11 is a call not to follow the ways of Cain.

35 There is fair consensus amongst exegetes that Genesis 2:4b-11:26 is structured around the sequential themes of God as Creator, the problem of sin, God's judgement and God's sustaining grace. For a discussion, cf. William Lasor (et al.) 1994:75-87; and for a more technical analysis, read the standard reference work on Genesis, Westermann 1974:24-88.

36 Westermann interprets the enumeration of different occupations here and elsewhere in Genesis 1-11 as references to "die Kulturerrungenschaften der Menscheit", each implying a new "Fähigheit" (1974:15).

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KEY WORDS
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Public theology
Humanization
Africa
Ubuntu

TREFWOORDE
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Humanisering
Afrika
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Church and war in the theology of Karl Barth

ABSTRACT

The issues around church and war followed Karl Barth during his whole career. His most extensive and systematic discussions of war are found in the Church Dogmatics. Here he questions the naturalness of war and develops a theologically motivated understanding of the practical primacy of pacifism for the disciples of Christ. However, his discussion of possible exceptions qualifies the main line of his argument to such an extent that the latter loses most of its content. His practical imagination was shaped by established semi-national churches and by his native Switzerland. This disjunction between his central theological account and his practical reasoning helps explain why his thoughts on war have been used by proponents of radically different positions. What is lacking is a display of the sort of church life and practice this kind of thinking presupposes. This is true whether one emphasises the main pacifist argument or develops Barth's thought in the direction of the just war tradition.

World War I, especially Christian theological justification of war, militarism and nationalism, led Karl Barth to a radical theological rethinking. (For details of the following, see Rasmusson 2005a.) One can follow his reactions in his correspondence with Martin Rade and Wilhelm Herrmann. For months Barth's sermons dealt with the war. The first major results of his theological reconstruction – his commentary on Romans, which was published in two quite different editions – can in part be read as sustained attacks on the ideological support of the culture that caused this war – but also, especially in the second edition – on ideological support for revolutionary violence. In this regard, Bruce McCormack even talks about "an ethic of nonviolence" (McCormack 1995:282). Barth asked, for example:

What more radical action can [the revolutionary] perform than the action of turning back to the original root of "not doing" – and NOT be angry, NOT engage in an assault, NOT demolish? (Barth 1933:481)

Barth did not, however, espouse pacifism as a general ethical position (Barth 1933:471). A few years later, in 1925, he described militarism, together with *völkisch* nationalism and anti-Semitism, as a confessional issue (Barth 1990:604-643).

In his ethics lectures of 1928, Barth provides his first longer and systematic discussion of war from a Christian ethical perspective (Barth 1981:143-146, 154-160). He discusses the new ideology of war. This new ideology is the consequence of modern total warfare and the idea of general conscription, which emphasises that, as members of a nation and citizens of a

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state we partake in its warfare even if we are not soldiers. Warfare no longer is the business of princes and the vocation of soldiers. Barth is of the opinion that the element of truth in this is that, if we belong to a people, we are also involved in its warfare – even if we have personally worked against its policies, even if we think our own country is in the wrong, or if we are conscientious objectors. It remains *our* people. However, Barth does criticise the way this ideology emphasises our fighting for our people, which tends to hide the fact that we are also killing the soldiers of another people. Barth does not think Christian ethics should condemn war in general, but it can help weaken modern military nationalism by concretely and realistically describing warfare as the killing of enemies "for coal and potash" (Barth 1981:159), thereby refusing to justify warfare ethically and spiritually. From this point of view, Barth can repeat his harsh criticism of the role played by theology during World War I:

> Servility of this kind was what made the war theology of all countries in the last war such an abhorrent phenomenon. Ethically, the most dangerous form of participation in war is the chaplains' service (Barth 1981:158).

Barth does not think that ethics as such can either disallow or allow war. We should not as a general principle defend pacifism or conscientious objection, but neither should ethics be used for giving spiritual support for militarism. God commands respect for life, but we cannot control the concrete content of the command. We have to be open to the possibility of being commanded to go to war. Barth, however, also points to the opposite possibility. In his words,

> …it may also be that as we listen more closely to what [God's command] demands of us, reason will be taken out of the ultimate reason and the resultant slogan will be: "*Down* with armaments" (Barth 1981:160).

In a similar way, Barth is very cautious about using revolution to overthrow the state, although this may be a last resort "in extreme and very rare circumstances" (Barth 1981:446).

Nazi Germany's aggression and then World War II prompted Barth to reflect further on warfare. In September 1938 he wrote a very famous letter to Czech theologian Josef Hromadka on "the Czech crisis" that had led to the Munich Agreement. The letter was published first in the Czech press, and then also in France, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. In it Barth attacks the Western powers' appeasement policy with regard to Hitler's claim on Czechoslovakia and the bankruptcy of post war pacifism, and he calls the Czechs to resistance. Most well-known and controversial is the following sentence:

> Jeder tschechische Soldat, der dann streitet und leidet, wird es auch für uns – und, ich sage es heute ohne Vorbehalt: er wird es auch für die Kirche Jesu Christitun, die in dem Dunstkreis der Hitler und Mussolini nur entweder der Lächerlichkeit oder der Ausrottung verfallen kann (Barth 2001:114. Cf. further 107-133).[2]

Barth was very widely, publicly and harshly criticised for this letter – especially in Germany, of course – also by his friends in Germany. The leader of the Confessing Church even wrote

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2 "Every Czech soldier who then fights and suffers will do that for us as well – and, I say this today unreservedly: he will also do it for the church of Jesus Christ, that in the atmosphere of Hitler and Mussolini is bound to fall prey to either ridicule or extinction."

a public letter of censure because of it. It led, further more, to the decision to ban Barth's publications in Germany. At the time Barth thought that, had the Western democracies resisted, Hitler would have backed down because Germany was not yet ready to go to war.

In December of that same year (1938), Barth defended his stand in a lecture that was published as *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day*. In that lecture Barth said that sometimes the church had to be neutral or oppose the wars of one's own country. However, there were also times when the church had to support and call for armed defence. The Czech situation was such a situation, as would be any defence against continued German aggression. The reason was that Germany at that time represented "the dissolution of the just State". The church should support the defence of a just state "just as she would support a police measure taken in the normal way". Defending the just state would also indirectly be defending the cause of the church, as it cannot function in a totally unjust state such as Nazi Germany. Barth concluded:

> [W]ould that the Church had concerned herself much more seriously with the restoration of the just State before matters had reached such a pass that she is concerned for its preservation in this form (Barth 1939:79).

And after the war broke out, Barth strongly defended it in similar language and also contrasted it with World War I: "[W]e approve it as a righteous war, which God does not simply allow, but which He commands us to wage" (Barth 1941a:4). In light of the German threat, pacifism had become unchristian and contributed to making the world defenceless (Barth 1944:21, 25).

Barth's most extensive and most systematic discussion of war as a Christian ethical question is in his *Church Dogmatics* (*CD*), in a volume originally published in 1951. This discussion is found in his ethics of creation as part of his discussion on the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" (CD III/4:450-470). As in his ethics lectures of 1928, he stresses that everyone is involved when a country wages war nowadays, that waging war primarily has to do with material interests, and that war is about killing as many of the enemy as possible. He sees it as perhaps hopeful that we have been forced "to face the reality of war without any optimistic illusions" (*CD* III/4:453). Any affirmation of the possibility that participation in warfare in certain circumstances may be commanded by God must, Barth says, "start with the assumption that the inflexible negative of pacifism has almost infinite arguments in its favour and is almost overpowering strong" (*CD* III/4:455).

Barth also takes up the issue of the radical shift in the Constantinian and post Constantinian church's understanding of violence and war, namely from aversion to the use of violence in the early church "to a no less self-evident affirmation of what had been previously thought impossible" (*CD* III/4:455). He seems to think that, on a theological level, this related to a "degeneration of ecclesiastical eschatology and the resultant overestimation and misinterpretation of the events and laws of the present world" (*CD* III/4:455). Even if Barth does not accept pacifism, he thinks the church has taken the "reality" of this world more seriously than the coming of the kingdom of God. "The criterion has thus been lost without the application of which there can be no controlling Christian will and action within this passing aeon" (*CD* III/4:456). War is seen as natural and even as part of the essence of the state. The history of nations, to a large extent, can be described as a history of war. This image, he says, needs to be demythologised. The church can never describe warfare as an essential part of the God willed order of the state. He goes even further and denies that "the exercise of force constitutes the essence of the state, i.e. its *opus proprium*"; instead, "it is an *opus alienum* for

the state to have to exercise force" (*CD* III/4:456).[3] Or, put positively, "[the state's] normal task is to fashion peace in such a way that life is served and war kept at bay" (*CD* III/4:458). Christian ethics can never give *carte blanche* to the use of warfare, but must try to make it only the *ultima ratio*.

Barth's discussion of this issue, as was said earlier, forms part of his creation ethics. However, he also refers to the use of force in his reflection on Christian discipleship and sanctification (*CD* IV/2:533-553, published in 1955). Considering the concrete form of Jesus' demand, Barth says:

> It is common to every instance that the obedience concretely demanded of, and to be achieved by, the disciple, always means that he must move out of conformity with what he hitherto regarded as the self-evident action and abstention of Lord Everyman and into the place allotted to him, so that he is inevitably isolated in relation to those around him, not being able or willing to do in this place that which is generally demanded by the gods who are still fully respected in the world around. At this particular place the disciple is freed from the bonds of that which is generally done or not done, because and as he is bound now to Jesus (*CD* IV/2:546).

Although the disciple is freed from what is generally done, he/she is now not bound to an alternative general system of ethics, a new general law. Yet, Barth notes, the Gospels do point towards certain general lines of concrete obedience to Jesus. In discussing this, Barth also takes up the issue of force, saying that Jesus' command "takes the concrete form of an attestation of the kingdom of God as the end of the fixed idea of the necessity and beneficial value of force" (*CD* IV/2:549). Barth refers to several sayings in the Gospels that expressly state or imply that the disciples should not use force, and which "invalidate the whole friend foe relationship". These sayings are, according to Barth, based in the new reality of the kingdom that has come in Jesus Christ. Barth concludes that, although this should not be made into a general rule, the direction is clear and has to be carried out.

According to the sense of the New Testament we cannot be pacifists in principle, only in practice. But we have to consider very closely whether, if we are called to discipleship, we can avoid being practical pacifists, or fail to be so (*CD* IV/2:550).

George Hunsinger claims that this understanding of discipleship is grounded in Barth's Trinitarian understanding of the cross and the atonement. In the cross God meets the enemy with suffering love. "The politics of God thus reveals itself as the politics of nonviolent love" (Hunsinger 2000:35, cf. further 34-40). Christians are called to participate in God's life, which makes the cross the norm for Christian life.

According to Barth, it is only against the background of such a denial of the naturalness and necessity of war and a positive striving for peace that Christian ethics can also deny the absoluteness of pacifism. Even if war is not a necessity, neither can Christian ethics say that the possibility can be eliminated. A nation can, due to the behaviour of another nation, find itself in a situation where it has to face the possibility that "its very existence and autonomy" (*CD* III/4:461) is at stake. However, Barth does not think that even this automatically justifies war. What can make a war justifiable and even demanded by God is when the loss of independence will also lead to the loss of something that cannot be given up:

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3 I have changed the translation of *gewaltübung* from "power" to "force."

It may well be that in and with the independence of a nation there is entrusted to its people something which, without any claim or pretension, they are commissioned to attest to others, and which they may not therefore surrender (*CD* III/4:462).

Barth even suggests that a people's relationship with God may be bound to its independence. He thus thinks that his own Switzerland, for example, should be defended (so also in Barth 1939:72-74). Likewise, a nation that is not itself under attack may be called to defend another nation that is.

On the issue of the responsibility of the individual, Barth says that every individual, as every Christian, is bound to the state; even, is the state. From this follows, on the one hand, that no one can leave all responsibility to the political authorities, but has to take responsibility him or herself. On the other hand, no one can discuss the issue of war as a private individual only, but has to take decisions as a citizen in solidarity with the state.

Barth defends the idea of general conscription, because it makes the question of warfare an issue that concerns the whole population. However, he also expects there to be situations where individuals, still in solidarity with their nations, will refuse to do military service. This presupposes that they do it as citizens, and not for their private conscience, and that they are ready to face the consequences of their refusal in the form of penalty and hostility. Christians must know that refusal to take part in a specific war may be what God commands. In this case too, Barth does not think that this should be a decision of the individual only. It should also be a church decision, and it should be taken with the specific case in mind (*CD* III/4:464-470; cf. Barth 1939:76-79). It can also never be an easy decision. In a different context, Barth expresses this hope: "May the Church show her inventiveness in the search for other solutions before she joins in the call for violence!" (Barth 1954:41).

His discussion of war in *Church Dogmatics* III was written primarily against the background of the aggression of Nazi Germany. Barth later found this problematic and saw it as a weakness (Barth 1971:81.) He thought the greatest flaw was his failure to deal with the changed situation created by the development of nuclear weapons. Nuclear war could never be justified, Barth claimed, and this made the just use of warfare even more unlikely (Barth 1971:83). The 1950s was characterised by an intense debate on nuclear weapons. Also at issue was whether Germany and Switzerland should develop their own. This was the only time, other than 1934, when Barth participated in a sort of confession regarding political issues. In April 1958, the Church Brotherhoods, which were a kind of continuation of the Confessing Church, presented ten theses to the Synod of the German Evangelical Church (reproduced in Yoder 2003:101-103). These theses were anonymously written by Barth and stated that nuclear weapons, the use of which would mean the mutual annihilation of warring nations as well as of innocent neighbouring nations, had created a new situation in which the church could not be neutral. Not only the use, but also the preparation for nuclear warfare was a sin and no Christian could participate in either of those activities. According to the final thesis, "An opposite viewpoint or a neutral stance on this question is *indefensible in Christian terms.* Both would mean the denial of all three articles of Christian faith." The Synod did not accept these theses that, understandably, created much controversy, even among people associated with Barth during the church struggle. The year before Barth had already spoken out against nuclear weapons in response to similar appeals by Albert Schweitzer and by eighteen German nuclear physicists. This was occasioned by Bundeskanzler Konrad Adenauer's opinion that the German army should also have tactical nuclear weapons (Barth 1984:389-392). Barth also took part in a similar debate on possible Swiss nuclear armament (Barth 1984:398f.).

Barth's position constitutes a remarkable break both with the Christian tradition in established churches generally and with twentieth century European theology in particular. Most of the theologians of his teachers' generation (such as Troeltsch, Herrmann, Harnack and Seeberg) and his own generation (such as Althaus and Hirsch) took the position that was also generally favoured in academic circles among historians and social and political scientists, namely that war simply is; it is a necessity, one of the foremost forces that create history, something that determines the role of peoples and nations. Thus it cannot be judged by ordinary ethical means. Even the doctrine of "just war" is impossible to accept. It would, for example, have made the recent unification of Germany illegitimate.[4]

Barth not only sharply criticised this idea of the naturalness and necessity of war; he also increasingly questioned the Christendom assumptions that most people had taken for granted (Rasmusson 2005b). In their description of reality, Christians should take the reality of the kingdom of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, more seriously than so called realistic descriptions of the unavoidability of war. Moreover, united with Jesus Christ, the Christian is freed from what seems self-evident for "Lord Everyman". Christians see the world through different eyes and need not do what seems necessary from the perspective of others or those in power. Barth thus made a strong theological case for Christian pacifism as representing a general rule of discipleship. Although not an absolute principle, it is the normal path for the Christian church.

However, this represents only one side of Barth's discussion. He also said that every individual (including the Christian) was the state and as such had to act in close solidarity with and responsibility for the state and its people. Only in exceptional circumstances would the individual not do what, in a manner of speaking, was expected of Lord Everyman. When Barth described possible exceptions, he did it in a way that seems – contrary to his general argument – to make pacifist resistance an exception. His position was also so used in the debate about German rearmament and nuclear weapons in the 1950s and early 1960s, though Barth himself described this use of his argument as "sheer wickedness" (Barth 1971:82). It did go against the main thrust of his thinking, but the way he discussed the exceptions certainly left his argument open to such a line of interpretation. This becomes clear if one compares Barth's discussion of war with his reflections on abortion, euthanasia, suicide, the death penalty and homicide. He did say that any acceptance of the use of warfare mustincorporate a recognition that even *in extremis* it is far more difficult to express even a qualified affirmative at this point than when we stand on the outer margin in such matters as suicide, abortion, self-defence etc. (*CD* III/4:455).

This is, however, not the impression one gets when reading Barth's discussion of possible situations when warfare might be necessary.

David Haddorf describes Barth's position on war as "dialectical, open ended, and … contextually linked to God's command in specific circumstances" (Haddorff 2010:386). But the section on war in *Church Dogmatics* is not explicitly related to specific circumstances, and Barth himself saw it as a problem that it was shaped too much by the situation of World War II, or maybe that he had not taken the new nuclear age seriously enough. One might more generally say that, in practice, Barth generalised one specific context, namely mid twentieth century Switzerland. Like most people he simply assumed the relative goodness and justness of his own nation. This was easy to do within the contexts of war since Switzerland had been living in peace

4 For Barth's direct discussion of this tradition, see *CD* III/4:457f.

since the time of Napoleon. It was then, as now, unimaginable that it would aggressively attack its neighbours. Instead, it had at the time just experienced the unparalleled threat from Nazi Germany. Thus the experience of Switzerland goes well with Barth's theology of war and peace. But how should, say, British or American Christians read him? They (or most of them) also think that they represent relatively good and just societies that their nations are carriers of something that they are not allowed to abandon but are commanded to defend; and, in contrast to Switzerland, they see themselves as nations that have a responsibility towards the whole world. They intend to live up to this responsibility, even if it means the use of force – the same sort of responsibility Barth pleaded for during World War II. One should also remember that German theologians, such as Troeltsch and Herrmann, used exactly the same arguments to justify Germany's part in World War I as Barth used concerning Switzerland. In World War I, Germany was defending its specific culture and Germany's God given role in history. What would Barth have said if Switzerland had been invaded during that war? An invasion at that time would not have had the same post war consequences as an invasion by Nazi Germany.

In other respects as well, Barth's theological thinking reflects his Swiss context. He is not only a strong defender of universal conscription, but he also thinks that a general conscientious objection stance should not be legally recognised (as was the case in Switzerland at that time). There is no place in his political conception for, say, the so-called historic peace churches. Other churches should demand of the state that members of such churches should be punished for their refusing to do military service, both in times of peace and war. Barth does recognise that the introduction of universal conscription at the time of the French Revolution was closely connected to modern nationalism and that it led to the militarisation of European societies and to the emergence of the phenomenon of total war, which has resulted in what war historian John Keegan has called the "extraordinary, monstrous cultural aberration" World War I (Keegan 1993:21; cf. 347-366). However, another side to the argument seems more important to Barth: the close connection between universal conscription, citizenship and democracy, between arms bearing and equality. Again, every individual is the state. (Where does this leave women? At the time, Switzerland did not even have women's suffrage!) Every individual is responsible for the politics of his or her state. Barth seems to say that Christians – outside Switzerland – should have refused to do military service, most of the time, because most wars have been unjust. But when you have a system of universal military conscription, strongly defended by a church that also thinks that military service is compulsory for its members, then it is difficult to contemplate that refusal to serve is anything other than the exception. There are almost no historic examples of such selective refusal. The most clear cut case for refusing to serve was in Germany during World War II. In 1939, Barth actually made some attempts to call upon Christians in Germany to refuse to serve in the German army, to become involved in sabotage and boycotts instead. He found no support for this among his theological friends in the Confessing Church. Of course, refusing military service in Germany would have meant death (some were executed for this very reason), fleeing the country or going underground. But many also thought it wrong to refuse military service for Christian ethical reasons. Therefore, Barth thought this attempt to call Germans to refuse doing military service was pointless, and he did not write publicly about it (Busch 1996:346; Gollwitzer 1962:337-342).

Also reflecting his Swiss tradition of an armed male population keeping their weapons with them at home is Barth's criticism of "the institution of standing armies" (*CD* III/4:460). Because of modern arms technology, this was a rather unrealistic expectation and one

cannot be sure what Barth meant by it. However, David Clough suggests that taking Barth's position seriously would mean that "there is no mandate to prepare for war" even if one has to be ready for that very rare occasion when God will call Christians to war (Clough 2005:98). To prepare for war might be compared to a situation where the state and the church support a system of euthanasia and suicide clinics, although euthanasia should be an extreme exception. The difference is, of course, that any effective military defence requires large scale preparation. In a critical discussion of the Cold War Barth writes: "I must admit that if I were an American or British statesman I would not neglect preparations for a possible military defence" (Barth 1951). In 1938 he called on Western powers to stand up against Germany's aggression against Czechoslovakia. To do this, long and large scale preparations for war would have been needed. One problem was that, in the period between World Wars I and II, England was much more antimilitaristic than Germany and, therefore, could not arm itself quickly enough. Barth accuses interwar pacifism for contributing to this situation. But is it not likely that a hypothetical English church dominated by Barthian theology would have supported such anti-war sentiments?

Given Barth's historical description of the role of warfare in history, World War II is an exceptional case. He could even write, during the war, that this war had "a totally different character (Barth 1941b:32). However, it stills functions as the primary implicit background for his general reflection on war as an ethical issue. This creates severe tensions in his account. Oliver O'Donovan, on the other hand, thinks that Barth's continuing espousal of his very critical view of the historical role of warfare shows that Barth did not learn anything from World War II precisely because he saw it as an exception (O'Donovan 2004:264). Critics may say that one has to prepare for the worst possible scenario even if it is unlikely. Compared to Europe, the USA used to be antimilitaristic, but now its policy is one of absolute military superiority. However, it is hard to imagine that anyone would dispute Barth's overall description of the history of war up to 1950. O'Donovan's own discussion of the just war tradition, although using historical material, clearly assumes the post1945 situation and takes for granted that the type of situation that World War II exemplifies is normal rather than abnormal (O'Donovan 2003).

Some would say that these tensions show that Barth's theological account is inadequate or one sided, others that he did not truly draw out the consequences of his theological account. O'Donovan claims that Barth's position creates a disjunction between actual politics and the gospel, and that it would be better if he had a fully developed just war account. He thinks that Barth was sceptical of the language of just war (see Barth 1971:82) because it seems to make war seem normal. Yet, not to reflect deeply on such issues and on what preparing for a just war could lead to more indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force in a situation of war than a Christian should accept (O'Donovan 2004:246-275). However, one might also say – as John Howard Yoder does – that Barth's concrete discussions of Nazi Germany, nuclear pacifism and revolutionary violence (in practice, if not in words) were informed by just war thinking (Yoder 2003:119f.). In the 1950s, when he was discussing the possible overthrow of governments, he proposed three relative criteria that are typical of the just war tradition. The first is that the government should have reached a state of such intolerable injustice and inhumanity that it cannot be a state anymore. Second that all other means should have been exhausted. Third, that war would offer "a real opportunity to better the situation". Barth thought that most revolutions had failed on the third criterion, if not already on the other two (Barth 1963:76f.). However, in his discussion of war in *Church Dogmatics* Barth seems to deny this third criterion when he writes that if the command of God should

require a nation – say Switzerland – to defend itself, this command should be understood as "quite unconditional", as independent of the prospects of success (*CD* III/4:463). The people should, therefore, fight to the end (whatever that is), even if they think that the outcome will be the same; except that many more people will be killed and much more destruction will follow – probably including a worsening of whatever conditions prompted the defence to start with. So it was presumably wrong, say, for Denmark in 1940 to more or less surrender without fighting. Criticising pacifist absolutism Barth ends up with absolutism. Yoder comments:

> It is hard to see how, after starting with such realism as his position demanded at the outset, Barth could ever come to say in effect that precisely those countries which have the least chance of being able to defend themselves effectively, the small Western democracies, are the ones for whom war is most likely to be a commanded thing (Yoder 2003:68).

However, maybe Barth wanted to say that, if they had been specifically commanded by God to fight, they should do so without reflecting on the likelihood of success. Understood in this way, new and difficult questions arise about Barth's general understanding of God's command which I cannot deal with here (cf. McKenny 2010).

On the other hand, Hunsinger (like Yoder 2003 and Clough 2005), thinks that Barth's "equivocal relation to pacifism stands in contradiction to the thrust of his theology" (Hunsinger 2000:119). Although Barth displays little knowledge of the main tradition of Christian pacifism, often caricaturing it, his core theological argument is close to that tradition. It is, Yoder writes, "nearer in fact than that of any really prominent theologian in the history of European Protestant dogmatics" (Yoder 2003:10f. cf. 3638). It is also consistent with his overall theology. Still, one might well argue that Barth's discussion of possible exceptions qualifies the main line of his argument to such an extent that the latter loses most of its content. His practical imagination was shaped by established semi national churches and his native Switzerland. This disjunction between his central theological account and his practical reasoning helps explain why his thoughts of war have been used by radically different positions; in his own time in ways he himself thought perverse (for example, in the debates on German rearmament, the Cold War and communism, and nuclear weapons), and later on in debates on the use of revolutionary violence. What is lacking is a display of the sort of church life and practices this kind of thinking presupposes. This is true whether one emphasises the main pacifist argument or develops Barth's thought in the direction of the just war tradition (cf. Bell 2009).

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KEY WORDS
Karl Barth
Church
War
Pacifism
Just war

TREFWOORDE
Karl Barth
Kerk
Oorlog
Passivisme
Geregverdigde oorlog

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Confessional theology a belligerently public theology – How confessional theology relates to notions of Africanness and Reformedness

ABSTRACT

Confessional theology while insisting on the centrality of the Word of God in theological reflection, admits that the socio-economic, cultural and political; context in which such reflection tales place is vital. In paying homage to the theological contribution of Dirkie Smit in South Africa, this article argues that this is the most opportune time to consider how marginal issues of Africa still are in theological reflection today. Taken the baton from Smit, it is argued that confessional theology if it is to remain relevant must deal with issues of Africanness in theological reflections today.

INTRODUCTION

First allow me to express my heartfelt appreciation for the invitation to contribute in this *Festschrift* in celebration of the 60th birthday of my *Doktorvater,* Dirkie Smit. I am certain that most of the students that happened to find themselves under his tutelage would agree that he is indeed a theologian par excellence. Allowing his students their own views is not strange to him. It was especially this attitude that had allowed me to disagree freely with him. To my mind, Smit also has what I would like to call "an intelligent sense of humour". Dry in appearance, his humour is both intelligent and very funny.

Dirkie Smit is an avid reader of Reformed theology, especially the theology of John Calvin. I vividly remember the numerous times when he likened me to one student of Calvin of whom the latter once noted, must be thinking secretly that the old Calvin had lost some of his marbles when advising him on some issues. I must admit, however, that Smit was correct with his observation regarding me, for I did from time to time think that this great theologian and son of the church must be losing some from time to time. Still, there remains no doubt in my mind that Smit will be remembered for his immense contribution to theology in this country and the world in general.

I wish to partake in the celebration of his theological contribution both into confessional theological studies and its relations to the realities from which such confessions emanate. I wish to make my contribution by looking at the following: first, this paper will probe the notion of "confessional theology", looking especially at how that great Protestant theologian of the twentieth century Karl Barth impacted on the theological reflection of Dirkie Smit. In this endeavour I shall call to mind the Belhar Confession as an epitome of his theological deliberations. It will be argued that, just as it can be claimed that the Barmen Theological

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Declaration gives a brief overview of the theology of Karl Barth, so can it be claimed that the Belhar Confession presents us with an overview of the theology of Smit. Therefore, if one wishes to understand not only the theology of Smit, but more concretely its relationship to concrete realities, the Belhar Confession remains an important yardstick for measuring that.

Some similarities can be observed between Barth and Smit and this is merely because of the extent to which Barth had influenced Smit. I am, of course, aware that for Smit such a comparison might be problematic, yet I nonetheless wish to reflect on it some, especially as I refer to current issues. Smit has become known as a Reformed theologian who places a premium on Reformed spirituality. For some his emphasis on Reformed spirituality at first created the impression that all else is subservient to it. For students like me, who associated with the black consciousness movement, it was very easy to look at such theological talk with much scepticism. However, with this perception in mind, this paper will show how his staunch "Reformedness" in fact rendered Smit a formidable public theologian. Of course it cannot be expected of him to address all challenges that faced and continues to face theological discourse, yet the biases with which one enters these debates has to be acknowledged.

This paper will argue that Smit managed to become a public theologian of note primarily because he was able to articulate, for himself first, the essence of Reformed theology and its innate inclination to be geared towards the public. Having established that, I shall then return to what I believe to be very important conversations that are long overdue and remain marginal in all major Reformed theological discourse in South Africa, namely those on "Africanness" and its relationship to "Reformedness".

The Confessional Theology of Dirkie Smit

One cannot really appreciate the question regarding Smit's confessional theology without admitting from the outset that this is intimately linked to his Reformed faith. In fact, when one reflects on his theological engagements during and after apartheid, one quickly realises how, also in his best criticism of the heresy of apartheid, he remained convinced of the many noble intentions of the Reformed faith. Put differently, Reformed faith was never to be totally overhauled simply because of the misapplications by some in order to sanction an establishment that had its own motives, an establishment that, at best, remained contrary to the faith. Obviously Reformed faith took the issue of spiritually very seriously. It is, therefore, not by chance that it takes centre stage in Smit's theological reflections. However, whether his emphasis on Reformed spirituality was done to the satisfaction of many who were not part of the main stream of the faith remains something to be considered.

One could perhaps argue that one of the reasons why Smit, and others like him in the Reformed tradition, chose to challenge the legitimacy of the apartheid ideology was their conviction that it was a struggle for the heart of the Reformed faith. Smit refers to five central debates involved in this struggle – these debates also touch on the characteristics of his confessional theology. These are

> the conflicts about the Reformed understanding and use of the Word of God, the Reformed understanding of the church, the Reformed understanding of the truth of the gospel, the Reformed understanding of the concrete, visible and practical embodiment of this gospel, and the Reformed understanding of God's caring (Smit 2007b:31-32).

I shall not reiterate Smit's extensive treatment of these debates here but simply wish to point out how his conviction that the legitimacy of apartheid was beyond defence enabled him to return to central Reformed teachings and values in order to challenge the supposed theological legitimacy of apartheid. I refer to them in summary to illustrate my point:

> The first struggle revolved around the issue of the struggle regarding the Bible (2007b:31). Smit contends, and rightly so, that the reading of the Bible during apartheid was often a rather controversial matter. This was simply so because it (the Bible) was used to give theological and biblical legitimacy to apartheid. It is not by chance that the dominant biblical hermeneutics increasingly became suspect for those within the antiapartheid camp – also, and especially, within the Reformed tradition. Black liberation theology, which became an alternative biblical hermeneutics, increasingly met with disapproval from those in dominant biblical hermeneutics.

Closely linked to this struggle was a struggle for the church (2007:32). Given the relationship of the Bible to the church, this was to be expected. If the Bible and, therefore, theology is to be a phenomenon that is more at home within the ambit of the church, it follows naturally that significant questions relating to the latter's life and mission must come to light. The different camps within the Reformed tradition (that is, those supporting and challenging apartheid) had to battle out how the church had to visibly affirm a position supporting the legitimacy of apartheid or how to visibly challenge such legitimacy. When it comes to this one can clearly see, as Smit observes, how there remained resources within the very Reformed tradition for supporting apartheid and yet, at the same time, there were also resources that vigorously challenged it. Among these resources, Smit remains at pains to refer to the tradition of Calvin as well as to the confessional documents of this tradition to discern will of God and "to stand (unapologetically) where God stands".

This leads one to the third struggle, namely the struggle for the truth (2007b:33). If it is true that there have always been different views within the Reformed tradition, then we must ponder the question of what then is the truth. Since we stand in a particular tradition, we need to concede to the fact that our challenges might be unique to our situation, yet we also stand on the shoulders of those who went before us. According to Smit, we must, therefore, ask whether the likes of Calvin would have dismissed apartheid as simply *adiaphora* and, therefore, as something that does not really threaten the central message of the Bible. Many would undoubtedly have loved to look at apartheid as exactly that, a neutral matter that in essence does not challenge the gospel. It was precisely because of this that the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) challenged apartheid as something that made a mockery of the Christian message.

The DRMC needed to confess simply because they felt they were with their backs to the wall and could do nothing else. Admitting that there are different ways one might read and interpret Scripture, a *status confessionis* was declared, not to have the better and the right word, but as a commentary on the dominant hermeneutics until such time when all will have realised the error of their ways. Of course, the idea of confession is not unique to our situation. In fact, it goes back to the time of the Reformation itself.

A fourth struggle that Smit refers to is the struggle for the embodiment of that truth (2007:34). Smit argues that one of the most challenging aspects of the struggle for truth was not only to confess the truth, but to embody it. He realises that it is one thing to

confess, yet it is a totally different matter to embody that which one confesses. Embodiment suggests that one lives out those confessed values – it is, therefore, not by chance that the church order of URCSA had to be overhauled so that it gave concrete testimony to what is confessed in the Belhar Confession. The final struggle is one which centres on Calvin's legacy regarding God's caring, and liberating justice (2007:37). Contrary to the impression among many Reformed Christians, Smit points out in a very real sense that confessions of faith are in fact very much related to the contexts in which they originate. That the Belhar Confession explicitly refers to notions of justice, unity, and reconciliation is not unique to it. In fact, Smit argues, this is directly influenced by Calvin's socioeconomic thought.

I have argued elsewhere that while Barth credits Luther for having influenced him immensely, he nonetheless places Calvin at the top of his list of those who had brought about in him a new way looking at Reformed confessional writings (Tshaka 2010b:32ff.). For these reasons I assert that Smit is rather Barthian in his approach to Reformed confessions. There is, for Smit, just as it was for Barth, an organic link between confessing and embodying what has been confessed. A confession without such embodiment, therefore, remains unacceptable both to Barth as well as to Smit as we shall see.

Confessing and embodying the Belhar Confession

The above leads to the question: How the Belhar Confession should be understood today? Another factor worth considering is the ecclesial authority that governs this very confession. How should the Confession be interpreted in light of today's changed and changing context? In addition to this, we are challenged by our reflection on Belhar to look back in order to more clearly engage the present circumstances. It is thus not by chance that the Belhar Confession constantly reminds one of the situation in which it originated, yet its past is to be brought into critical dialogue with the present. The Belhar Confession can only retain its relevance if it is allowed to be a blueprint for new challenges.

A few things ought to be taken into consideration in pondering the essence of Belhar for present day South Africa. At first glance one notices a distinction between confessing and embodying the confession. While the former seems to be widespread within the Reformed tradition, the latter warrants brief explanation. to embody something suggests that something is incorporated into something else. With this one can conclude that a call is being made today on those confessing Belhar to incorporate it into their very being. There are, of course, a number of ways in which this call can be heeded; we shall not deal at length with that here, except to point toward the essence of particularity in dealing with new challenges.

The essence of particularity must be observed as we strive towards making this confession a practical reality for us today. For many in URCSA, to embody Belhar means that URCSA is the Belhar Confession (cf. Smit 2000). It is, how ever, not enough to merely say that the URCSA is the Belhar Confession. Such a statement needs to be substantiated in order to gain clarity on the circumstances that sanction such a claim. The Belhar Confession is a bold statement that can be embodied only when one explains why it is a relevant and a necessary commentary on alternative, entrenched half-truths.

Talk on the embodiment of the Belhar Confession can also be understood negatively. To speak about the truth that is encapsulated in this confession with out assessing the new situation in which this is currently being uttered can also tempt one to absolutes Belhar as

the ultimate truth. Barth remained very cautious of such attempts. His caution was informed by the temporal nature of any human statements about God. It was not by chance that he stated in no uncertain terms, at the meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Cardiff in 1925, that a Christian confession must take its particular context seriously (cf. Barth 1962:112). I am of the view that with this Barth also wanted to point to the "humanness" of a very confession. It is possible for one to embody something to the extent that one is unable to transcend that which one has incorporated into one's being. This must be guarded against by all means.

It is only by considering some characteristics of a confession that we will be able to guard against the temptation of absolutising that which we had embodied. It is imperative to pay heed of this because, as Naudé indicates, the socio economic and political developments that precede and "inform" a confession are mostly not neutral, and – due to their theological interpretation by the Confession are themselves at stake in the act of confession (Naudé 2003:157).

Although the story and historicity of Belhar is well documented, both locally and internationally, within Reformed circles knowledge about this Confession within the ranks of URCSA leaves much to be desired. Like so many confessions that preceded it, Belhar was called into being by the socioeconomic and political circumstances and theological consideration that divided people in terms of race and colour. The Belhar Confession boldly takes its cue from the Barmen Declaration which questioned the Nazi state's involvement in determining the membership to the church of Christ.

As the chief exponent of the Barmen Declaration, Barth began to wrestle with Reformed theology or confessional theology at a rather late stage in his theological metamorphosis. It was only when he cut ties with liberal theology and was compelled to read Reformed theology more closely in preparation for his lectures at a predominantly Lutheran faculty at Göttingen in the early 1920s that he developed a deeper appreciation of the Reformed tradition. Shortly before this incident, Barth came to understand the mystery that governs the Word of God. With his endeavours to come to terms with the paradox of having to speak about God because we are charged by Him to do so, and yet being con fronted with an impossibility of executing this command simply because we are human and therefore fallible, he came to the conclusion that due to the church's existence within the world, the church has to say something.

McCormack was thus correct when he asserted that, to the issues of ecclesial authority, the nature of a church confession, and the obedience that is proper to such a confession, no Reformed theologian in this century has afforded more attention than Barth (McCormack 2003:53). Barth's involvement with confessional writings, which let him to conclude that they (confessions) occupied a pivotal role within the Reformed tradition, had allowed him the opportunity to understand the complexity that surrounds confessions. His maturity and authority concerning this subject was revealed when the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (already mentioned above) requested of him to comment on the desirability and possibility of a universal Reformed creed (Barth 1962:112ff.). More importantly, most of Barth's views that informed his approach to confessional theology as well as his views concerning the problem of ecclesial authority, which was an obstacle during the 1920s, were tested during this period and was to remain with him until the end of his life.

In response to the critique against his dialectic theology by a Catholic friend (Erik Peterson),

Barth maintained that certain factors constitute the concrete authority of the church: (1) the decision of the church on the canon and the text of the Bible; (2) creeds – or the decisions of the church on fundamental statements of faith that have been more or less unanimously acknowledged; (3) "fathers" or "doctors of the Church" who have been acknowledged by the church(es) as faithful expositors of those authoritative creedal statements, and; (4) the "command of the hour" (the "definiteness of the moment") in which theology finds itself, which lays upon it an obligation to speak to the real needs of the present (Barth 1962:291; McCormack 2003:56). These four factors taken together constitute ecclesial authority.

The context in which the Reformed church finds itself today differs vastly from the context of that of the sixteenth century were membership to a church was bound to a common confession (McCormack 2003:46). Having pointed this out, it cannot be denied that the very concrete authority which informs the character of the church is still necessary and relevant in this context. The challenge is seeing how it speaks to current issues today.

For Barth, a Reformed confession is spontaneously and publicly formulated. It is not something that fell from heaven, but which is confessed by those who subscribe to it and, therefore, it is a product of and for the community. Certainly, it may be concluded that, in line with Reformed tradition, Barth understood a confession to be merely a comment on the Word of God and not the Word of God as such. It is also clear that Barth realised that a confession should be treated as being open to discussion and improvement. This is important to note since Reformed confessions differ from Lutheran confessions in that the former do not expect all Reformed communities to subscribe to them (Smit, publication forthcoming). Lutheranism ascribes decisive importance to the unity and the uniform interpretation of its confessions (Barth 2002:2). Reformed confessions completely lack the characteristic of ecumenical publicity. It is this lack of uniform interpretation of a particular confession that has left Reformed believers open to the charge of confessionalism.

It is imperative that, to start with, one reflects on the essence of confessional theology especially in light of the many challenges that face South Africa today. But what are these many challenges? They are varied and are prioritised differently depending on the context of those that do so. There are indeed many "South Africa's" in South Africa. What would, therefore, be construed as "important" in one section of this country might not be viewed as such in another. However, all would agree that in this country a scandalous gap exists between those who live in opulence as well as those who live in abject poverty. This difference did not develop by chance as many would like to believe, but was a calculated move to ensure that ultimately those on the underside of history will resign themselves to their subjugation in society (cf. Tshaka and Makofane 2010:532-546).By reflecting on confessional theology and acknowledging that confessional theology remains true to the particular contexts in which it originated, we in this way remain true to our Reformed heritage. This requires from us to also acknowledge confessional theology's humanness and, therefore, its limitations and it belligerently admits that it is merely a comment on the Word of God as are all other confessions. However, it is a specific kind of commentary on the Word; it is a bold "NO!" that remains aware that there may come a time when the emphases found in it might be placed differently. In essence, it is a commentary that is made by fallible men and women who are called to speak about God and yet are unable to do so because of their own fallibility.

In Barth's explanation of the impossibility of a universal Reformed confession he maintains that this is because there are particular instances that give rise and structure to confessions. It is in

light of these particular instances that Reformed churches confess "until further notice" (Barth 1962:119). Smit asserts that the latter phrase serves the purpose of defining the character of a confession authoritatively to its outsiders, while at the same time giving direction to its own doctrine and life (Smit, forthcoming). One can also appreciate this insight when one recognises that the church exists within the world and that it has to frequently familiarise itself with what is going on in the world.

This brings us to another very important subject that, in my opinion, has not enjoyed the necessary attention in the past, yet it remains a cardinal problem if we are really to understand the problems facing (mostly black) communities in South Africa. While it is necessary and proper that we must celebrate the immense contribution by the Reformed faith through many of its faithful exponents, such as Barth and Smit, it is also necessary that we deal with what was not said clearly or forcefully enough. Substantial research had been conducted on the hermeneutics of apartheid employed by those who justified the subhuman position of those who were not considered white. However, while one finds studies on politics and, to a lesser extent, on economics and how this is related to the Reformed faith in South Africa, virtually nothing was done to advocate Africanness and its relationship to being reformed. It is this absence that this paper wants to probe below.

Africanness and its relation to Reformedness

It is precisely because confessional theology is public theology that it must take seriously its particular context. The particular context of confessional theology in South Africa is its African context and reality.[2] While one must never lose sight of the fact that confessional theology was immensely influenced by the fathers of the Reformed tradition, it nevertheless must deal with its particular African realities. What is this African context that has to be taken seriously if Reformed faith is to retain its significance and relevance on this continent? Africa essentially is a continent characterised by different world views and cultures. At the same time it is a continent plagued by conflict and war, disease and famine. It has a well-documented history of colonialism and was pillaged and maimed by Western colonial powers for their own benefit. In short, Africa is a context full of complexities.

I contend that Reformed faith and, therefore, confessional theology, while in later years attempting to challenge the rogue biblical hermeneutics propagated by apartheid theology, did virtually nothing to establish an intentional platform for a much needed conversation on Africanness and Reformedness. It cannot be denied that the deliberate attempts at

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2 In the summer of 1968 Barth received a letter from Singapore by someone unknown to him. It was from Kosuke Koyama who had translated Barth's *Christian Dogmatics* into Japanese. Koyama was a Japanese missionary and had been involved for some years with the Theological Seminary of Thailand, becoming Dean of the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology. He later took over the position of editor of the *South East Asia Journal of Theology.* Koyama wrote to Barth with a request that he write something about his (Barth's) theology for this journal. At the time Barth was ailing and permitted his assistant Eberhard Busch to see to this request. Busch compiled some of the issues that Barth was thinking about at the time and Barth endorsed them. However, there are a number of important issues that Barth thought he had to communicate to these Christians. In the letter Barth made it clear that "boring theology" was unacceptable and that it had was time for these Christians to understand that it was now the time for *them* to speak and for *him* to listen. Barth continued to make it clear that theology had to be conducted with a degree of humour and, more importantly, that they had to understand that the God who they were talking about was also *his* God. They should not repeat what he said in a different context, but should appropriate that which will be relevant in their context. For the details of the letter cf. Barth 1984:555.

establishing this faith in South Africa without promoting integration between this new faith and African culture was informed by agendas that were convinced that Africa had nothing to contribute to this debate. In fact, it was thought that it would be more worthwhile to lose one's (African) identity in one's attempt to be welcomed into this faith.

It is sometimes asked: What is meant when the Africanisation of the Reformed church in Africa is called for? While this might be a legitimate question, something sinister often hides behind it. Sometimes it is ignorance but mostly it is some ill begotten notion of Africa and its people. Be that as it may, one should admit with Kwame Nkrumah that the meeting between African ways of life and those of the rest of the world had placed Africa and its people on a road of no return from the rock whence they were hewn. Nkrumah quite poignantly writes that

> …the defeat of colonialism and even neo-colonialism will not result in the automatic disappearance of the imported patterns of thought and social organization. For those patterns have taken root, and are in varying degree socio logical features of our contemporary society. Nor will a simple return to the communalistic society of ancient Africa offer a solution either. To advocate a return, as it were, to the rock from which we were hewn is a charming thought but we are faced with contemporary problems, which have arisen from political subjugation, economic exploitation etc. (Nkrumah 1967).

I have argued elsewhere that this very important acknowledgement is not to be confused with sentiments held by some that Africa must forever remain grateful to the West for having brought the Christian faith to it – even though they exploited the continent in exchange (Tshaka 2009:116). In fact, Nkrumah was very serious about the need for an African consciousness. He had the following to say about the African colonial student:

> A colonial student does not by origin belong to the intellectual history in which the university philosophers are such impressive landmarks. The colonial student can be so seduced by these attempts to give philosophical account of the universe, that he [sic] surrenders his whole personality to them. When he does this, he loses sight of the fundamental societal fact that he is a colonial subject (Nkrumah 1966:2).

One can, therefore, understand why it is always expected that when the concepts "Africa" and "African" is mentioned, more always needs to be said. Yet it is not recognised by the very people who "ask that more be said so that the notions become intelligible" that this happens precisely because there are some notions that are deemed normative while others are not. A case in point is the usage of "Africanness" and "Reformedness" in the same vein. In the debate on the latter, Reformedness is the unexamined norm to which all else must rise to. It is for this reason that a degree of uneasiness becomes apparent when a space for dialogue on and between these phenomena, which remains a tangible reality at least to the African Christian, are insisted upon. In a similar observation, Maluleke (2010) correctly asserts that

> …the idea that Christianity could be Africanised has been viewed as suspect – either because it is assumed that Christianity is universal or that Africanization can only mean a lowering of universal "Christian standards" in order to fit in with some local "African standards".

Having noted these challenges, at the end of the day it remains the responsibility of the black African Reformed Christian to see to it that Africanness in theological deliberations does not only remain an unimportant appendix. The attempt to take it seriously needs to find

expression particularly also in curricula (Tshaka 2009). African and Reformed theology need to acknowledge a particular history that in essence contributed towards a flight from the black self. The repercussions of this have been devastating as is evidenced by the Afro-phobic attacks on Africans north of the Limpopo (Tshaka 2010a).

Towards creating a space for debating Africanness and Reformedness

Statistics indicate that Christianity is increasingly gravitating towards the global South (Bedaiko 2008:107). Reformed theology in South Africa had become notorious for insisting on academic standards. In essence, as in so many main line church traditions, Reformed theology had indiscriminately imposed its methodologies without looking for ways to learn from the African situation. We have already alluded in passing to this attitude in this paper. However, the fact that there is much talk about Christianity changing its face does leave some with the impression that perhaps there is much that can be learned from the African and his or her context. Academic theology, which in South Africa has become a synonym for Reformed theology, has always been judgmental toward those theologies that were not enmeshed in rigorous method. In this process it had lost a significant opportunity of bringing about serious debate between the academy and the very community that scholarly activities were supposed to serve.

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TREFWOORDE
Afrikaanheid
Konfessionale Teologie
Gereformeerde Teologie
Apartheid
Menswees

KEY WORDS
Africanness
Confessional Theology
Reformed Theology
Apartheid
Humanity

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Reformed theology and politics

ABSTRACT

The Reformed tradition has always been involved in political issues. In terms of this perspective the views of two major Reformed theologians, John Calvin and Karl Barth, are compared with opinions in early Christianity regarding the relation between Christians and politics. Theologians in the early patristic period kept their distance from politics. Calvin pleaded for sober involvement, while Barth eagerly calls for a prophetic participation in the public sphere. These differences may be interpreted as a natural development related to historical changes: from a persecuted community to the *corpus christianum*, and subsequently to the challenge of a perverse political ideology, and the call for a response in a new situation its defeat. From this perspective all three positions are understandable. However, being true to the Reformed call *ad fontes* one must conclude that Barth's theology is totally different from both that of early Christianity and the New Testament. This calls for a reconsideration of positions regarding the relation of church and politics.

INTRODUCTION

The Reformed tradition is considered a tradition dealing with everyday life, with work and public issues. For this tradition there exists no sacred sphere for religion, separated from the (never neutral) spheres of politics and the economy. Everything is related to God. In this article the views on politics and the state of two major Reformed theologians will be compared. John Calvin is found at the birth of this tradition, and special attention will be given to the influential last chapter of his *Institutes*. The other is Karl Barth, the most influential Reformed theologian of recent times. Because being "Reformed" was never aimed at being a specific tradition but rather at the reformation of the whole church by returning to the sources of early Christianity, the ideas of these two theologians will be compared with those sources. Early Christian texts and texts written by Calvin and Barth will first be discussed in chronological order, and then in reverse chronological order. After a reflection on the differences between both ways of reading, some conclusions will follow.[1]

EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Hugo Rahner published an overview of early Christian texts on Christian attitudes towards the state (Rahner 1961).[2] In this overview three distinct aspects of public theology come to the fore (all of which have their roots in the New Testament), namely prayer, obedience and a limitation on the claims of government.

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1 For the comparison, a few classic core texts of the authors were used. A full elaboration of the theme would, of course, require investigations into their other works and contemporary authors, and taking into account secondary literature. That is impossible in an article. It would require a full monograph. However, precisely this focus on core texts highlights the differences and clearly shows the changes in theology.

2 Readers who want to easily access many patristic texts on the topic in one volume can refer to Rahner's anthology, though the texts mentioned in this work are by no means exhaustive. Those who want to do further research can, of course, find the texts in editions of early Christian writers.

Prayer

Early Christians used to pray for government. Many early Christian writers mention that the faithful pray for the emperor. This is done in line with Paul's exhortation in his first letter to Timothy: "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Tim. 2:1ff.). Christians prayed for a good administration so that justice may rule in the empire (Clemens, *Letter to the Corinthians* 60:4 – 61:1: Rahner 1961:40; Tertullian, *Apology* 30: Rahner 1961:46). They did this because the peace of the empire was, of course, the peace of Christians as well (Tertullian, *Apology* 31: Rahner 1961:49). They, therefore, not only prayed for righteousness, but also for the power of Rome, so that its enemies would not destroy the Roman peace. For this reason they also prayed for a brave army (Tertullian, *Apology* 30: Rahner 1961:47).

The Roman Empire was the guarantor of a quiet life, and not just with regard to the then current reality. For some authors it formed part of their eschatological religious convictions. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul refers to the lawlessness that will come to "the one who holds him back" (2 Thess. 2:6ff.).Many have speculated about what or who this "onewho-holdsback" might have been. Regardless, Tertullian was convinced that it was only the Roman Empire that prevented the world from falling into the abyss of chaos at the end of time:

> For we know that a mighty shock impending over the whole earth – in fact, the very end of all things threatening dreadful woes – is only retarded by the continued existence of the Roman empire (*Apology* 32: Rahner 1961:49 – 51).

The Roman Empire was seen as a blessing from God, given on behalf of his people. Therefore, Christians prayed for the wellbeing of this empire. Even though some emperors were brutal dictators and claimed to be gods, the Roman Empire was preferred to the chaos that would ensue should it fall. Only the devil wants to deconstruct society into chaos (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V,24,2).

The emperor was the heart of the empire. Christians, therefore, not only prayed for the empire but for the emperor himself. He was seen as the embodiment of the *pax Romana,* and this warranted their prayer for his health and life (Tertullian, *Apology* 30: Rahner 1961:47). Thus, the Roman emperor was intrinsically important in the early Christian faith, not only since Constantine but long before Constantine's reign.

In Scripture, Peter's epistle refers to Christians as priests (1 Pet. 2:5,9). Origen did the same, and applied it in a very specific sense: as priests, Christians offered a particular service to the empire, namely priestly intercession (*Against Celsus* 8,73ff.). Priests were exempt from military service in the Roman Empire, as they supported the state in a different way, namely by their intercessions to the gods. Origen argued that the Christian community constituted a priesthood in the service of the state, replacing the priests of the old gods of Rome. By their intercession and life, Christians are the salt of the earth (Origen, *Against Celsus* 8,70: Rahner 1961:68). Again, this was not written in the time of a Christian empire, but during a time of persecutions wherein Origen's life ended. Christians were seen as the soul of the body of society (*Letter to Diognetus* 6).

Obedience

From this perspective the Christian call for obedience to the emperor does not come as a

surprise. The church fathers often quoted Jesus' injunction to "[g]ive to Caesar what is Caesar's" (Mt. 22:21; Mk. 12:17; Lk. 20:25; cf., for example, Justin Martyr, *Apology* I,17: Rahner 1961:42; Hippolyt, *Commentary on Daniel* III: Rahner 1961:53). They also referred to Romans 13, where Paul calls for obedience to the emperor (for example, Origen, *Commentary on Romans* IX, 26: Rahner 1961:58). One finds not the slightest indication of revolutionary ideas among Christians in the first centuries. Though they sometimes suffered greatly and many of them were martyred, Christians were obedient to the state (Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 4; Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* I, 11: Rahner 1961:44). At most Christian writers appealed to the laws of the Roman state in their defence of fellow Christians.

There are several reasons for this call for obedience. First, it would have resulted in even more hardship should they have revolted against a power so much stronger than themselves. If one caused trouble for the Roman state, one would have realised that it did not carry the sword for nothing (Rom. 13:4). Athenagorsas writes in his plea to the emperor:

> [We] pray for your government, that you may, as is most equitable, receive the kingdom, son from father, and that your empire may receive increase and addition, all men becoming subject to your sway. And this is also for our advantage, that we may lead a peaceable and quiet life, and may ourselves readily perform all that is commanded us (*A Plea for the Christians* 32).

Second, the stability of society was in itself a great blessing. The hardship of revolution and civil war was much worse than the injustice and arbitrariness suffered at the hands of Roman procurators – better an imperfect law than no law at all. Discord was an evil to be avoided by Christians and the unity of human society a good to be pursued (Tertullian, *Apology* 30: Rahner 1961:44). A final argument, however, was that disobedience would strip martyrdom of its glory. If Christians were to be put to death because they did not obey the law, they would be rightly punished. However, if they were unjustly sentenced, they gave their lives as blameless sacrifices, the blood of which became the seed of the church (Origen, *Commentary on Romans* IX: Rahner 1961:60 – 62).

The above views implied that the laws of the state were good, which is precisely what Origen argued. When the apostles declared that Christians should "abstain from food sacrifices to the idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality" (Acts 15:29), one might conclude that murder, theft, and other crimes were allowed, since these are not mentioned. Origen argued that the latter crimes warranted no mention because they were already forbidden by public law. Only what is not in the laws of the state was added (Origen, *Commentary on Romans* IX, Rahner 1961:60 – 62). These laws prevent people from committing crimes and, therefore, they were seen as precious gifts from God.

This then is at the core of the call for obedience: the government as such is given by God. Paul expresses this opinion in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 13:1) and it is supported by later generations of Christians (Clemence of Rome, *Letter to the Corinthians* 61; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V,24,1; Tertullian, *Apology* 28: Rahner 1961:44 – 46). It applies to a non-Christian or even an unjust government. It is said about the reign of Claudius, who was emperor in those days – a wicked emperor who was outdone in evil deeds only by his successor, Nero. It thus did not matter whether a government operated justly. Government itself was a gift from God and one day God will call on its officials to account for their deeds (Justin the Martyr, *Apology* I,17: Rahner 1961:42). It was not the prerogative of the governed to drive them from their

thrones. The root of Christian obedience to the government was the belief that it was God's government (Origen, *Commentary on Romans* IX: Rahner 1961:60).

Limitation

Precisely because the government is subject to God's government, Christians refused to render ultimate honour to it. Government is subservient to God, who is the supreme Ruler and, therefore, no government could be absolute. Still, it had to be honoured, albeit within its limitations as a created and ordained entity. Government is believed to be human, not divine. Therefore, Christians could not worship the emperor as *Deus ac Dominus*. They were willing to obey him in everything, but not if he required worship and made claims that were reserved for God alone (Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* I, 11: Rahner 1961:42 – 44; Tertullian, *Apology* 28: Rahner 1961:44; Hippolyt, *Commentary on Daniel* III, 25 – 31: Rahner 1961:52 – 56).

Furthermore, should the Roman government require submission to and the worship of its own gods, this would be an insult to these gods. For if the worship of these gods was dependent on the will of the emperor, it implied that the authority of the emperor was a higher authority than theirs. Tertullian joked about this compulsion of the emperor to demand the worship of his gods: the emperor was indeed a higher authority than they, for a living human has higher authority than a dead, nonexisting god (Tertullian, *Apology* 28: Rahner 1961:44).

Only a God who convinces people to honour the government can be a true God. God cannot be dependent on the power of government. Any government that makes claims to the contrary is a false government.

It was this refusal to acknowledge the government as divine that brought Christians into conflict with the Roman Empire, until Constantine acknowledged the truth of Christian public theology in the beginning of the fourth century. However, when his successor, Theodosius, declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, he turned the above Christian insights upside down: now the emperor urged people to worship the Christian God. In terms of Tertullian's comment about the emperor defining who the true God is (cf. Tertullian, *Apology* 30: Rahner 1961:46), this could however be seen as blasphemy, as Theodosius made God dependent on his own edict.

Christians in government

Thus far only Christians and their relationship to government have been considered. In addition, one has to also consider Christians in and part of government. The texts selected by Rahner do not give any information about this, which does not necessarily mean that such texts do not exist. They do, the most explicit being a section of *Contra Celsum*. After his discourse against the emperor's claims to divinity, Origen proceeds to discuss the challenge by Celsus to Christians to participate in the Roman administration. He suggested that if they have so much critique against the government's decisions and societal behaviour, Christians should try and do better.

It might be expected that Origen would accept such a challenge since Christians have such high regard for the government as God's gift; however, his response to Celsus was a refusal of the offer to participate in government. When Christians have leadership capabilities, Origen stated, they should use them in the church, not in government (Origen, *Against Celsus* 8,73 – 75). Precisely because they have a higher task as priests, they cannot neglect their calling of praying and thus they will not become administrators, judges or government officials.

Someone in the service of the reign of Christ cannot serve the earthly reign of the emperor except by praying for the latter's wellbeing. Should Christians stray from this conviction, they will be denying the very Lordship of Christ. If one is called to the service of the supreme Lord, one is not allowed to accept a call of a lower servant and disregard one's ultimate calling. Even the *Apostolic Constitutions* of the end of the fourth century, when Christianity was state religion, still prohibit Christian office bearers to enter the service of the emperor, especially in the army:

> Let a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, who goes to the army, and desires to retain both the Roman government and the sacerdotal administration, be deprived. For the things of Caesar belong to Caesar, and the things of God to God (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8:47,83).

Another argument against participation in civil service was that the state could only exist on the strength of its coercive power. If need be, it could punish people with violence and ultimately by putting them to death – at the time either by a death sentence or by conscription into the army to defend the state. However, according to early Christians one may not take another's life as God alone rules over life and death. Therefore, the *Traditio Apostolica* forbade both a judge as well as a soldier to become a catechumen (16:9 – 11). Early Christian authors of various contexts and temperaments such as Origen (*Contra Celsum* 8,73), Hippolyte (*Traditio Apostolica* 16:9 – 11) and Tertullian (*On the Chaplet*) argued against the conscription of Christians into the army, for "we are peacemakers – pacifici" (Origen, *Commentary on Matthew 26:52*: *In Mattheum 102*, Migne, PG 13, 1752). The glory of the victories of the emperor's army was anointed with the tears of wives and mothers of the killed opponents (Tertullian, *On the Chaplet* 12) – who may even have been brothers in Christ, "for Christ is also among the barbarians" (*On the Chaplet* 12). Therefore, Christians serve in "another national organization, founded by the Word of God" (Origen, *Against Celsus* 8, 75).

Calvin's institutes

The last chapter of Calvin's *Institutes* (with little change in subsequent editions) has had a profound influence on Reformed political thought – although usually in interpretations that suited later theologians and politicians. If one compares Calvin's position to that found in early Christian thought as described above, one finds many similarities. Calvin stresses the importance of prayer for the government. He also believes that government is a gift from God and that one should obey its laws. Against the radical Reformation, Calvin held that Christians should not be revolutionaries but decent citizens (*Inst.* IV,7). He also agrees with the church fathers that God should be obeyed, and not humans, if government claimed greater honour than is owed to God (*Inst.* IV,32). Therefore, before noting the differences between the views of Calvin and the church fathers, one must carefully note that their overall frame of thought was not all that different from each other. Like the church father, Calvin opposed (two) false attitudes toward the government:

> On the one hand, frantic and barbarous men are furiously endeavouring to overturn the order established by God, and, on the other, the flatterers of princes extolling their power without measure, hesitate not to oppose it to the government of God (*Inst.* IV. 20.1).

Nevertheless, there are also some differences. Though Calvin is reluctant to accept resistance against a wicked government, he considers the possibility that lower levels of government may oppose the national or imperial government and may even overthrow it (*Inst.* IV.20.31).

This is an interference in political affairs that was absent in early Christian thought. It is also different from the perspective of the church fathers for whom earthly affairs were accepted as God's providence, even if these implied suffering and – ultimately – death. The Letter to the Hebrews states from this perspective: "You joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions" (10:34). This is different from princes who replace an unjust king. In this way Calvin is more open to a Christian involvement in political affairs. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that, despite what he says here with regard to lower princes, it does not overrule or replace Calvin's continuous stress on due obedience and submission to the government, even if the latter is wicked (*Inst.* IV.20 and 22 – 32).

Besides this, Calvin states that government should further true religion and oppose false religion (*Inst.* IV.20.2). This could be interpreted as being in line with early Christian thought for it means that a government should not make religious claims and should oppose any religion that does not recognise the difference between God's divine rule and the rule of human government. A false religion is one in which created entities – even those created by king and government – are seen as divine. Calvin is very much aware of the limited character of the state. It is temporal and its organisation depends on specific circumstances and contexts. Like Tertullian, he thinks that worldly government is suited for the present (*Inst.* IV.20.2). This is Calvin's primary view. Nevertheless, in his idea that government should promote true religion something more is found. Governments are not only called "to foster and maintain the external worship of God", but also "to defend sound doctrine and the condition of the Church" (*Inst.* IV.20.2). In Calvin's own context this implied a call upon the government to promote the Reformed faith against Roman usurpation and especially to refute radical political religion as propagated by the Anabaptists. The fact that government should promote true Christian faith is not a totally different position than that of church fathers, but it does entail a further element. However, one should not overemphasise this for Calvin himself explicitly states:

> I no more than formerly allow men at pleasure to enact laws concerning religion and the worship of God when I approve of civil order which is directed to this end, viz., to prevent the true religion, which is contained in the law of God, from being openly violated with impunity and polluted by public blasphemy (*Inst.* IV.20.3; see also *Inst.* IV.20.9).

A third difference between Calvin and the church fathers concerns the involvement of Christians in politics. Calvin's perspective on Christians as subjects governed by the state is similar to that of the church fathers. Their theological framework is similar: the state is something different from the church and Christians should obey the government by being a servant of God. However, one does not find ideas in Calvin's work similar to that of Origen, namely that Christians should not be part of the administration of government and are, therefore, not allowed to be judges or to serve in the army. On the contrary, in this world the army is a necessary instrument of government (*Inst.* IV.20.11). The administrators of Geneva belonged to the same congregation where Calvin practised his ministry. They were Christians – as were almost all people in Western Europe at that time. Since the time of Constantine it was almost impossible to have a government comprised of nonChristians, and this was most certainly the case in sixteenth century Europe. This also had consequences for mutual relations between Christians. Unlike Paul (1 Cor. 6:1 – 11), Calvin condones court cases between Christians if this happens in a proper way and with the right attitude. Calvin, therefore, had to reinterpret Paul (*Inst.* IV.20.17 – 21).

This is an example of how Calvin had to adapt his theology to his context. Nevertheless, he did so with moderation and continued to uphold the idea of Christians being governed subjects even if he did not reflect much on the tasks and responsibilities of Christians within government.

In conclusion, one sees in Calvin's *Institutes* a slight adaptation to new circumstances of Christian thought on public affairs, because he admitted participation in the government and even revolt to a tyrant by lower governments. This was, however, reluctantly done and did not put Calvin on the frontline of new opportunities and challenges on the road to a just and Christian Europe. Calvin is writing theology, and politics have only his heart if it is for the well being of the church. The state is a limited and relative earthly body, and dealing with it is for Calvin almost an appendix to his wonderful reflections on God's Providence, on Christ, and his Spirit.

KARL BARTH

It is precisely because the political theology of Calvin (and other Reformers) is not very much elaborated that Karl Barth enters the discussion. "It must be strongly emphasized that on this point they do not by any means tell us all that we might have expected" (Barth 1939:3; 1938:4).[3] If Christians are mere subjects, they will conform to the will of their rulers. However, when Paul speaks about being subservient to the government, he does not mean that we are mere obedient subjects. Being subservient implies taking responsibility for the government (Barth 1939:34 – 36; 1938:21). For a Christian this means seeing politics in the perspective of Christ. Barth criticises Calvin for not keeping to the fullness of Christ when dealing with the state:

> We can neither overlook nor take lightly this gap in the teaching that we have received from the fathers of our church – the lack of a gospel foundation (that is to say, in the strictest sense, of a Christological foundation) for this part of their creed (Barth 1939:6; 1938:6).

It seems as if everything Calvin so enthusiastically wrote on being in Christ and being led by his Spirit in preceding parts of the *Institutes* is forgotten when he writes about the political responsibilities of Christians. When reading the latter, it seems one is a traveller in a distant land (Barth 1939:4; 1938:4). Therefore, the *Institutes* end with a chapter that does not touch the heart and does not challenge us toward a renewal of society.

Barth wants to fill this gap. Although Barth might do so from a different political perspective, he shares the conviction of Abraham Kuyper, who wrote that "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!' " (Kuyper 1930:32). Politics does not constitute a neutral space apart from Christian faith. Faith concerns all of life, and politics are an essential part of this. Human life always has political elements. Christian life, therefore, also has political elements, for no part of reality falls outside the power of Christ. He is Lord of the world (Barth 1946:12). Therefore, Christians are called to carry out their responsibilities in society and in politics in ways that bear the signs of his Lordship (Barth 1939:77 – 81; 1938:42 – 44). That was, according to Barth, even more true in his own time when a political system tried to govern to the benefit of the worst

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3 The translation of the title of Barth's brochure as *Church and State* does not really do justice to the German *Rechtfertigung und Recht*. I, therefore, also supply references to the German original.

form of paganism. It was a time when questions regarding the relationship between faith and politics were raised with new urgency (Barth 1939:8; "*in je ganz neuer Eigenart und Schärfe*", Barth 1938:7).

Barth is thoroughly aware of the fact that the state will never be the kingdom of God (1939:38 – 40; 1938:22f.). On this point he is fully in line with Calvin, who also made a clear distinction between limited human governments and the eternal reign of God in Christ (Barth 1946:5f.). Even so, Calvin looked at human governments from the perspective of general providence wherein his Christology did not play a role. Barth considers the state to be an analogy for the coming reign of Christ (Barth 1946:8ff.). There is a similarity (*Gleichung*) and politics have a *Gleichnisfähigkeit* to God's kingdom (Barth 1946:22f). Of course, in Barth's theology one should not reverse the sequence. One must reflect on the Lordship of Christ first and then look at government from this perspective – not the other way around (Barth 1946:23). Only from this perspective and direction does the church know what the meaning of government is and how justice should be accomplished (1939:46 – 50; 1938:28 – 30). Without faith, government is blind (Barth 1946:5) and could arbitrarily adopt any ideology to justify its decisions. Such arbitrariness not only opens the door to any kind of ideology, but as a consequence often leads to oppression and exclusion. Only confessing the One Lord, Jesus Christ, prevents a government from becoming its own end (Barth 1939:71 – 73; 1938:39 – 40). The government is an institution given by the only Lord of the world on behalf of humans (whom He also created). According to the analogy of faith, such an institution should, in its own limited way, reflect the glory of God's justice.

Barth agrees with the church fathers and with Calvin that government is an institution of God. If so, Christians should not be mere passive subjects but responsible actors on the political stage. It is in submission to the government as a God-given institution that Christians are called to take coresponsibility (*Mitverantwortung*, Barth 1946:13). Christians are called to express their faith in all spheres of life. Reformed Christians, in particular, should know that politics are fully part of life and that they cannot escape their political responsibilities. On the contrary, they should be eager to participate in making society a sign of God's just rule (Barth 1946:24). Barth accuses the Reformers of not being consistent in their confession of the Lordship of Christ. In addition, he also regrets that Romans 13 and the whole New Testament were not more specific "about what is, and what is not to be understood by these particular political duties towards the State which are to be expected of the Church" (Barth 1939:73ff.; 1938:40). For Barth the political responsibility of Christians is an expression of their faith in the One Lord, Jesus Christ. Barth himself extensively demonstrates what the character of Christian politics should be in following Christ (Barth 1946:25 – 33), though he says that characteristics of humanity such as justice, freedom, care, responsibility, service, mercy, et cetera, are only examples of the Christian's political calling (Barth 1946:33).

Barth is aware that this responsibility is exercised within the confines of life on earth: the fullness of love and peace has not yet come (Barth 1946:5). There is evil and the powers of darkness are still at work. One has to remain vigilant of the countermovement of powers that want to destroy God's creation and resist it. Such resistance requires the power of weapons and other instruments of violence such as penalties and prison. Christians cannot be so idealistic as to reject all use of weapons. This will amount to confusing the kingdom of God and the analogous world government. The latter cannot do without weapons. "Human law needs the guarantee of human force" (Barth 1939:75; 1938:41). For Barth, therefore, it was never a question of whether the Swiss had to have an army to protect it against the threat

of Nazi Germany or whether Christians should wholeheartedly participate in this army or not (Barth 1939:76; 1938:41ff.). He was convinced that they should be the first to take up arms against an evil regime so that the government might reflect – in its own limited way, of course – the justice of God.

Barth is not reluctant to adapt Christian public theology to changed circumstances. He draws from the early Christian position that the government is God's government. In the analogy of faith, the government reflects God's just rule; and Christians are fully, and enthusiastically, involved in it. "The light which falls from the heavenly polis upon the earthly ecclesia is reflected in the light which illuminates the earthly polis from the earthly ecclesia through their mutual reflection" (Barth 1939:61; 1938:34). Christians take on their responsibility even if at the cost of life itself – maybe on the battlefields where many young men died on behalf of a righteous society or in prison, as in the case of Bonhoeffer.

In reverse perspective

Thus far a historical perspective on the relationship between Reformed faith and politics has been discussed in chronological order, that is, the usual way of treating historical developments. Ideas are adapted to changed circumstances over time, and implicit consequences appear over time. We can come to an understanding of changes in this manner and can come to value them. Reformed Christians will appreciate this approach even more because being Reformed means being conscious of *semper reformanda*. Christian faith cannot be fixed in the formulas and structures of a specific time or place since it refers to a living reality as the work of the living God through his Spirit. To confine it will amount to making faith into an idol. Therefore, although one cannot return to the situation before Calvin or Barth, Christians have to develop their thought further, in new contexts and with further critical awareness of the consequences that are implied in the confession that Jesus is Lord.

However, we can also approach the issue from a reverse perspective: from Barth via Calvin looking back to the church fathers and subsequently to an interpretation of Scripture. This is not the usual approach followed in modern critical research: faith seeking understanding is faith seeking historical understanding. However, this begs the question of what historical understanding is: whether it is necessarily an understanding according to historical developments or whether it could also be grounded in the perspective of historical sources or roots. It is precisely the latter that the Reformers intended. It was not their aim to adapt Christian theology to changed historical circumstances but to restore it from aberrations that occurred during historical developments. Their slogan was "back to the sources" (*ad fontes*). Reformation was needed not because of new circumstances but because the church strayed from the truth. Theology should return to its beginnings. The church is *semper reformanda* because she must continuously be critically reflected upon from the perspective of her sources and because she is inclined to always make compromises with the world.

From this reverse perspective we begin with Barth, who considers the government to be an analogy for the kingdom of God. It should therefore be an expression of righteousness, and Christians should take responsibility for contributing to such a society and to defend it when it is threatened. This seems obvious to present-day Christian theology: Christians strive toward justice and will promote it as far as they are able to do so.

However, one then has to wonder why the Reformers were so reticent about political

affairs. Why does Calvin's last chapter in his *Institutes* pale in comparison to the splendour of *Rechtfertigung und Recht* and *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde?* One cannot suggest that participation in political change according to the ideals of the kingdom of Christ was not yet on the mind of Christians in the time of Calvin. On the contrary, this mindset existed everywhere around him, especially in the radical Reformation. Maybe its proponents were too radical, but still, this does not explain the lack of involvement in the implementation of the church's calling to bring about justice and righteousness. In fact, it should have challenged Calvin to develop a more balanced public theology that could have been implemented for the sake of a just and peaceful society. Yet something prevented Calvin from entering into a discourse on a theology of political involvement in the same way Barth did. It would be possible for Barth to blame Calvin for this, but critical theology has to investigate *why* Calvin did not travel the road Barth wanted him to.

Searching for an answer to this question one comes close to the very heart of the Reformation: *ad fontes.* The call to return to early Christian thought, beginning with the New Testament, plays a key role in Calvin's conclusions. He does not enter into the issue of political changes. His uneasiness is palpable when he does venture a step further, in opposing a wicked regime. It is precisely his sources that prevent him from doing so and that keep him conservative in political affairs.

One should, therefore, turn to Calvin's sources and wonder why they do not call for societal changes. This is not an anachronistic question, because political change was present at the very beginning of Christianity as well, especially where it originated in Palestine, with the Jewish war as its culmination point. The accusations and charges levelled against Jesus to the Roman governor by his opponents fit quite well with such an atmosphere. One may then well ask why Christians did not opt for working towards active political change from the very beginning.

To review the answers given above: the very practical consideration that one would have been confronted by harsh and brutal repercussions may call on Christians to oppose these. However, this does not disclaim the ultimate truth that Christians have a freedom that exceeds all forms of worldly freedom, and that the pursuit of the latter would disclaim the confession of freedom in Christ. Such distinctions are precisely the starting point of Calvin's reflections on politics (*Inst.* IV.20.1).

Early Christian thought regarding politics is succinctly expressed in Jesus' reply to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn. 18:36). Of course, this can be seen in a Gnostic or other world denying ways, which does not sit comfortably with the gospel that begins by speaking about creation as Christ's own (Jn. 1:112). Nevertheless, it cannot be interpreted as merely meaning "not based on the methods of the world" (that is, violence). Certainly this is implied as well, but this view can only be held if Christ's kingdom is from a qualitatively different order than the governments of this world. If Christ's kingdom was of this world, his servants would have resisted his arrest (Jn. 19:36). That is the way kings operate. Barth is correct in saying that, at the very moment one accepts political responsibility, one must be prepared to join the army. It is the way in which governments operate in this world: no state can exist without an army (unless a small state is kept secure by a larger, more powerful ally or neighbour). Barth's political theology unavoidably has as a consequence that a Christian – en route to destroy an enemy that is willing to further the ultimate ends of evil – may be flying an aircraft carrying a nuclear bomb. A Christian is not only allowed to do so, he or she would be called to do so.

If someone does not want to accept this consequence, all talk about political responsibility is futile.

Asking whether Christians should be in the army is this the same as asking whether Christians should be in politics. Barth's answer is clear: "Yes." The answer of early Christian theologians was also clear, but a clear "No" (cf. Van de Beek 2006). Calvin avoids a definite answer when dealing with Christians as subjects of governments even while being conscious of Christians serving as magistrates. He keeps the early Christian theological framework but omits the conclusions that were clear to them. Calvin himself is *reformandus* – but one could ask whether he is *reformandus* in the direction of Kuyper and Barth, or in going back to the sources of Christian theology. Putting the question in perspective of the early Reformation, the answer is: *ad fontes*. Calvin exemplifies that it is difficult to reform the church and to be a Reformed theologian, and thereby for the church to be *semper reformanda*.

Regarding this Calvin does not differ very much from his later Roman Catholic colleague Hugo Rahner, after Rome implemented a reformation in its own way. In his overview of early Christian texts on public theology, Rahner in his anthology collected only those passages that fit into present day postConstantinian theology, both in the case of the Reformation and of Rome. He omits the *Traditio Apostolica* and texts on pacifism by Tertullian and Origen. He even ends the long exposé of Origen in response to Celsus just before Origen reaches the apex of his discourse: that Christians should not join government administration because they are administrators of a more supreme nation. Rahner and Calvin still have a sense of the critical power of early Christian thought, which Barth has lost, but they do not follow the church fathers to the very end. The ultimate consequence of this change is that Christians do not end in defenceless, vulnerable love, but in the army instead, acting according to the directions of adrenaline and testosterone – for these make the army powerful, as it should be according to the rulers of this world.

God's servant and the beast

If both Barth and the church fathers conceive the government to be a God-given institution, one must then distinguish between their positions. For Barth government is an analogy for the kingdom of God. In some way it reflects the justice and peace of God's eternal reign. Yet for the church fathers government is a temporal gift – for the time being – until the final tribulations come and the world ends. The kingdom of God will come as a resurrection from death. This does not mean there is no positive relation between this world and the world to come, but it is the relation of a seed to a plant. It is not different from the relation of earthly life to the life of the resurrection as Paul speaks about it in 1 Corinthians 15. The seed is not a lower level analogy for the plant, but the germ with the promise of what is to come, and the life to come will follow in the wake of the death of the seed. Christians participate in God's life in Christ, but they do so under the conditions of this world: bearing their cross. They are happy when they are in good health and not persecuted. They thank God for such gifts. But they know that one day this life will end and their being in Christ will only be fulfilled when this earthly life has passed away. They hope that the transition will not be difficult – but if so, it cannot be compared to the glory that will be revealed.

Earthly structures, including governments, are similar. It is a gift if there is justice and peace, and Christians pray for this and thank God for it. But if it is not to be, the sufferings of this world cannot compare to God's kingdom. We also know that one day all earthly institutions

will cease to exist. We only hope and believe that the time of tribulation will be limited on behalf of the elect (Mt. 24:22; Mk. 13:20). The government keeps earthly affairs in good order – just as food and drink support the body. It is God's servant in that way: serving limited earthly life that will one day come to an end.

If the difference between earthly affairs and heavenly life are taken into consideration, it is no wonder that Calvin's language about the government is bleak compared to his discourse on the life in Christ, as Barth noticed. There are many poems about flowers, but few about the seed from which they grew. Government just helps to keep the seed dry – until one day it must fall in soil. It is the governments of the world that will introduce the chaos of Armageddon, for governments belong to this world that has fallen into sin.

Here can again be found a similarity with individual life, for human structures and human life cannot be separated. In the limited conditions of earthly life we do good, more or less – and it is a pleasure if it is indeed "more". But, compared to the ultimate requirements of the kingdom of God, we can only join Paul in saying: "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, there is no good." Being in Christ we are glorious; in ourselves we are not good.

The government is a similar case. If it is about limited earthly life, it is more or less just and we can be happy if there is "more" of it, and it to an extent prevents total chaos in the world. This is a gift from God – again, for the time being. But if it is about the absolute peace and justice of God's kingdom, there is no such good in government. That is the difference between Romans 13 and Revelation 13. It is not the case that Romans 13 is about a relatively just government and the author of Revelation is confronted with evil incarnate in the emperor. Barth makes a distinction between a good and a wicked administration, between government and tyranny, between a state according to Romans 13 and according to Revelation 13 (Barth 1946:16). By doing so, he takes into account neither the different theological perspectives of the two chapters nor historical reality. The later emperors of the Julian house in the time of Paul were no better than the Flavians in the time of Revelation. It is only the perspective of both writings that makes the difference: Romans speaks about earthly conditions and the relative circumstances of present society; Revelation views everything *sub specie aeternitatis* – from a heavenly perspective (Rev. 4). According to this view one has to say that no good is to be found in government, that it is a beast from the abyss.

Barth too easily makes a positive comparison between government and the kingdom of God. A government can become the beast, according to him (Barth 1939:11; 1938:8); it can become demonic (1939:21 and more extensively, 30; also 1938:14, 18). He does not take different perspectives into consideration: one of living in this world that is subject to death and the other of the new creation in Christ. Because Christians belong to the latter, they must resist the temptation of making agreements (and thus analogies) with the former.

Bɪʙʟɪᴏɢʀᴀᴘʜʏ

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KEY WORDS
Reformed theology
Political involvement
Early Christianity
Calvin
Karl Barth

KERNWOORDE
Gerefromeerde teologie
Politieke betrokkenheid
Vroeë Christendom
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Too little too late … On the reaction of the WARC to the resurgence of violent identity politics in the 1990s

ABSTRACT

This contribution offers an analysis of the manner the World Alliance of Reformed Churches reacted to the influence of the identity politics of the 1990s on its way to the 23rd General Assembly in Debrecen in 1997. Contrary to the outspoken position of the 21st General Assembly in Ottawa in 1982 over against the South African Reformed churches that supported apartheid and adopted its racial structures correspondingly, the 1997 Assembly's reaction was much more subdued. Attempts to find an answer in the traditional Reformed teaching on church-state relations and in the Presbyterian Synodal structure were finally dismissed as not to the point. Instead a Barmen Declaration like call for a multicultural church was accepted. But with its eschatological style no church felt pressed upon to reflect on its link with nation, ethnic group, or tribe. The conclusion weights the consequences of reducing an ecclesial problem to an ethical issue.

INTRODUCTION

One year after joining the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Western Cape, the young theologian Dirkie Smit would become one of the main drafters of the Belhar Confession. This confession positioned itself in a most outspoken way in the then existing political and ecclesial apartheid within the Dutch Reformed Church family. The Belhar Confession reverberated strongly among the member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) (cf. Naudé 2010). For Smit it would be part of a life-long academic interest in Reformed theology, as attested to by the recent publication of one of his collections of essays (Smit 2009).[2] Smit's method of contributing to ecumenical theology from a Reformed perspective has always attracted me.

In this contribution I offer an analysis of the way WARC reacted to the identity politics of the 1990s. I do so with a view to answering the question whether any continuity exists in the way WARC reacted to racial identity politics in South Africa in the 1980s. In this way I wish to honour the work of Smit and to challenge him and others to continue working towards the unity of the church as part of doing public theology in a "global" world.

In 2010, WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council together formed the World Communion of Reformed Churches. This new body faces the same challenge as other global Christian communions in the broad ecumenical movement, namely how to deal with sociocultural

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2 This volume contains 28 of Smit's essays on aspects of Reformed theology.

identities in relation to the identity of the church? The issue of social identities, including racial, national and ethnic identities also faced the twentieth century ecumenical movement. The movement serves an interesting case for two reasons: First, it has a history of publicly condemning violence caused by racial, national and ethnic tensions. At the same time, since the unity of the church is its core business, the ecumenical movement is an environment where resistance to attempts at linking the Christian message and Christian denominations too closely with racial, national, and ethnic identities can be expected. Such attempts would, after all, contradict the idea of the unity and catholicity of the church.

Identity issues were very high on the international agenda at two occasions during the twentieth century: First, before World War II due to the threat of an imminent war as a result of nationalistic profiling, especially in Nazi Germany. After World War II a new ideological confrontation pushed national and other identities into the background. However, the end of the Cold War brought a reawakening of the violence that often accompanies identity politics in the West. Many people were surprised by the resurgence of nationalistic violence and in stances of ethnic cleansing in the heart of Europe. Especially unexpected was the use of religion as an identity marker in these former communist societies that had been thoroughly secularised by the state for more than forty years. Serbs, for example, presented themselves as Orthodox, Croats as Roman Catholics, and Bosnians as Muslims.

Religions were, of course, misused for political purposes, but at the same time they also used the opportunity to present themselves in the public sphere. In this heated atmosphere the jargon of Christian peace and reconciliation was used, but more importantly, many religious leaders, theologians and lay believers unreservedly defined themselves in terms of their national or ethnic affiliations. There was no theological reticence whatsoever. This is not surprising in light of the common conviction (also expressed in Faith and Order documents) that social identities within the church were of a nontheological nature and that they do not harm the fundamentals of the one Catholic Church.

A FIRST REACTION: A REMINDER OF THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STATE

In response to the historical changes that took place in Europe in 1989, WARC's Department of Theology organised two consultations. The first was held in November 1990, one year after the implosion of communist regimes in most of the Central and Eastern Europe (cf. Wilson 1991).[3] The theme and the mandate of the consultation (on Christian Community in a Changing Society) were broad. Its task was to discern how Christians in a living community could exercise responsibility in a changing society. The consultation produced a working paper that was intended for further discussion by member churches. More than merely expressing gratitude for the end of the Cold War and communist dictatorships, the paper also breathes an air of concern about an uncertain future. Will the new governments in Central and Eastern Europe still see as their task the protection of vulnerable members of society in a time of unemployment, economic chaos, ethnic and cultural strife, et cetera? Will authorities and churches respect the secular state, and how will they react to ethnic nationalism?

The rise of ethnical identity and nationalism was just one of the issues that followed in the wake the rapidly changing society since 1989. However, the fact that the Message to the Churches, which resulted from the above consultation, does not mention the issue confirms that it was still not seen as a real challenge (cf. The Message to the Churches in Wilson 1991:88 - 89).

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3 Some thirty persons, all from the Reformed tradition, took part.

In the introduction to the working paper, an explicitly negative reference to the issue of nationalism is found: "we are concerned about the rise of nationalism, racism, and other disquieting features of the present day" (Wilson 1991:80). In his introduction to the volume containing the texts from the consultation, H. S. Wilson (then Executive Secretary of WARC's Department of Theology) observed that the negative connotation attached to nationalism was not shared by all consultation participants (Wilson 1991: ii). This volume is also revealing in another way. It contains the presentations at the conference: six case studies,[4] and two papers. The latter two papers are on the same issue, namely the relationship between church and state but from two perspectives, the biblical witness and the Reformed tradition (Gottwald 1991:118 and Busch 1991:19 - 28).

The tradition affirms that God has installed governments with the clear function of looking after the wellbeing of all and creating a just social body responsible for protecting the weak from the strong and freeing all the oppressed. The Christian community is, then, called to support the functions of the government in striving towards this goal (Wilson 1990:108).

But would this specific Reformed contribution be enough when more violence, fuelled by ethnic and nationalistic claims, erupted in Europe and other parts of the world in the first half of the 1990s?

A SECOND REACTION: CHURCHES CALLED TO PROTECT DIVERSITY AND TO WORK AS AGENTS OF RECONCILIATION

The second consultation took place in 1994, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in the wake of the ethnic crises in Bosnia and Rwanda. This consultation was organised in cooperation with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).[5] It focused on one of the main characteristics of the post Cold War era, namely the resurgence of ethnicity and nationalism. Four short presentations and a statement resulting from this consultation have been published. In the first presentation, Jayadeva Uyangoda (who teaches political science at the University of Colombo) attempted to entangle ethnicity and nationalism and ended with a call to de-ethnicise politics (Uyangoda 1995:190 - 194). He explained that issue of conflicting identities also affect churches:

> In other words, the church is a part of the problem because at one level church has this universalizing, universalist, homogenizing identity, while at the same time church members have micro identities (Uyangoda 1995:193).

The second paper by the then still fairly unknown Croat scholar Miroslav Volf (1995:195 - 205) offered theological perspectives on cultural identity and conflict.[6] According to Volf, striking a balance of distance and belonging Christians should not be of the culture, but in and for the culture. This requires a catholic personality that belongs to a catholic community – catholicity referring to openness to other personalities and communities. The catholicity of the local church is attributed to its being part of the universal church, but in reality every local church is a catholic community because all other churches shape its identity. However, next to this

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4 German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Northern Ireland, Lebanon, South Africa and South Korea.

5 This time thirty six people attended, representing WARC, LWF or the WWC.

6 Volf used some ideas he later fully developed in a volume entitled *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (1996).

movement towards embracing culture, especially other cultures, a movement in the direction of exclusion needs to be distinguished. It requires an evangelical personality, transformed by the Spirit and engaged in transformation of the world as part of an ecumenical community that says "No!" to evil in each culture. Volf referred to the Barmen Declaration that called upon the churches to reject all "other lords". But Barmen's abstract formulation now needs an added formulation in order to nurture commitment to the multicultural community of the Christian church (1995:198200).

The meeting in Colombo ended with the adoption of a statement entitled A Challenge to the Churches.[7] The introduction to the statement contains a revealing confession:

> The role of the Christian community in any situation of ethnic strife is always difficult and often ambiguous. In many of these conflicts, no solution is apparent; and we recognize that Christian faith offers no ready answers to them (Ethnicity and Nationalism 1995:225).

The report consists of three sections: a) reflections on some types and elements of ethnicity; b) biblical and theological perspectives; and c) practical suggestions for the churches. I shall focus on the second section. It starts with aspects of creation theology with references to Genesis 1 (creation) and 11 (Tower of Babel). "God is the author both of our common humanity and of our diversity" (1995:227). Due to sin – greed for wealth and power, land and its fruits – human beings have made ethnic differences a source of deadly conflict. As a consequence of the redemption in Christ, every tribe and nation is called to gather around the Triune God in a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21 – 22). Before this promise will be fulfilled, all cultures will be refined and renewed. The relationship between the church and the nations is described as follows:

> As the gospel has been preached to many nations, the church has taken root in many cultures, transforming them as well as being profoundly shaped by them. Yet the church does not have its own specific culture; rather, to be church is a way of living the life of the new creation within a given culture. The church must have its feet firmly planted in any culture in which it lives, and its arms stretched out towards God and God's future, the new creation (1995:227 - 228).

Since Pentecost is in line with the experience of the Tower of Babel – the new community speaks many languages (Acts 2), it is not reverting to the unity of cultural uniformity; it is an advance towards the harmony of cultural diversity.

The church contributes to the flowering of diverse cultures by affirming cultural diversity. At the same time, the church is called to protect cultures against forms of ethnic aggression against the "stranger who is within the gates" or towards neighbouring ethnic groups. Churches also need to challenge structures or oppressive practices whether these are economic, political, sexual, racial or ethnic. Churches must, furthermore, strive towards peace and justice, and should give special attention to the plight of the vulnerable.

Confronted with the present ethnic conflicts around the globe, the first act of churches should be to repent.

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7 This statement was published in *The Ecumenical Review* (47(2), 1995, 225231) as well as in Wilson 1995:113124 and in Tschuy 1997:150156.

Finding it difficult to distance themselves from their own culture, churches too often echo its reigning opinions and mimic its practices, sometimes to the point of repeating nationalistic slogans and propaganda (1995:228).

The report next recalls the appeal made at the 7th Assembly of the WCC in Canberra (1991):

> The churches are called to move towards visible unity in order to proclaim the gospel of hope and reconciliation for all people and show a credible model of that life God offers to all (1995:228).

Churches are invited to respond to this gift and calling for the sake of ethnic harmony. Because of the blood of the one Lamb, people of all tribes and nations belong to the one church. References to Revelations 5:9 and Galatians 3:28 underscore the Christological and unique soteriological basis of the one community in Christ.

As can be seen from the above, several themes are mentioned in this central biblical and theological section. First, starting from creation theology, unity and diversity are confessed as gifts from God, with the emphasis on diversity. Second, the calling of the church in the world is to cherish diversity, while at the same time being attentive to signs of exclusion within cultures. Three, churches must repent because they have too often been open to nationalistic slogans. And finally, in order to be a community of reconciliation, the church itself must be one people gathered from every tribe and nation, reconciled with God and each other on the basis of the blood of the one Lamb. Creation theology thus supports the diversity of nations and ethnical groups while the unity of the church is based on Christological arguments. The problem with this analysis is that ethnic strife is viewed only as a problem of the world. The one church is called to protect harmonious relations between various cultures, nations and ethnic groups. However, ethnicity or nationalism is not seen as a problem for the identity of the church and that can only diminish the reconciliatory potential of the church in the world.

The last part – challenges to the churches – confirms the above analysis. The challenges are ways to strengthen the reconciliatory power of the church: critical evaluation of its own history of involvement in ethnic strife; interfaith encounter in order to prevent the abuse of religion for nationalistic and ethnic purposes; the local congregation as the place par excellence for encounter across ethnic lines; wise leadership that promotes the gospel above ethnic affinities; sensitivity for the rights of minority groups; and churches that are politically, economically, historically and culturally well informed. In other words, the church "is challenged to break down the walls of hostility among groups and to unmask the dehumanizing powers often inherent in nationalistic programs" (1995:230). The phrase "kingdom of God" is proposed as inspiration toward an improved understanding of nationalism and ethnicity.

One point of advice is difficult to relate to the other "challenges", namely that "[t]he church is challenged to respond to the increase in missionary activity and the phenomenal growth of new religious movements in many countries" (1995:229). The latter groups are accused of propagating a faith that is alien to the cultural identity of the communities to which they belong, of offering simplistic responses to complex and critical issues and of serving as vehicles for promoting the economic and political interests of other powers. The accused groups are not identified, but the text contains the exact accusations levelled by the auto-cephalic Orthodox churches in Central and Eastern Europe against Evangelical missionary outreach,

which is often financially supported by American Evangelical or Pentecostal churches, or by the Roman Catholic Church. This is considered as resulting in inappropriate proselytism. What "the response" of "the church" – note the singular – should be is not explicitly stated. What in reality happened in many of these Central and Eastern European countries was that the historical church in these countries – often Orthodox churches, but sometimes also churches belonging to other traditions – tried to strengthen the bond between nation and a specific church in a combination of national and ecclesial identity in order to exclude other religious traditions.

For WARC the 1994 Colombo consultation had to be understood as the sequel to the 1990 Swiss conference on Christian Community in a Changing Society (cf. Wilson 1995:113). However, since it was co-organised by the LWF and WCC, specific Reformed emphases were absent. In his introduction in *Reformed World,* Wilson suggested some key doctrines that might require reinterpretation and application, namely those on the sovereignty of God, covenantal relationship, exercise of Christian freedom with responsibility, and the pilgrim nature of Christians (Wilson 1995:115). What these doctrines might mean in the context of rising ethnic and nationalistic tension was not further developed, but Wilson seems to be referring to theological elements that might help in looking critically at the issue of ethnic and nationalistic identification and that might help churches to keep their distance from a too close alliance with specific nationalistic and/or ethnic groups. For further direction Wilson referred to the 23rd General Council of WARC that was to follow in 1997.

On the way to Debrecen 1997: The presbyterian synodal structure as model

A study book and a volume with study texts were prepared in preparation for the 23rd Assembly of the General Council of WARC. These supplied participants with the basic documents to be discussed during the Council meeting. National and ethnic identity would be addressed, but not as part of the first section (Reformed faith and the search for unity), but of the second, which would deal with "justice for all creation". Next to justice in the economy and in creation, justice with regard to issues of national and ethnic identity would form the third subsection. The focus was on protecting ethnic and national diversity and on protecting ethnic and national minorities. It further built on the results of the meeting in Colombo.

After describing the ambiguity of belonging and types of ethnic conflicts, the document called National and Ethnic Identity (in Réamon 1997:64 - 72) observes that churches are not often able to act as agents of peace in ethnic conflicts. In the fourth paragraph, biblical and theological perspectives are provided for: dignity and equality in creation; God's option for diversity as expressed in the story of the Tower of Babel; ethnic discrimination as sin; the calling of Israel to be different for the sake of the others; the cross of Jesus, "the stranger", reconciling humans with God and with one another; the eschatological promise of the gathering of all tribes and nations around God's throne; Pentecost as the confirmation of God's option for diversity at the Tower of Babel; the Christian attitude of distance towards and belonging to culture; forgiveness as Christian message in contexts of ethnic violence; and both justice and truth as indispensable on the way to ethnic harmony.

Two of the theological themes contain valuable perspectives from the Reformed tradition. One is the Reformed understanding of the state. The state as an institution is a gift of God to promote peace and justice and to provide for the protection of the weak. One recognises

here the central theme of the first consultation in 1990. The second Reformed accent is new and refers to Calvin's organisation of the church:

> This Pentecost vision of unity in diversity is reflected in Calvin's view of the church. According to Calvin, the visible church is first of all local: the church in a definite region of the world where it can act responsibly, because it is small enough to be manageable. The church in its region is not, however, separate: it is in this region the one Christian church. It is immediately in contact with other churches in their regions, tied with them in federal communication. Without imposing its confession or order on the churches in the other regions, it is connected with them in the same faith. The church is in this way an ecumenical church (quoted in Réamon 1997:6970).

The autonomy of the local church and the interdependence within the presbyterialsynodal system are presented as a kind of model for the way ethnic groups and national states should interact with one another.

Biblical and theological perspectives are followed by challenges and tasks for the churches. These are identified as: being a welcoming and open community to all; the development of liturgies that reflect ethnic diversity; a reassessment of churches' involvement in ethnic conflicts; the need to explore the political meaning of forgiveness; the need to engage in the struggle for the rights of vulnerable people; the need to call governments to account; and the need to promote encounters with people of other faiths.

The study text on national and ethnic identity ends with a confession in the tradition of the Barmen Declaration:

> "You were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9). "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

All the churches of Jesus Christ, scattered in diverse cultures, have been redeemed for God by the blood of the Lamb to form one multicultural community of faith. The "blood" that binds Christians together as brothers and sisters is more precious than the "blood" (the language, the customs, the political allegiances or economic interests) that may distinguish them or separate them from each other.

We reject the false doctrine, as though a church should place allegiance to the culture it inhabits or the nation to which it belongs above its commitment to brothers and sisters from other cultures and nations, servants of the one Jesus Christ, their common Lord, and members of God's new community (in Réamon 1997:72).

Subsection 2.3 of this study text concerns national and ethnic identity and is the most elaborate reflection on the issue produced by WARC thus far. It has no official status, but it provides us with good insight into the thinking on this theme within WARC. It is obvious that the approach in the Colombo statement of 1995 provided the main inspiration for the study text. First, the call on the churches to be a community of reconciliation is echoed and transformed to fit the theme of the conference: ethnic discrimination is understood as a justice issue. The protection of diversity and care for minorities become central issues. Second, the theological themes also correspond. Diversity and equality

are stressed as creation theological, Israel theological and pneumatological focuses, while unity is approached from a soteriological and an eschatological angle. Third, the churches are described as communities of people reconciled with God and with one another. It is their vocation to call other people, national and ethnic groups to reconciliation. Forgiveness is an important part of their message, especially in the context of ethnic violence.

In a further analysis it becomes clear that the approach is ecclesiastical and not ecclesiological. It deals with ethnicity and nationalism on the level of the churches, not on the level of the church. If the latter would have been the case, the subsection should not have been part of section 2 (on justice) but of section 1 (on the unity of the church). At the Colombo conference the political scientist Uyangoda challenged the church to rethink the way its universalising identity corresponds with the micro identities of its members. The presentation by the theologian, Volf, also contained various creative ideas that linked ethnicity and nationalism to the identity of the church as one and catholic. However, following the Colombo statement, the study text abstains from looking into the issue of ethnicity as relating to the fundamental ecclesiological issue of unity. One element of Volf's lecture is incorporated though, namely the Barmen Commitment to the Lordship of Christ complemented by a commitment to the multi-cultural church of Christ.

Of the two specific Reformed theological inputs, one has been repeated over and over again. The church should be a sentinel in relation to the state, permanently assessing whether the state is performing as God calls it to. The other is new. The Reformed presbyterial synodal church order is presented as a model for the way multiple ethnic and national groups can relate to one another. The quite small and manageable local church in one region is linked with other churches in other regions to together form the one church of God. In this way unity in diversity is provided for. Still it is to be seen whether this church model is really that attractive. Calvin understood this as a regional model, having one church for each region, but in the Calvinist tradition this connection of one church for one locality was lost. Due to the strong emphasis on truth, discussions often led to schisms in which the unity of the local church was sacrificed in order to safeguard the purity of the church. The presbyterial synodal structure has survived in a variety of denominations within the same region. Diversity is rescued at the cost of unity. Would the theological input of and all the other elements in this study text on national and ethnic identity become part of the official statement accepted by the 23rd General Council of WARC that met in Debrecen in August 1997?

The 23rd general assembly in Debrecen: no longer an ecclesiological issue

National and ethnic identity would indeed become part of the official report of the Debrecen assembly. It is found in Section II under the title Justice for All Creation (in Opočenský 1997:192201). The texts of the subsections in the study texts have been integrated into one document. Economy, ecology and national or ethnic identity are all themes of the living together in the household of God. The third issue deals with "respect for diversity of the household" (Opočenský 1997:192). National and ethnic identity forms a subheading under "biblical perspectives and analysis of issues" (Opočenský 1997:195 - 197).

In the final part of the second section of the report, separate conclusions are drawn on economic and ecological issues and regarding national and ethnic identity. In relation to economic injustice and ecological destruction a *processus confessionis* (a progressive

recognition, education and confession) is called for. In relation to national and ethnic identity, the General Council calls upon the member churches to affirm the multicultural character of the church in a way similar to Barmen. The text proposed by Volf is then quoted. It also calls on the churches to engage in religious dialogue, to evaluate their own historical track record on this theme, and to repent and repair. The General Council calls upon WARC to establish a permanent commission on ethnic and cultural conflict, and to disseminate these statements and concerns to religious and political authorities (Opočenský 1997:200201). Just as the climax regarding economic and ecological justice is found in the call for a processus confessionis, so the climax regarding national and ethnic identity is be found in the affirmation, which is modelled on the Barmen Declaration.

This Barmen like declaration is copied from Volf's lecture at the Colombo meeting. It was not part of the statement adopted in Colombo. Because it is central to the Debrecen declaration, this "affirmation" is worth a closer look: Churches are asked to confirm that they place loyalty to Christ above loyalty to their ethnic group or nation. Just as ethnic and national allegiance finds expression in group identities, belonging to Christ is also expressed in terms of group identity. In the Barmen styled recommendation that was accepted this group identity is described as "one multicultural community of faith". The context suggests that this has to be understood eschatologically in the sense that this is directed at the future rather than at realised eschatology. The reality is one in which "all the churches of Jesus Christ, scattered in diverse cultures", but is transformed into one multicultural identity through God's redemption by the blood of the Lamb. The biblical introduction supports this eschatological reading. The first of the two texts is from the Book of Revelation (Rev. 5:9) and an anathema confirms this interpretation as well. Allegiance to nation and culture is rejected when it is placed above allegiance to God and "to the vision of God's new redeemed community". The word "vision" is important. It suggests that it is not what the churches are now but what they are heading towards.

The anathema is clearly not aimed at "all the churches of Jesus Christ scattered in diverse cultures". It is only aimed at Christians who and Christian churches that fully identify the Christian community with the ethnic or national community and who have lost this eschatological vision of one multicultural community of faith. Churches organised along ethnic or national lines should not feel they are the addressees of the anathema if they keep alive the hope for that multicultural future in one community. Reformed churches will confirm that their loyalty to Christ has priority above loyalty to their people – also because the multicultural community of faith has eschatological over tones. At the same time they will be happy with the approach taken by the WARC in Debrecen. The argument follows a strong creation theological line, while Christology and ecclesiology are set in an eschatological key. The main accent is not on unity but on diversity and the call for the protection of minorities. It is possible that for Volf, the original author of this text, the declaration might have sounded less eschatological. In his ecclesiology, *After our Likeness* (1998), which was published later, he further developed the notion of congregational catholicity and the local multicultural congregation becomes the expression of this congregational catholicity.

It is obvious that the Barmen like declaration founds its way, first into the study text and later into the official report on the General Council in Debrecen 1997, because the original Barmen Declaration of 1934 was awarded confession like status in many Reformed Churches. A statement built on the central idea of Barmen (a recommitment to the Lordship of Christ within the Church) and on the Barmen model (biblical references, followed by a

confessional statement and an anathema) appeals deeply to the Reformed, and confirms and strengthens the collective Reformed identity. This has become so central that other specific references to the Reformed tradition in the study text have not been retained in the final text. Both the traditional call on churches to be a sentinel in relation to the government and the reference to the presbyterialsynodal system disappeared.

Volf's Barmen like statement is imbedded in an original ecclesiological discourse on catholicity and unity. The first section of the Debrecen General Council report addresses the issue of the Reformed faith and the search for unity. This sections deals with Reformed self-understanding, gospel and cultures, and common witness, but not with churches and their cultural and national identities. This complete silence on the issue in the context of the 1990s is more than remarkable.

Conclusion

In the beginning of the 1990s the world was shocked at the upsurge of in identity politics and the accompanying violence. Almost nobody had expected ethnic cleansing in the heart of Europe less than fifty years after the end of World War II. What was even more surprising was the role played by religions in these identity politics. Christian communities were part of this and Re formed congregations and churches were no exception as the declaration of the Reformed churches in Hungary and Romania proved. So was WARC able to provide theological leadership in order to prevent churches from become accomplices to identity profiling? Here are some conclusions.

Ecumenical reaction came late. The Dayton Agreements to end most of the fighting in the Balkan was signed in November 1995. Faith and Order would only launch a project on the ethnic identity, national identity and the unity of the church in 1997. The WARC Debrecen statement is also from August 1997.

WARC did not understand it as an ecclesiological challenge; it saw it as a justice issue. What ultimately happens in such cases is that civil governments are called upon to take action and the result is a very unsatisfactory kind of public theology. The Barmen like call for a multicultural church is original. However, no church should feel as if it is its addressee, since its tone is eschatological.

No theological concepts from the Reformed tradition were presented as possible solutions. Neither the traditional call on the state, nor the presbyterialsynodal model survived.

WARC has been able to convey what it condemns as heretical in relation to sociocultural identities and the unity of the church in one case – that is, the way some South African churches developed a model of congregations and synods separated along racial lines. However, race is not the sole category; the concepts of nation, ethnicity and clan are also used for profiling churches within Reformed traditions. The Debrecen General Assembly of WARC went out of its way to deal with the problem by reframing it as a justice issue. In my opinion, the issue is still very urgent and potentially very dangerous for unity within the Reformed tradition.

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KEY WORDS
World Alliance of Reformed Churches
Identity-politics in the 1990s
Race
Nation
Ecclesiology

TREFWOORDE
Wêrelbond van Gereformeerde Kerke
Identiteitspolitiek in die 1990's
Ras
Nasie
Ekklesiologie

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Should theology take evolutionary ethics seriously? A conversation with Hannah Arendt and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone

ABSTRACT

In this essay I attempt to bridge the gap between evolutionary and theological meta-narratives by making a proposal for a bottom-up, contextual form of evolutionary ethics, and then specifically ask how this might apply to the evolution of morality, to ethical judgments, and the status of ethical judgments and moral codes in theology. Most importantly, this will imply a Christian ethics, and a notion of morality that proceed not from a consideration of rules, duties, rights, moral judgments, moral status, but proceeds rather, from the examination of the fundamental evolutionary realities of human nature. This argument is developed against the background of an analysis of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's engagement with the work of Hannah Arendt on the notion of evil. Finally I argue that the work of evolutionary ethicists are of great importance for theologians because of their direct interest in how the evolutionary origins of human behaviour is to be explained, and in which way our behaviour has been constrained, but not determined, by biological factors. Evolution by natural selection can explain our tendency to think in normative terms, i.e., our innate sense of moral awareness. However, evolutionary explanations of this moral awareness cannot explain our moral judgments, nor justify the truth claims of any of our moral judgments. Why and how we make moral judgments can only be explained on the level of cultural evolution, and by taking into account the historical embeddedness of our moral codes in religious and political conventions. For Christian theology the choice will not be between a moral vision that is inherent in revelation and is, therefore, 'received' and not invented or constructed. Instead, on a post-Foundational view our moral codes and ethical convictions of what is 'received' is itself an interpretative enterprise, shaped experientially through our embeddedness in communities and cultures.

INTRODUCTION

The tension between evolutionary theory and Christian faith is often viewed as the most recent and the most long-standing example of defensive posturing by people of faith in the face of advancing scientific understanding, the kind of scientific understanding that seems to have systematically threatened belief in God by the sheer firepower of naturalistic explanation (cf. Schloss 2004:1f.). I do believe, however, that a constructive dialogue with evolutionary theory should not be about whether or not supernatural accounts of the origin of creation can be defended, but should rather focus on the fundamental question: What kind of creation do we have?

Against this background, I want to try, in this essay, to begin to bridge the gap between evolutionary and theological meta-narratives by making a post-foundationalism proposal (cf.

Van Huyssteen 2006:6-24) for a bottom-up, contextual form of evolutionary ethics, and then specifically ask how this might apply to the evolution of morality, to ethical judgements and the status of ethical judgement and moral codes in theology.

FROM EMPATHY TO MORAL AWARENESS OF ETHICS

In her fascinating studies, especially her acclaimed Roots series, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone goes to the evolutionary roots of human cognition, language and communication by developing a very pronounced "hermeneutics of the human body" (1990; 1994; 2008). Throughout her work the emphasis is on the role of the human body in understanding meaning and mind. The most fundamental theme advocated in her work, however, is the existence of a biological disposition to use one's own body as a semantic template for the way we communicate with others. Sheets-Johnstone wants to go even further, however, and "get back" to our hominid roots through the evolutionary continuum of the tactile-kinaesthetic body (cf. 1990:280), so as to illuminate the evolution of sexuality, language, cognition and morality.

Ultimately, Sheets-Johnstone argues that the biological disposition to use one's own body as a semantic template to communicate with others in the most fundamental sense of the word is about symbolic behaviour and conceptual origins (1990:3), or what Steven Mithen would call the "emergence of cognitive fluidity in the embodied human mind" (cf. Mithen 1996:70, 136). Her fascinating thesis is that human thinking is modelled on the body and it is precisely the sensorial felt and sensorial feeling body that serves as the cognitive source of those human concepts that continuously shaped human thinking and evolution, thus functioning as a semantic template (1990:5, 6). It is against this background that Sheets-Johnstone argues that many contemporary answers to the origins of language fall short as they continue to ignore the reality that "no language can be spoken for which the body is unprepared" (1990:135).

No wonder, then, since the path from embodiment leads directly to the evolution of empathy and the moral sense, the fundamental embodied roots of morality have been of utmost importance in Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's most recent work. For her empathy goes to the evolutionary heart of human personhood. Our ability to care, to trust, to empathise and have deep feelings for others is essential to the development of moral awareness and the realisation of a fully resonant human being (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:193f.). As such, it gives us access to the mental acts and processes of others and through empathy we discover the feelings and values of others, what their convictions are and precisely through this capacity for empathy we ultimately share what Husserl already described as an inter-subjective world, that is, a *communally intelligible world* (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:194). And – of crucial importance, although often neglected – in empathy we basically make sense of each other in ways *outside* of language.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's work on the roots of morality is infused by the fact that in hominid and human history there clearly emerged a deeply embodied sense of empathy: and the core phenomenon we observe when we reflect on our own empathetic actions is not simply a *body,* but a *moving body.* Movement is an *unfolding dynamic event* and we, in fact, have perceptions of movement as well as *feelings* of movement. Sheets-Johnstone accurately describes this as a *double spatial sense of movement: we perceive* our movement as a kinetic three-dimensional happening; and we feel the qualitative dynamics of our movement kinaesthetically (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:199). Indeed, in empathy *we move in ways we are moved to move* (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:207f.). It is in this sense that empathy is through and through indicated somatically: it is indeed not merely a question of a body, but of a body in movement.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone also follows infant psychiatrist Daniel Stern (1985) and makes an important conceptual distinction between *attunement* and *empathy*: in this way an important distinction is made between neurological mother-infant attunement and attachment, and embodied empathetic movements or understandings that flow from this. What is thus revealed is that our cognitive understandings finally enter deeply into the congruent dynamics of both attunement and empathy. Furthermore, both attunement and empathy start with an emotional resonance, but attunement takes the experience of emotional resonance and automatically recasts that experience into another form of expression. So, for Sheets-Johnstone, attunement occurs largely beyond awareness and almost automatically, while empathy involves the mediation of cognitive processes (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:203).

For Sheets-Johnstone empathy is, furthermore, an embodied form of *responsivity*. It is never just a form of mental construction and it is never just a one-sided experience, but it is rather a spontaneous embodied response to direct experiences of the other, and from its foundations in affect attunement and attachment, it progressively discloses richer and more complex dimensions of others. In exactly this sense, empathy is a seeing deeply into another and, I would add, in a more Ricoeurian way, finding oneself in another, finding oneself as another (cf. Ricoeur 1992:1-29). Responding empathetically, then, we experience the density of another person, the meanings that are livingly present for him or her (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:225f.). And importantly, these deepened understandings of another over time are not ready-made but mature progressively as we ourselves mature. We grasp at ever deeper levels what another is living through because we have ourselves grown in life experiences and thus reach out to the deepest levels of one another, as we together become more mature, intricate and trustworthy persons in the process.

Against the background of this illuminating discussion of empathy, Sheets-Johnstone now adds the notion of *trust*. Trust, as deeply embedded in empathy, is already grounded in a non-linguistic sense of the other that is rooted in sensitive and deep awareness of the feelings, dispositions and intentions of the other toward us (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:265). And, it is only the learning of trust that can ultimately overcome the existential meaning and impact of uncertainty. However, because its cognitive structure is always open to affective influence or some form of fear, the cognitive structure of trust can be unstable. Only if and when we arrive at a fuller understanding of our relationship with the other and of the *affective foundations of trust,* will we be able to arrive at a fuller understanding and an overcoming of the more fragile nature of the *cognitive structure of trust* (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:281). And it is this ever-maturing cognitive structure of trust, so deeply embedded in the embodied, affective structure of empathy, which ultimately opens the door to a mutual *rationality of care* for one another.

In further developing this argument, Sheets-Johnstone now calls for philosophical and evolutionary ways to understand how empathy is indeed a spontaneous outgrowth of affect attunement and emotional attachment (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:211; cf. also Kirkpatrick 2005). Empathy also has direct links to Theory of Mind, that is, our intuitive knowing of the minds of others. For Sheets-Johnstone this is now enriched by redefining Theory of Mind as getting to know not just other minds, but *getting to know other moving bodies* (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:213ff.). In principle, Sheets-Johnstone thus offers us a fascinating evolutionary trajectory for engaging any project in ethics that opens up an understanding for a particular form of inter-animate meaning, namely *empathy, moral awareness,* and a *rationality of care* (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:215). It is this rich revisioning of a profoundly embodied notion

of empathy, I believe, that will eventually become a crucial building block for understanding the evolution of morality, of notions of good and evil, and although Sheets-Johnstone herself does not go there, to a responsible way of thinking about the evolution of religion (cf. Van Huyssteen 2011b).

Thus, in trying to understand the evolutionary roots of human morality through affective attunement and empathy, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone develops what I would call a "bottom-up" understanding of morality grounded in the nature of human nature. Most importantly, for her this evolutionary approach to the understanding of the roots of morality directly implies a phenomenological exploration of human experience, including the phylogenetic and ontogenetic heritages of humans, experiences of the embodied human psyche and of the very basic facets of embodied human existence (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:1f.). Most importantly, this implies a morality that proceeds not from a consideration of rules, duties, rights, moral judgements, moral status or leading current ethical issues in Western society or the world at large, but proceeds rather, and first of all, from the examination of the fundamental evolutionary realities of human nature. As such, Sheets-Johnstone articulates multi-disciplinary and multi-layered understandings of human morality that are ultimately grounded, as we will see, in bottom-up, pan-cultural aspects of human existence.

For Sheets-Johnstone the need for such an "interdisciplinary therapeutic" is called for because an ethics based on anything other than human nature would lack solid empirical moorings and easily loses itself in the reductionist abstractions of disembodied, abstract issues like selfish genes, dedicated brain modules, and reductionist views of evolutionary altruism, et cetera (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:2). Following the historical line of Hume, Rousseau and Hobbes, whom she sees as developing, each in his own way, an understanding of morality rooted in what he saw as *the nature of human nature* (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:2ff.), Sheets-Johnstone reclaims a strong empirical approach that is based on evidence from both personal and social experience. Not only that, but she casts her evolutionary approach in a phenomenological perspective so that it could be seen as offering a *profile* of human nature, that is, just as an object offers multiple possible profiles to a phenomenological observer, so also does human nature (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:2). For Sheets-Johnstone the challenge in effect is to discover the nature of the human condition on the basis of the kinds of profiles that emerge when we carefully observe human nature, and so to take the first steps to reveal the roots of human morality.[1]

Building now on the deeply embodied sense of empathy as discussed earlier, the biological roots of empathy can fundamentally be seen as enabling a social transfer of sense through embodied communication. As such, from an evolutionary perspective, empathy translates naturally into a basic moral sense, that is, how it is first and foremost generated from, and anchored in social and affective bodily experiences, and how it is ultimately sustained by trust in interpersonal relationships (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:7).

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1 Throughout the book Sheet-Johnstone's approach then unfolds in three successive steps: i) what we have learned from others; ii) then broadening that knowledge by putting it in preliminary evolutionary and ontogenetically perspectives; iii) deepening this phenomenologically by probing along elusive experiential borders to reach the roots of human morality(cf. 2008:6).

On the origins of evil

Ultimately, of course, Sheets-Johnstone argues that the pan-cultural origins of both empathy and evil clearly have their roots in the evolutionary heritage of humans, though just as clearly those roots stretch all the way from the biological to the cultural. And she pointedly asks: What is evil if not violence, warfare, massacres, ethnic cleansings, and what is war to begin with, if not male-male competition (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:128f.)? Moreover, what is war fundamentally if not an expression of the biological matrix of male-male competition raised from the size and power of the individual male to the size and power of groups of males? The whole point, then, of Sheets-Johnstone's argument for the pan-cultural origins of evil is to show that violence and war are socially-elaborated, biological-derived phenomena. And to best unravel the pan-cultural origins of evil through a local, bottom-up, contextual, phenomenological-informed attention to war and violence, Sheets-Johnstone now turns to Hannah Arendt's most famous writings on war and evil.

Arne Vetlesen (1994:85) has already plausibly argued that Hannah Arendt's reflections always start from and retain a highly contextual moment of particularity. Exactly this methodology is what appeals so strongly to a phenomenologist like Maxine Sheets-Johnstone. Time and again in her most famous monograph on the reality of evil, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin 2006), Arendt would emphasise the particularity of persons, events, and the actions we judge as well as the circumstances in which we do so. Arendt's views on moral judgement as an exceedingly precarious affair inform all her basic themes: the nature of radical or unprecedented evil, the connection between deeds and motives, and the interrelation between thinking and judgement (cf. Vetlesen 1994:84). For Arendt the case of Adolf Eichmann's trail in Jerusalem serves to illuminate all these themes.

Arendt's experience of the trial of Adolph Eichmann in Jerusalem deeply influenced her views on good and evil and what she finally came to call the "banality of evil": diligence, the blind commitment to doing one's duty. As Arendt strikingly puts it:

[W]hen I speak of the banality of evil, I do so only on the strictly factual level, pointing to a phenomenon which stared one in the face at the trial. Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all. He *merely,* to put the matter colloquially, *never realized what he was doing*… It was a sheer thoughtlessness, something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period (Arendt 2006:287).

Thus it was Eichmann's fearsome, mindless diligence to authority, the blind commitment to doing his duty that she ultimately describes as the "banality of evil". No wonder, then, that Hannah Arendt famously dissociated evil from religion and from related questions about the goodness of God, and placed it solidly in the everyday, lived human realm, a realm fundamentally characterised by *a thoughtless diligence to duty*. Precisely in so doing, evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognise it, that is, the quality of temptation. For Arendt it was clear: The Nazi's must also have been tempted to not kill, not murder, "but God knows, they had learned how to resist temptation" (Arendt 2006:150).

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, in her own rereading of *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* now places Arendt's identification of the banality of evil as a *cognitive* diligence to duty in a deeper *affective* light: in the most basic sense of the word, the appeal to violence or evil is a powerful appeal that

turns people away from empathy (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:131). There is, therefore, the clear *ethical impact* not only of empathy, but also the devastating ethical impact of *turning away* from empathy. For Arendt the relative ease with which humans can close off all civil social feeling and succumb to decimating other humans is, in fact, nothing less than the cultivation of brutality. This cultivation of brutality finally exemplifies evil as it becomes the moral lapse that allows one to absolve oneself of responsibility by an utter lack of judgement following mindless diligence in following orders of the authority. The banality of evil, therefore, flows not only from choosing or not choosing to do evil, but from having no deep motives left anymore except an exclusive concern with one's personal advancement (cf. Sheets- Johnstone 2008:132f.). Turning away from empathy to mindless diligence is, then, a complete moral failure, a lack of judgement that leads directly to the banality of evil.

Following Arne Vetlesen (1994), Sheets-Johnstone now develops these ideas further by taking *emotion* and *perception* into moral account and seeing indifference to others and hatred of others as a deep and significant lack of empathy. In this way, Sheets-Johnstone now adds a significant perspective to that of Arendt through evolutionary ethics: The brutal road to evil is now revealed as a complete *emotional failure* on the level of empathy, which now embeds and includes Hannah Arendt's characterisation of evil as a *cognitive failure* on the level of judgement. The remarkable intellectual account of Arendt's notion of judgement is thus deepened to show not only the crucial importance of empathy for moral performance, but also that there are indispensable cognitive *and* emotional components to moral judgements (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:133). From an ethical point of view, the stark progression is clear: emotional failure (lack of empathy) leads to *cognitive failure* (lack of judgement) leads to evil.

Hannah Arendt, of course, took this one step further in the case of Eichmann: emotional failure not only led to cognitive failure and a lack of judgement, but to the banality of evil, that is, the *ultimate refusal even to judge.* And Sheets-Johnstone's rereading of Arendt enables a less intellectualistic vision of Arendt's views by seeing her view of the banality of evil not just as an *intellectual* inability, but as embedded in a moral vision that acknowledges the depth of emotion and empathy (or the lack thereof). In this sense it is clear that specific moral judgements emanate from individuals in particular circumstances. In this specific sense, morality is first of all an individual matter, and, as Vetlesen argued (cf. Vetlesen 994:108), the question of individual responsibility must take the form of not allowing oneself to become incapable of judging (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:135).

Against this background Sheets-Johnstone now talks about a *pan-cultural understanding of the banality of evil* as she pursues her quest for an understanding of the nature of human nature. And the banalities of evil are indeed pan-cultural, not only in the immediate sense of being a present-day world-wide human phenomenon, but in the enduring sense of being a chronic historically laden human phenomenon (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:137). This certainly directly implies the natural history that undergirds the banality of evil, a history that, cultural variations notwithstanding, has phylogenetic and, therefore, evolutionary roots. It is here that we find Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's particular evolutionary deepening and enriching of Hannah Arendt's argument: to trace the roots of the natural history that underlies the banality of evil requires an elucidation of the nature of human nature in *evolutionary terms* that does justice both to the essential realities and intricate complexities of the human capacity for evil (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:137). Sheets-Johnstone, therefore, argues powerfully that an inquiry into the origin of the pan-cultural human capacity for evil is in essence an attempt to flesh out, in phenomenological terms, an answer not just to the question, *what is evil?*, but rather

to the question, *what motivates evil?* In this way Sheets-Johnstone could broaden Arendt's "keenly accurate concept of the banality of evil" by showing what a universal dimension and consistently present element evil has been in the history of humanity (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:138f.).

For Sheets-Johnstone this starts with a consideration of behavioural evolutionary relationships, and by probing our animal heritage for clues to the pan culturality of evil. In doing so, not only important evolutionary roots are exposed, but also the remarkable cultural elaborations of those through the course of history. Rooted in human evolutionary history, the pan-culturality of evil is precisely culturally elaborated, induced and perpetrated along a diversity of lines (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:140). Following a discussion of what Sheets-Johnstone calls the "pan-cultural heroic honing of males" for aggression and violence and its direct relation to the banality for evil, she now nuances her discussion by explaining as follows: in trying to discern the exact relationship between empathy (or rather the lack of empathy) to evil, it is important to realise that by itself a lack of empathy is not yet a motivation of evil, just as a lack of judgement is not yet a motivation for evil. Neither the lack of empathy nor the lack of judgement could explain the outright deliberate motivation to harm or kill others, and this is because the human capacity for evil is just that, *a capacity* (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:156). This indeed is not yet the banality of evil itself but only it's potential. The capacity is thus not ready-made, and an ability to act on it may or may not be realised, hence a capacity is a potential that can be tapped into, drawn on, encouraged, nourished, culturally elaborated and promoted. So cultivated, the capacity produces humans who are exemplars of the banality of evil. From an evolutionary point of view, then, we humans are born with a moral sense for right and wrong, a capacity for good *and* evil. As such, humans are not born evil, but have – in addition to a capacity for empathy – the capacity to harm and kill other humans, a capacity that can be culturally fostered and valued to the point of taking over whole societies. For Sheets-Johnstone the heart of the argument is thus in the act that the capacity for evil and the practice of violence and of making war have the same biological roots: both are firmly anchored in the biological matrix of male-male competition. Morality is thus indeed, and first of all, as Vetlesen affirms; an individual matter, but its roots lie in human evolutionary history (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:157, 18).

Thus it becomes clear why, in completing this argument, Sheets-Johnstone has called for philosophical and evolutionary ways to understand how empathy is a spontaneous outgrowth of affect attunement (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008: 211), and why she wants to build on her research on empathy to develop a "rationality of caring" that in turn offers deepened understandings of empathy. She also wants to ground her phenomenological approach by consciously embedding it in Charles Darwin's natural history of the moral sense. In doing this she is making a bold attempt at revealing the inherent link between ethics and biology, thereby laying the ground for a genuine *evolutionary ethics* (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:286). So, a rationality of caring grows out of the insight that one's own body is the standard upon which the plight, concerns, thoughts and feelings of another are grasped. One's own body is a semantic template for those inter-corporeal understandings that ground the rationality of caring; in fact, it generates caring as an attitudinal affect (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:287). In this "transfer of sense" an understanding of another's movements, gestures, words, cries, postures and expressions (that is, another's behaviour in the widest possible sense) is engendered and the capacity for empathy is revealed, a capacity to enter in a dynamically and affectively intuitive sense into the life of another. And a genuine evolutionary ethics makes explicit the epistemological structures of caring while at the same time it anchors those structures in the

corporeal facts of evolutionary life (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:288), and thus enables a leading of the moral life. Or as Sheets-Johnston strikingly puts it: Before being able to give reasons for one's actions and beliefs – the common criteria of rationality – one should be able to act reasonably in the world and have reasonable beliefs about it (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2008:302).

The work of evolutionary ethicists is, therefore, of great importance for theologians because of their direct interest in why humans behave the way they do, how the evolutionary origins of human behaviour is to be explained and in which way our behaviour has been constrained by biological factors. In this sense one could say that the starting point of evolutionary ethics is the insight that morality has a biological, evolutionary basis. Ethical behaviour is indeed a product of our biological evolution, but this fact by itself does not entail any normative assertions: from the act that morality has developed we cannot conclude that any particular trait of human behaviour is good or bad (right or wrong) in an ethical sense. Put differently, an evolutionary account of ethics does not support any particular moral code, but it may help us understand why such codes have developed (cf. Wuketits 1990:202). We should, therefore, be careful to always distinguish between the *evolution of moral awareness* and any attempt at the *evolutionary justification of moral codes*. Evolutionary ethics in this second sense has a bad history and has resulted in ideologies like Social Darwinism.

When I use the term evolutionary ethics I use it to characterise specifically the view that morality has evolved and there are clear pointers to the biological roots of moral behaviour in pre-human history, as the work of primatologist Frans de Waal (2006), scientist Donald Broom (2003) and philosopher Richard Joyce (2006) have clearly shown. However, from the evolutionary genesis of our moral awareness we cannot derive moral codes for right or wrong. Accepting that our moral awareness has evolved also means accepting that our moral codes may not be fixed forever as unchangeable entities.

As humans, therefore, we are indeed free to find our own moral goals in this world and an evolutionary approach to ethics and morality helps us understand under which circumstances we have created the kinds of values and moral codes that we have. Certainly, some traits of our moral behaviour may be derived from archaic behavioural patterns and from the intense drive to survive. If moral codes have regulated the interactions among individuals in a society, then these codes must also have been useful for survival. In fact, to our phylogenetic ancestors there must have been some survival value to believe that moral codes are simply given, and, therefore, authoritative and objective – as is still found today in the belief that ethical norms are unchangeable and derivable from some set of eternal, divine principles. In an evolutionary approach to ethics the status of these kinds of beliefs will rightly be challenged, and the creation of moral norms, in an a posteriori sense (to use Kantian terms), will be found to lie on a constructive, cultural level. This, of course, means that humans in principle are free to change their moral codes, but this also means that humans carry great responsibility for themselves and that this responsibility cannot and should not be easily delegated to "objective divine moral codes" (in this sense, for example, even the Ten Commandments and Jesus' love command, over time, are historically revealed as a posteriori moral laws, even as they have acquired over time the authority of biblical truth). This also frees us from the foundationalist need for an idea of absolute moral truth: our idea of truth is relative to our historical and social contexts and their histories, and only a coherentist, post-foundationalist approach can sufficiently explain this. What we find here, then, is an open view of evolution: basic patterns of our behaviour depend on, and have been developed through, our evolutionary past. But this is not a deterministic view, because we humans have the responsibility to make our own

decisions on what counts as the norms and limits to our own behaviour. We are, therefore, constrained, but not determined by our evolutionary past.

CONCLUSION

Through discernment and moral judgement, pragmatically embedded in concrete cultural contexts, we come to agree upon moral codes and the a posteriori affirmation of our seasoned "moral laws"; exactly this fact provides the pragmatic "clout" and post-foundational justification for our moral convictions. For me, the interdisciplinary conversation with Hannah Arendt and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone on evolutionary ethics and on our conceptions of good and evil now yields the following tentative conclusions:

Evolution by natural selection can explain our tendency to think in normative terms, that is, our innate sense of moral awareness. However, evolutionary explanations of this moral awareness cannot explain our moral judgements, nor justify the truth claims of any of our moral judgements. Why and how we make moral judgements can only be explained on the level of cultural evolution, and by taking into account the historical embeddedness of our moral codes in religious and political conventions. This argument, I believe, helps us to avoid committing the so-called genetic fallacy, that is, the mistake of thinking that tracing a belief's evolutionary origins automatically undermines its epistemic warrant. Or, put differently, the mistake of thinking that the evolutionary origins of our moral awareness necessarily explain away and make impossible the possibility to hold onto moral truth.

The important distinction between an innate, evolutionary moral awareness and the evaluative discernment needed for making intelligent moral judgement (cf. Joyce 2006) does not have to lead to moral scepticism or relativism. On the contrary, each and every one of our beliefs does indeed have a complex causal history. However, it would be absurd to conclude from evolutionary, neurological capacities, and from historical, philosophical or broader cultural reasons behind the history of our beliefs and belief-systems, that all our beliefs are unjustified, including also our religious and moral convictions. On a post-Foundational view, some of our religious beliefs are indeed more plausible and credible than others. This also goes for our tendency to moralise and for the strong moral convictions we often hold. On this view we not only get to argue for some of the enduring moral codes and laws within the context of the Christian faith, but also for why it may be plausible to think that at least some of those moral beliefs are more reasonable than others.

We have now seen that, in spite of a powerful focus on the evolutionary origins of moral awareness, ethics emerge on a culturally autonomous level, which means that the epistemic standing of the particular moral judgements we make is independent of whatever the natural sciences can tell us about their genesis. The evolutionary origin of the human moral sense indeed tells us nothing about how we get to construct moral decisions, codes and laws. That, however, does not mean that we cannot give a philosophical account of how we arrive at these informed judgements, codes, and laws, without having to fall back on supra-naturalist or sociobiological "rules" for moral behaviour.

So, if we take into account what we have learned so far about so-called a priori accounts of knowledge or morality, our moral codes or "laws" in the fullest and deepest sense of the word are indeed, in an evolutionary epistemological sense of the word, a posteriori: for Christian theology the choice will not be between a moral vision that is inherent in revelation and is,

therefore, "received" and not invented or constructed. Instead, on a post-Foundational view, our moral codes and ethical convictions of what is "received" is itself an interpretative enterprise, shaped experientially through our embeddedness in communities and cultures. Through our intellectual and language abilities we have created cultures, vast bodies of knowledge and moral codes, which in a broader sense can all be seen as cultural evolutionary artefacts that enable us to benefit from the trials and errors of the moral instincts of our ancestors. Evolutionary ethics helps us understand now such moral codes have developed, even if this does not yet lead to an evolutionary explanation for the formulation of specific moral codes, laws or norms. In this sense, then, there is a clear difference between an evolutionarily developed moral sense and the actual making of moral judgements.

However, moral judgements, and eventually moral codes and laws, have what Richard Joyce called "practical clout" in terms of the formal, social and conventional ways we come to make moral judgements and decisions, and as such they make inescapable and authoritative demands on us. Moral codes are the core components of religions, also of the Christian faith, and in an evolutionary sense religions can indeed be seen as seen as part of the cultural, social structures that underpin our morality (cf. Broom 2003:164ff.).

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KEY WORDS
Evolutionary Ethics
Empathy
Moral Awareness
Cognitive and Moral failure
Evil a posteriori Moral Judgements

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Geneem en gelees: oor Dirkie Smit as hermeneutiese teoloog

ABSTRACT

Met spesifieke toespitsing op die werk Neem, lees! (2006) van die sistematiese teoloog Dirkie Smit van die Fakulteit Teologie, Stellenbosch, word krities gevra na sy benadering tot en verstaan van die plek van hermeneutiek in teologiese besinning. Op grond van 'n uiteensetting van sy diepgaande hermeneutiese verstaan, word sy benadering beskrywe as 'n ekumenies-ekklesiologiese rasionaliteitsmodel. Ten opsigte van hierdie model word die vraag gestel "waarheen?" dit ons hermeneuties neem. Hierdie "waarheen?" word aangedui en krities bespreek met as kernpunt van kritiek die volledige ignorering van die eietydse teologie-wetenskap debat wat op geen wyse vormgewend neerslag vind in Smit se hermeneutiese model nie.

1. INLEIDING

Om oor Dirkie Smit as hermeneutiese teoloog te skryf is 'n voorreg. Ook soveel te meer as dit saamval met die herdenking van sy sestigste verjaarsdag in Okt0ber 2011. Om krities na te dink oor sy teologiese bydrae as Reformatoriese sistematiese teoloog aan die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland en Stellenbosch – 'n teologiese bydrae waarvan die impak veel wyer strek as die hange van Tafelberg, die Kaapse vlaktes en die kuslyn van die Atlantiese oseaan. Op watter wyse hy oor bykans drie dekades sy besondere bydrae gelewer het[2] en tans nog lewer asook die reikwydte en spesifieke foci van sy nadenke, is al by meer as een geleentheid en deur verskeie ander persone oor die afgelope paar jaar benoem en beskrywe.[3] In kort: dis besonders. Sy akademiese toewyding, deeglikheid, kognitiewe netheid, ekumeniese openheid en ekklesiologiese deernis is vir ons in baie opsigte 'n eksemplariese voorbeeld van teologiese uitnemendheid. So skryf – om maar net een voorbeeld te noem – Botha (2007:336) in die vroeëre huldigingsbundel ter ere van Smit:

> Smit is highly respected in the church and by colleagues throughout the theological world for his ability to grasp historical and contemporary trends in the vast field of theology; for his impressive knowledge of so much of the theology that has been and is still produced today; for his sharp insight into contemporary debates and discourse; for his ability to discern and to integrate the insights of contemporary theologians and of those from former times; and particularly, for his ability to relate fundamental theological insights to contemporary challenges and this to facilitate the development of necessary discernment in the church. Despite this, Smit consciously and deliberately prefers not to work on his own, for himself. He prefers to do-theology-with-others, in community,

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2 Sien veral die Versamelbundels *Essays in Public Theology: Collected Essays 1* (2007), *Geloof en Openbare Lewe: Versamelde Opstelle 2* (2008) en *Essays on Being Reformed* (2009). Vir 'n volledige publikasielys van Smit, sien http://academic.sun.ac.za/tsv/staff/smit.html.

3 Sien as voorbeeld die vroeëre huldigingsbundel in 2007 met artikels van Johan Botha, Steve de Gruchy, Auke Compaan, Nico Koopman, Elna Mouton, Robert Vosloo en Clint le Bruyns.

with an openness to others, whom he sees as co-workers and co-witnesses to the truth, conscious of and continuously recognising that which is of value and worth in able older and younger voices".

Besondere "Bothaanse" woorde van waardering. En dit kan ek maar net beaam. Maar in my beaming hoor en sien ek terselfdertyd 'n uitnodiging om met hom in 'n kritiese gesprek te tree,[4] en weliswaar net ten opsigte van een belangrike dimensie van sy nadenke as teoloog, te wete Smit as hermeneut, of dalk beter gestel: sy verstaan van teologie as hermeneutiese teologie. Hierna gaan ek kyk in twee opeenvolgende fases: eerstens 'n kort oorsigtelike uiteensetting van sy verstaan van teologiese hermeneutiek soos hy as storieverteller dit spesifiek uiteensit in sy boek Neem, lees! (2006). Ek kies hierdie boek juis omdat dit op die agterblad daarvan beskrywe word as 'n "fassinerende verhaal wat sal inlig, inspireer en stimuleer" (Rachel Baard); as 'n "meesterstuk van gerypte insig" (Christo Lombard) van 'n "mature mind" (Piet Naude). Elders noem Vosloo (2007:399) dit "waarskynlik een van die belangrikste teologiese boeke wat die afgelope aantal jare in Afrikaans verskyn het ..." En dit is so waar! In die hieropvolgende bespreking van die boek, gaan ek sy hermeneutiese denkwyse tipeer as sprekend van 'n ekumenies-ekklesiologiese rasionaliteit. En tweedens wil ek enersyds wys – positief – op die besondere (passievolle) diepte en (sosiale) trefkrag van sy verantwoordelike (en versigtige) benadering tot teologiese hermeneutiek, en andersyds – negatief - op die onvermydelike isolering van teologiese nadenke wat voortspruit uit sy benadering.

1 Geneem en gelees

Neem, lees! is die titel van Dirkie Smit se boek oor die "hoor en verstaan van die Bybel" wat in 2006 verskyn het. Sy keuse vir hierdie titel laat by my as leser 'n eucharisties-liturgiese toon deurskemer en resoneer, amper asof hy die leser wil uitnooi om die (histories-gegroeide) "Woord" wat hy (hermeneuties / interpreterend) breek, in God se teenwoordigheid te geniet – maar dan in afhanklikheid van die troue Een wat die woord self "ingestel" het! Smit (2006:7; 231-33) verduidelik die keuse van die titel, asook die afbeelding van die fresco van Benozzo Gozzoli[5] op die voorblad. Neem, lees! verwys na die beslissende oomblik in die lewe van die Noord-Afrikaanse kerkvader Augustinus (354-430) wat in 'n krisistyd in sy geestelike lewe in sy tuin 'n kindjie die woorde hoor sing het. Dit het hom vreemd aangegryp en hy het 'n Bybel geneem en begin lees – en sy lewe is daarmee radikaal vernuwe. En dit is vanuit hierdie "eie (persoonlike) nuutheid" dat Smit die storieverteller word van die verhaal van die interpretasie van die Bybel deur die eeue: van teologiese hermeneutiek. Nie 'n verhaal ter wille van 'n verhaal nie, maar juis om hierdie vernuwende tekstuele krag opnuut weer uitnodigend te laat weerklink (sing?) sodat die lesers daardeur aangegryp kan word – soos Augustinus destyds daardeur aangegryp is.

Smit vertel sy een verhaal oor die lees en verstaan van die Bybel uit vier verskillende perspektiewe (2006:7-8), naamlik 'n historiese, 'n sistematiese, 'n etiese en 'n homiletiese perspektief. Aan elkeen hiervan wil ek kortliks aandag gee.

Die historiese perspektief (Smit 2006:9-110) gee weer op watter wyse die Bybel deur die eeue gelees is. Smit begin sy verhaal by 'n kursoriese aanduiding dat hierdie verhaal eintlik moet begin by die ontstaangeskiedenis van die onderskeie boeke (wat hy opsigself as

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4 My woordkeuse "krities" sinspeel hier spesifiek op die ontbreking van enige kritiese opmerkinge oor Smit se teologiese bydrae in die vroëre huldigingsbundel!
5 Benozzo Gozzoli (c. 1421 – 1497) was 'n Italiaanse Renaissance skilder van Florence.

hermeneutiese aktiwiteite beskrywe want getuienis is 'n vorm van interpretasie!). Tog val hy weg met sy verhaal by die lees van die Bybel in die Vroeë Kerk (Smit 2006:12ev). Hy vertel van ontwikkelinge (voorlesing van dokumente by aanbiddingsgeleenthede; kanonvorming) en prosesse in hierdie tydperk (toekenning van godsdienstige gesag; samevoeging van Ou Testament en Nuwe Testament tot een boek; formuleer van samevattende fokus, 'n sleutel vir interpretasie vas te stel; rol van amptelike kerk in die vasstel van die regte lees van die Bybel); van uitlegmetodes (bv allegorie) en uitlegkundige skole (Aleksandrië in Egipte en Antiogië in Sirië) en invloedryke persone (soos bv Augustinus). En dan volg die interessante ontwikkelinge van die Middeleeue: ontwikkelinge hoofsaaklik in die Latynsprekende Weste van die Romeinse Ryk (en nie soseer in die Griekssprekende Ooste van die Romeinse Ryk waar die vroeëre ontwikkelinge meestal afgespeel het nie). Van die geestelike *lees* (dit is, die *lectio divina* met sy drie stappe van grammatika, meditasie en gebed) van die Bybel in kloosters tot die ontwikkeling van die gebruik van die Bybel in skolastieke teologie in die katedraalskole tot die totstandkoming van die onafhanklike Middeleeuse universiteite. En hiermee saam die stigting van allerlei ordes (bv Dominikaanse Orde) en nuwe agendas vir die lees en verstaan van die Bybel. In die hieropvolgende Hervorming sou egter 'n radikale breuk volg wat deur allerlei ontwikkelinge en gebeure teweeggebring is. Onder die invloed van die Renaissance wat die oproep gedra het: terug na die oorspronklike bronne, is die oorspronklike Bybelse tekste intensief bestudeer; hiermee saam die ingrypende verdieping van die konflik tussen die beroep op die Bybelse dokumente en gesaghebbende uitlegtradisies; boonop ontstaan die drukpers en die Bybel word in allerlei volkstale vertaal. Hierna sou Bybelse interpretasie nooit weer dieselfde wees nie. En dan volg die Verligting: 'n grondige wending wat Smit (2006:53) beskrywe aan die hand van twee invloedryke denkers, te wete Descartes en Kant. In die invloedryke volgstroom van hulle denke het veral drie karaktertrekke die nuwe tydsgees tipeer: rasionalistiese denke, historiese bewussyn en die sekularisasieprojek. Dit het die lees en verstaan van die Bybelse tekste en boodskap op allerlei ingrypende wyses beïnvloed met radikale meningsverskille oor wat die Bybel is, waar en hoe dit gelees word. In verskillende sosiale omgewings (bv. akademie, kerk) is dit radikaal verskillend gelees en het in die 20ste eeu 'n nuwe belangstelling wakker gemaak wat eintlik maar net presies dieselfde konflikte van deur die eeue, in 'n nuwe gedaante na vore gebring het. Vir Smit (2006:66ev) is daar veral vyf vrae wat die lees van die Bybel vandag bepaal, en spesifiek vrae wat aan die hand van die konflikte geformuleer kan word, te wete: eerstens die stryd tussen verduidelik en verstaan (bv. in die ontwikkeling van die hermeneutiese filosofie); tweedens die stryd oor wie eintlik die reg het om die Bybel te lees (bv. die vraag na leserskontekste); derdens die stryd oor wat lees regtig is en hoe mense lees en behoort te lees (bv. die erkenning van die subjektiewe betrokkenheid as lesers); vierdens die stryd oor wat dit beteken om verantwoordelik te lees (want dit maak saak as sosiale aktiwiteit!), en laastens, oor wat die Bybel eintlik is, wat die ware aard is van hierdie teks wat gelees word (dws as teologiese boek en as boek van die kerk).

Juis op hierdie punt as afsluiting van die historiese perspektief wend Smit (2006:88 ev) hom in sy verhaal van die hermeneutiek tot *die lees van die Bybel in die ekumene*. En ek meen dis bepalend vir Smit se eie verstaan van die lees van die Bybel. Hy voer aan dat dit die een plek is waar baie kerke en gelowiges met hulle uiteenlopende sieninge, verwagtings, praktyke en leesgewoontes bymekaar kom en saam met mekaar probeer lees en luister wat die Bybel sê. Daarom meen ek dat Smit (2006:96) self 'n ekumeniese hermeneutiek vooropstel, dit is, 'n gemeenskaplike saamsoeke na die waarheid, wat soos volg gekenmerk kan word:

> Die lewende teenwoordigheid van Christus deur die werking van die Heilige Gees waarborg dat die Woord steeds gehoor en verstaan word binne die kerk, volgens die breë ekumeniese kerk.

En dan spesifiek:

> "… gelees word as beloftes vir die prediking en sakramente, as inspirasie vir aanbidding, as inhoud van die sending, as riglyne vir die alledaagse lewe" (Smit 2006:97).

Vervolgens vertel Smit (2006:111-181) sy een verhaal oor die lees van die Bybel vanuit 'n *sistematiese* perspektief. Hierdie perspektief (wat eintlik weer die oorvertel is van die eerste verhaal maar nou vanuit 'n ander perspektief!) word vir hom bepaal deur die objektiewe en subjektiewe kant van die lees en verstaan van die Bybel, dit is, die dubbele aspek van enersyds die teks uit die verlede en andersyds die konteks van die hede. In sy eie woorde:

> "Mense wil graag hê dat die Woord gehoor moet word, en mense wil graag hê dat die Woord verstaanbaar, geloofwaardig, eksistensieel, aktueel, profeties, situasiegerig, of hoe mens dit ook al wil formuleer, gehoor word" (Smit 2006:111).

Hierdie lees- en verstaanproses onderskei hy (aan die hand van sy voorbeeld van die stukkie geskeurde papier met die woorde: "I have a dr …") dan skematies deur die aanduiding van verskillende aspekte, te wete: Eerstens die teks wat historiese (bv. hoe het teks ontstaan?), grammatiese (bv. wat beteken die woorde, sinne?) en literêre (bv. tot watter genre behoort die teks) vrae oproep waarop antwoorde gevind moet word; tweedens die vraag na die oorsprong van die teks waardeur gekyk word na die sosiale, kulturele, politieke en ekonomiese kontekste waarbinne hulle ontstaan het; derdens, die oorleweringsgeskiedenis van die teks en die effek wat dit gehad het in daarvan op die gang van die tradisie deur uitleggers voor ons;[6] vierdens volg die kritiese houding van die leser, en spesifiek 'n selfkritiese houding waarin die leser sy / haar eie voorverstaan, keuse van en assosiasies met die teks met agterdog bejeën;[7] vyfdens volg die vraag of dit ons regtig raak, of ons dit ernstig neem, dit wil sê – in Smit (2006:135) se woorde – om "te begryp, is om ge-gryp te word" en dus onsself oopstel op te stel om in die ontmoeting met die teks voortdurend self uitgelê te word;[8] en laastens die vraag: waar hoe raak dit ons, dit is, die konteks waarin ons ons bevind binne ons konteks. Vir Smit (2006:139) is die beskrywing en verstaan van die konteks 'n baie ingewikkelde saak met 'n gelaagdheid wat die lees en verstaan van die Bybel se boodskap net nog verder kompliseer. Meer nog: dit nog moeiliker maak om die rol van die konteks in die wisselwerking tussen teks en konteks te verstaan. Na die implikasies van elkeen van hierdie ses aspekte word vervolgens in Smit se verhaal konstruktief aandag gegee. Vir Smit beteken die eerste aspek dat watter metodes ook al aangewend word vir lees en verstaan van die Bybel, dit ten diepste begelei sal word deur die aanvaarding van die gesag van die Skrif as die normatiewe, apostoliese oorlewering van die evangelie. Anders kortweg gesê: Hierdie metodes is net nuttig in die mate waarin dat dit daarin slaag om die finale en gehele teks van die kanon, soos oorgelewer in die kerk, reliëf gee en meer verstaanbaar te maak. Die tweede aspek (dit is naamlik, die ontstaanswêreld agter die teks) noodsaak groot versigtigheid omsigtigheid aangesien ons kennis veel meer kariger is as wat dikwels erken word. Nietemin is van groot waarde die uiteensetting van die teologiese grondstruktuur wat onderskei kan word van 'n bepaalde outeur, die sosiale en kulturele agtergronde (insluitend argeologiese bevindinge). Dit geld volgens Smit ook wat die derde (oorleweringsgeskiedenis) en vierde aspekte (effek) betref. Hierdie aspekte noodsaak

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6 Smit (2006:130) gebruik die beeld van 'n klankversterker om hierdie besondere aspek te verduidelik.

7 Smit (2006:135) gebruik in die geval die beeld van 'n sif of filter om dit te verduidelik.

8 Smit (2006:139) verduidelik dit aan die hand van 'n verstaansirkel ten einde die wisselwerkende aard van egte verstaan te beskrywe.

prioisering by wyse van – soos Smit dit stel[9] – konsentriese sirkels (kerk, geloofgemeenskap, geloofbelydenisse, teologie en geloofspraktyke), en die herkenning van verskillende trajekte (grondlyne) waarbinne betekenisse ontsluit kan word. By die vyfde aspek kom die lesers se eie (suspisieuse!) rol ter sprake in die verstaanproses asook die uitlegtradisie waarin die leser staan. Hiervan moet die leser selfkrities bedag wees ten einde op 'n verantwoordelike wyse begelei te word in die verstaanproses van seleksie, ordening, sifting en benutting. En laastens word die Bybel gelees met 'n sekere verwagting; vertroue dat die leser aangespreek sal word. Meer nog: dat die leser gekonfronteer sal word met nuwe woorde. In Smit (2006:162) se woorde:

> Gelowige lesers wag dus op 'n woord wat saak maak, wat sin maak, wat betekenisvol en geloofwaardig *in-spreek* op die hede, wat hulle eie lewe vir hulle nuut *uit-lê* en aan hulle 'n nuwe verstaan bied van hulle lewenswerklikheid en van die geskiedenis.

Daarom is vir Smit (2006:164) die beste uitleggers van hierdie Woord die gemeente, die gelowiges, die daders van die Woord. Aan hulle behoort die "epistemologiese voorrang"! Maar – ten slotte – vir hierdie Woord om grond te vat, moet dit voortdurend gerig wees op, geïntegreer word met die konkrete konteks, die lewenswêreld van die lesers en hoorders.[10] Daarom konkludeer Smit (2006:172) in sy sistematiese perspektief op die lees van die Bybel vandag om te wys op drie motiewe - wat na sy oordeel beslissend is, te wete die roeping van Christene, die feit dat Christene anders as die natuurlike mens is, en dat die hart van die roeping geleë is in die hart van God self. Mooi stel hy dit in die voorafgaande gedeelte soos volg:

> "Dit beteken dat ons eers die Bybel verantwoordelik lees en verstaan wanneer ons hierdie voorveronderstellinge, hierdie geloofsbeslissinge waarsonder die Bybel nie moontlik was of is nie, in gedagte hou en respekteer, wanneer ons die drie-enige God in die Bybel ontdek, met ons hoor praat, en ons hoor deel maak van sy volk en sy werk. Die diepste inhoud van die Bybel is die openbaring van die drie-enige God en die feit dat Hy mense roep en deel maak van sy werk. Ons verstaan die Bybel, as ons dié boodskap daarin hoor" (Smit 2006:170).

"Die roeping en deel maak van sy werk" bring Smit (2006:182-230) by die derde perspektief op sy een verhaal van die lees van die Bybel, te wete die *etiese* perspektief. In hierdie perspektief kom die kernvraag na vore na die Bybel as rigsnoer vir die Christelike lewe. As rigsnoer en dus ook die vraag na die relevansie van die Bybel vir die moraal, vir wie ons is, hoe ons leef en wat ons doen. Hy stel:

> Die lewende God en sy Christus spreek in sy verbondstrou dwarsdeur alle eeue en tot vandag tot sy kerk deur sy lewende Woord en sy lewendmakende Gees. Die lewende Woord van Christus, in sy amp as profeet, priester en koning, lei en onderrig ook die kerk in hulle Christelike lewe. In die troosvolle beloftes van die evangelie sit die beslaglegging van die imperatief opgesluit. Die genadige verlossing lei tot 'n nuwe lewe van dankbaarheid" (Smit 2006:183).

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9 Smit (2006:153) stel dit as volg: *"Hoe nader sekere faktore aan die sentrum lê, hoe belangriker rol behoort hulle te speel in die uitleg van 'n bepaalde perikoop"* (kursivering van Smit). Wat is hierdie sentrum? Vir Smit is dit die Skrif as kanon, as betroubare en gesaghebbende Woord.

10 Treffend stel Smit (2006:167): "Predikers preek in die vertroue dat deur alles heen God se lewende Woord tog steeds weerklink, nooit gewaarborg nie, nooit onfeilbaar nie nooit aantoonbaar nie, maar tog kragtig, lewend verlossend".

Sy etiese verhaal vertel Smit aan die hand van die vier eienskappe van die Skrif – te wete gesaghebbend, betroubaar, helder en genoegsaam. Gesaghebbend gee uitdrukking aan die oortuiging dat die lewende God self met gesag deur die Skrifte praat, ook in die hede – en ook teenoor die kerk! Die *betroubaarheid* verwys na die betroubaarheid van God, en dus in geloof op sy beloftewoord – soos in die Bybel verwoord - geneem en as waar bely kan word. Die *helderheid* van die Skrif het betrekking op die eenvoud van die basiese boodskap, dit is, die heilsboodskap terwyl die *genoegsaamheid* getuienis aflê dat die kerk niks meer benodig as om die genadige weg van verlossing in Christus te ken en om dankbaar as mense van God in sy diens te kan lewe nie. Met as kernvraag *hoe?,* wys Smit daarop dat bogenoemde eienskappe nie die noodsaak van uitleg uitskakel nie. Die teendeel is juis waar. Die kerk moet steeds weer hoor wat die Gees aan die gemeente sê (Smit 2006:189). Dit sien ons in die belydenisskrifte, in die erns wat met eksegese gemaak word, die begeleidende rol van die tradisie, die klem op die saamlees deur die gemeente in hulle soeke na leiding, wysheid en onderskeidingsvermoë. So veronderstel die belydenis van die gesag van die Skrif juis uitleg, en dit is geen maklike taak wanneer oor die Christelike lewe of oor moraliteit gepraat word nie. Hieroor word op baie verskillende manier gedink, hetsy aan die hand van aangeleerde en ingeoefende houdings en gedragspatrone (genoem deugde-etiek), *of* aan die hand van gesaghebbende sosiale instelling (bv staat, kerk) wat voorskriftelik te werk gaan (genoem norm-etiek), *of* aan die hand van die enkeling se eie (vrye, mondige) rede (of gewete) as norm (genoem gesindheidsetiek), of laastens aan die hand van die oortuiging dat moraliteit vereis dat mense gesamentlik moet vra na die moontlike toekomstige gevolge van hulle dade (genoem verantwoordelikheidsetiek). Vir Smit bring hierdie vier benaderingswyses verskillende uitgangspunte mee aan die hand waarvan oor moraliteit gepraat en gedink word. Vir sommige gaan dit oor die ideaal van 'n morele wêreld en samelewing. Vir ander weer oor die deugde van 'n morele karakter. En vir nog ander oor die dade wat as morele optrede en Christelike gedrag beskou kan word (vgl Smit 2006:206). Dit illustreer Smit aan die hand van drie etiese kwessies, naamlik geweld, geregtigheid en homoseksualiteit. En hoe moeilik en kompleks dit is om – aan die hand van hierdie voorbeelde – reglynige, klinkklare en finale konklusies in spesifieke historiese oomblikke te trek, toon hy duidelik aan. Veel meer kom (van alle oorde!) in spel.[11] Maar wat (normaalweg)[12] vasstaan, is die voortdurende primêre (rigsnoer) rol van die Bybel (op 'n ryke en komplekse wyse) in hierdie etiese oordeelsvorming en die konkrete beliggaming van die evangelieboodskap in die lewe van gelowiges, die gemeente, en selfs die openbare lewe. En wat verder vasstaan, is dat gelowiges hulle mag en moet beroep op die Bybel.[13] Treffend sluit Smit (2006:228) samevattend sy verhaal af:

> Met die oog op die Christelike lewe bied die Bybel as boeiende verhaal van die drie-enige God se genadige omgang met die wêreld en met sy kerk en gelowiges, 'n wonderbare rykdom van perspektiewe, in die vorm van drome, deugde, en dade, in die vorm van inspirerende visies van die Godsryk, veelvuldige uitbeeldings van die mense van die ryk, en talle konkrete riglyne, wette, norme, vermanings, eise, voorskrifte, voorbeelde,

11 Duidelik stel Smit (2006:227-8): "… (I)ndien 'n mens nadink oor die proses van etiese oordeelsvorming, word dit duidelik dat die Bybel 'n sleutelrol kan vervul, maar dat dit nie al ons vrae gaan beantwoord en al die inligting wat ons benodig, gaan verskaf nie. Ons gebruik almal ook onvermydelik ander bronne, ander kennis, ander opvattinge, ander oortuigings – en baie dikwels lê die oorsake van ons meningsverskille met mekaar meer in hierdie ander bronne en oortuigings as by die Bybel self".
12 Vir hierdie woordkeuse, sien Smit (2006:230) se verwysing na Calvyn se beklemtoning van die adiaphora.
13 Sien ook Smit (2006:229) se belangrike argument vir sy keuse om eerder te praat van Skrifberoep as van Skrifgebruik.

waarskuwings en veroordelings waarin die lewenskeuses wat pas by die mense gedemonstreer word. Om die rede is die getroue hoor van die Woord, in die volheid van die gemeentelike liturgie, veral in die prediking en lering, maar ook in tallose ander vorme van kerklike omgang met die Woord en voortdurende verdieping in die Woord, van beslissende belang.

"In die volheid van die gemeentelike liturgie" is die leidraad en oorgang na die laaste perspektief van Smit (2006:234-312) se een verhaal oor die lees en verstaan van die Bybel, te wete die praktiese perspektief . Hieraan – by gebrek aan ruimte – gaan ek nie uitvoerig aandag skenk nie. Ek verwys slegs na die rykdom van metafore (veertien in totaal!)[14] wat Smit aandui wat die Bybel self gebruik om oor die woorde van God te praat en wat in die geskiedenis deur die kerk met instemming herhaal en bely is. Die punt is: Elkeen probeer 'n ander aspek (bv spieël - om Christus te sien; stem – dat God met ons praat; balsem – om genesing te ervaar en van redding te hoor ens.) van hierdie wonderbare werking van Gods Woord verwoord.

In die hieropvolgende gedeelte, wil ek aan die hand van hierdie voorafgaande uiteensetting van Smit se een verhaal oor die hermeneutiek vanuit vier perspektiewe, vra na die storieverteller (hermeneut) Smit agter die verhaal, en dit is spesifiek, na Smit se (implisiete) verstaan van teologisering. Vra na sy besondere verstaan van verantwoordelike teologiese nadenke, en dus na die karakter van teologie as wetenskap. Laasgenoemde gaan tipeer word as Smit se ekumenies-ekklesiologiese rasionaliteitsmodel. En hieroor moet ons saam praat en mekaar hoor, want dit hou na my oordeel die onvermydelike gevaar in van die uiteindelike isolering van teologiese nadenke en die ongelukkige verskraling van ons selfverstaan in ons skepselwees voor God.

2. Die "waarheen?" van 'n ekumenies-ekklesiologiese rasionaliteitsmodel

Soos 'n besondere goue (hermeneutiese) draad loop die beklemtoning van God se trou, van die Gees as waarborg deur al vier perspektiewe van Smit se verhaal oor die verantwoordelike lees en verstaan van die Bybel. Om maar net enkele verwoordinge aan te haal:

"Dieselfde lewende God praat in sy trou vandag nog met ons, lewend, deur die lees en deur die luister" (53); "Die lewende teenwoordigheid van Christus deur die werking van die Heilige Gees waarborg dat die Woord steeds gehoor en verstaan word binne die kerk, volgens die breë ekumeniese kerk"(97); "Die kerk kan vertrou op die beloftes dat die Heilige Gees die kerk sal lei in alle waarheid" (184); "Die Bybel is betroubaar omdat God betroubaar is" (184); "Die waarheid van die Bybel is juis primêr 'n persoonlike waarheid, 'n waarheid van beloftes en betroubaarheid, dis die waarheid van die lewende God wat met mense praat" (185).

Met hierdie beklemtoninge kan en wil ek nie verskil nie. Deel ek ook vertrouensvol in die geloof saam met Smit. Op 'n besondere wyse ontvou hy as hermeneut hierdie "trou-moment" – van God en wat van die gelowige verwag word - in sy verhalende vier perspektiewe met 'n

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14 Die veertien metafore is: spieël; stem; balsem; skat; wet; saad; brood; krag; bril; lig;lamp; swaard; huis; en anker (vgl Smit 2006:234-312).

passievolle diepte[15] en sosiale trefkrag.[16] Maar beslissend word bygevoeg: ons kan dwaal, dit verkeerd hê, voer Smit aan. Ook dit deel ek. Deel ek juis in besonder. Maar op die implikasie van hierdie punt, loop ons weë egter uitmekaar. Smit kies dan vir 'n verstaan van teologiese nadenke wat haar (metodologiese) integriteit moet uitpluis en vind binne die ruimte van die groter kerk (dit is, die ekumene) wat uiteindelik die kritiese gespreksgenoot moet wees waar ons van ons moontlike dwalinge bewus gemaak moet word. Ons moet as kerke saampraat; as kerke saamluister; as kerke saam soek en saam uitvind oor hoe en wat ons te doen staan. Dis ook hoe ons van ons verkeerde weë bewus gemaak sal en kan word. Ek noem dit kortweg: Smit se ekumenies-ekklesiologiese rasionaliteitsmodel.[17] Die belang en betekenis van die groter ekumeniese gesprekskring kan geensins in ons teologiese nadenke ontken word nie. Dis lewensnoodsaaklik. Aan die kerk is die goeie boodskap toevertrou. Maar dit kan beslis nie die volledige of enigste konteks van kritiese nadenke wees oor die wyse[18] (dit is, ons metodologiese verantwoording) waarop ons oor God praat; oor God as Skepper en God se goeie skepping – en terselfdertyd ook oor lyding en hartseer - nadink, oor die betekenis van redding in Jesus Christus en die leiding van die Gees; oor menswees as imago Dei – noem maar op. Teologisering – ten einde aanspraak te kan maak op geloofwaardigheid – vereis besinning oor die (metodologiese) regverdiging van ons geloofsuitsprake. Op hierdie punt resoneer Smit in sy hermeneutiese verhaal – dit wat ek sy ekumenies-ekklesiologiese rasionaliteitsmodel noem - implisiet (of dalk doelbewus?) die afwysende houding van Karl Barth[19] ten opsigte van die metodologiese regverdiging van ons teologiese uitsprake. Waar

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15 Sien hieroor – as voorbeeld - Elna Mouton (2007) se *"Seeing" with reverence: Dirk Smit on the ethos of interpretation.* In die konteks van die liturgiese viering, stel sy dit so besonders in waardering van Smit se benadering waarin sy passievolle diepte treffend verwoord word: "In the worship service, Smit proclaims, the Spirit shapes and refines the senses of believers. They learn to listen to God's words, to each other and to the needs of society and the world. They learn to feel, to smell, to taste. They learn to look and see and be surprise in new ways. They learn to see God differently – with awe and reverence – and one another, as well as the vulnerable and fragile realities within and around them. In liturgy the Spirit teaches them to name their sins, and to grow from remembering their inherited traditions of alienation to dismembering them in the light of God's mercy. They learn to see their past, their personal and collective scars and guilt of sins committed and omitted for what it is, but also boldly to revisit their own and others' stories through the lens of God's great deeds in history, and Christ's forgiving and healing love. In this way the Spirit teaches them to think, speak and act from a new collective identity, and to accept the life stories of all "others" as if they were their own. From there they learn to see the future differently, and are challenged to live and speak with courage and hope in the present".

16 Sien as goeie voorbeelde van die sosiale trefkrag van Smit se teologie in hierdie verband Koopman (2007) se *Doing ethics in communion. Some lessons from the theology of Dirkie Smit,* en De Gruchy (2007) se *On not abandoning church theology: Dirk Smit on church and politics.* In albei kom die besondere belang van die Belhar Belydenis – en ook Smit se betrokkenheid daarby - ter sprake.

17 Rasionaliteitsmodel is 'n tegniese verwysing wat vanuit die kader van die wetenskapsfilosofie kom. Dit verwys na die vraag oor die regverdiging vir die oortuiginge wat ons verdedig, en die redes waarom.

18 Die beklemtoning van wyse is hier van besondere belang, aangesien die argument wil fokus op die isolering van teologiese nadenke, en nie in die eerste plek op die bybelse inhoud van ons denke nie.

19 Die noue teologiese ooreenkoms tussen Barth en Smit se verstaan van teologiese nadenke wat deur ander skrywers reeds aangedui is, is die motivering vir hierdie keuse (sien bv Vosloo 2007:406). In die suid-afrikaanse konteks was Johan Heyns – saam met Willie Jonker – in hulle *Op weg met die teologie* (1973) na my wete die eerste kritiese standpuntinname tov Barth se Christomonistiese openbaringsbegrip, en wat, volgens Heyns (1973:155ev) tereg aanleiding gegee het tot 'n volkome isolasie van die teologie. Op Heyns en Jonker se verstaan van teologie het Wentzel van Huyssteen (1978) weer krities reageer, en hierdeur – ook in die suid-afrikaanse konteks – ten minste die debat oor die wetenskaplikheid van teologiese nadenke destyds ontketen. Van Huyssteen (1973:386) het op sy beurt oortuigend aangetoon dat ook Heyns nie op die wyse waarop hy Barth aangevat het, self ontkom aan die drastiese isolering van die

Barth God se openbaring volledig vooropstel, stel Smit God se openbaringstrou voorop. En beide doen dit op 'n besondere wyse – as geloofsleer – ter wille van die kerk. Maar net soos wat Torrance (1990: x-xi) ten opsigte van Barth gestel het, sal ek graag ten opsigte van Smit wil stel:

> "Whether or not contemporary theology agrees with Barth, it cannot escape the questions he has raised, or avoid dealing with the situation he has created. If theological advance is to be made, it will not be by passing him or going round him, but only by going through and beyond him …"

Ook Smit se vrae kan nie ontwyk word nie. Ook kan nie beleef maar net verbybeweeg word by die diepsinnige hermeneutiese kompleksiteite wat hy aangedui het in sy vier perspektiewe nie. Ons sal (met behulp van Torrance se woorde geformuleer!) saam met Smit deur Smit moet beweeg. Saam moet deurbeweeg want hier lê 'n onvermydelike taak van teologiese nadenke wat nie versaak mag word nie. Nie versaak mag word ter wille van haar geloofwaardigheid, haar integriteit nie. Reeds Heinrich Scholz (1931) het hierdie vraag so raak en so skerp gestel aan Barth in sy artikel "Wie ist eine Evangelische Theologie als Wissenschaft möglich?" Swaardsnydend skerp stel hy:

> "Aber die Energie des Glaubens, so hoch sie auch gefasst werden mag, ist natürlich im geringsten noch nicht ein Beweis für seine Legitimität". (Scholz 1931:27)

En nog sterker as Scholz verwoord Moltmann (1964:149) hierdie kritiese vraag:

> "Wer bürgt für die Wahrheit der Verkündigung und die Wahrhaftigkeit der Verkünder? … An welcher Wirklichkeit beweisen die Worte ihre Wahrheit oder welche Wirklichkeit beweist die Wahrheit dieser Worte?"

Hierdie vrae geld ook vir Smit. Waarskynlik hou hierdie verpas van kritiese nadenke deur Smit oor die regverdiging van haar metodologiese werkswyse buite kerklike kringe om, ook verband met die doelbewuste ignorering van die mees omstrede uitdaging aan teologiese nadenke vandag, te wete die omvangryke invloed van die natuurwetenskappe.[20] As Botha (vgl

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teologie waarvan hy Barth beskuldig nie. In 'n latere publikasie stel hy dit as volg: "Barth sought to found his theology of revelation on an impressive choice for revelation rather than experience, theology rather than non-theological sciences, kerygmatic authority rather than rational argument. The scientific status of theological reflection was thus never a vital question for theology according to Barth, since theology is a function of the church which, in obedient faith, serves the gospel through critical guidance" (Van Huyssteen 1989:16).

20 Om hier 'n volledige motivering te gee vir die oortuiging dat dit eenvoudig moet, is die ruimte daarvoor te beperk. Ek volstaan met enkele verwysinge aangesien daar eenvoudig net te veel goeie literatuur oor die afgelope vier dekades sedert die indrukwekkende werke van Ian Barbour en Arthur Peacocke hieroor verskyn het. Murphy (1996:105) het al meer as tien jaar gelede kort en kragtig gesê: "Relating theology to science just might be the single most important apologetic task in our postmodern era". Dit kan egter nie ongekwalifiseerd gestel word nie, en daarom is Rolston (1996:64) se woorde van pas: "The religion that is married today to science is a widow tomorrow, while the religion that is divorced from science today leaves no offspring tomorrow". In die meer resente versamelbundel *Why the science and religion dialogue matters* (2006), bespreek George Ellis, John Polkinghorne, Holmes Rolston III, Fraser Watts en Ronald Cole-Turner juis hierdie vraag op 'n insiggewende wyse. Ek volstaan met 'n opmerking van Watts (2006:61) waarmee ek volledig kan saamgaan: "I care deeply about the dialogue between science and religion, partly because I hope it will lead to a less arrogant, more religiously sympathetic science, but also because I hope that science can help religion to become more open and humble"! In die onlangse populêre werk van Alister McGrath (2010:77) *Mere theology* het hy 'n goeie kort persoonlike bespreking

bl 2) dan stel dat Smit juis eietydse uitdagings so skerp identifiseer, en daarvan teologies werk maak, dan is die opvallend vreemde dat dit in sy hermeneutiese verhaal volledig ontbreek.[21] Tog stel Smit deurgaans in al vier perspektiewe op die een verhaal van die Bybel die konkrete leefwêreld voorop, beklemtoon die (gelaagdheid van) konteks, die belang van ons menslike gesitueerdheid – maar die mees invloedryke eietydse ervaring van die natuurwetenskappe ontbreek volledig.[22] Tevergeefs in Smit se hermeneutiese verhaal soek die een-en-twintigste eeuse konkrete leser van "vlees en bloed" – wat swaar en dikwels ontnugterend gebuk gaan onder die eietydse fel aanslae van die natuurwetenskaplike-reduksionistiese mens- en wêreldbeskouinge – na die name van Copernicus (Galileo word toevallig terloops genoem), Keppler, Einstein, Darwin, Dawkins – noem maar op. Is hierdie ontbreking (dit is: van enersyds van metodologiese verantwoording en dus teologiese selfverstaan en andersyds die erns maak met die natuurwetenskaplike invloed) 'n verbandhoudende gevolg (dus doelbewuste blindekol) van Smit se ekumenies-ekklesiologiese rasionaliteitsmodel? Of meen Smit dalk soos Barth (1947:5) dat "(d)iese Frage … auf keinen Fall eine Lebensfrage (ist) für die Theologie"?

Dit is 'n lewensvraag vir teologiese nadenke. Ons moet eenvoudig die Bybelse skeppingsverhale en ons eie kerklike belydenisse konsekwent en grondig ernstig neem in hulle geïmpliseerde (universele) reikwydte.[23] Daar staan tog duidelik geskrywe dat God in die begin die hemel en *aarde* gemaak het. En dit sluit dus benewens Israel, ook China, Japan en Irak in. Maar so ook in die *Apostolicum* bely ons as kerke saam dat ons glo in God, die Vader, Skepper van hemel en *aarde*. Hierdie (universele) reikwydte mag nie teologies verpas word nie. Mag ook nie willekeurig-geloofsmatig verskraal word nie. Ons is God se fisies-biologiese handewerk. Hierdie geïmpliseerde teologiese reikwydte en fisiese konkreetheid, en dus daarmee saam die vraag na die wyse waarop teologiese uitsprake oor God, en Gods goeie skepping, en die redding in Jesus Christus gemaak word, noodsaak metodologiese verantwoording wat onvermydelik deel uitmaak van die algemene wetenskapsteoretiese probleembewussyn. Wil ons met teologiese integriteit praat oor God as Skepper, en die mens as God se handewerk as skepsel, sal dit in elkeen van Smit se vier perspektiewe verdiskonteer moet word. Dalk duideliker gesê om moontlike misverstand uit te skakel: die vraag is hier beslis nie na 'n wetenskapsteoretiese begronding van Gods openbaring of Gods trou nie. Nee. Wat *moet* is

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van die belang van die teologie-wetenskap relasie met die sprekende titel: The natural sciences: friends or foes of faith?

21 Weliswaar word op enkele plekke terloops na die natuurwetenskappe verwys (sien bv Smit 2006:78;81), maar dan nie as 'n relasie teologie-natuurwetenskap wat van belang sou wees nie.

22 So ook in Smit se onlangse voordrag oor die opstanding van Jesus waar hy deurgaans beklemtoon dat ons konkrete (kosmiese) werklikheid nooit uit die oog verloor moet word nie. So stel hy: "Allereers is die sleutelsaak in die Bybelse getuienis dat dit Jesus is wat opgewek word. Dís die geheimenis, die wonder, die verrassing, die troos, die belofte, die *nuwe perspektief op die hele wêreld en werklikheid,* op die geskiedenis, op onsself, op Gód, dís die eintlike punt" (Smit 2011:2; kursivering myne); Ook:"Die lewende Heer is by ons teenwoordig en werksaam deur die Gees – in die geskiedenis, die werklikheid, die kerk, ons eie lewe. Die Opgestane en Lewende Christus werk deur die Gees en die Gees werk ook in en deur kosmos en kerk, ook in en deur óns, nou én op weg na die toekoms (Smit 2011:4); En: "Die Gees maak ook die skepping nuut, die wêreld, die ganse werklikheid" (Smit 2011:6).

23 Van Huyssteen (1978:393) stel dit op sy besondere manier baie duidelik in sy kritiek op Heyns en Jonker se verstaan van teologie. In hiefdie konteks is sy kritiek ook van toepassing op Smit se wyse van teologisering. Hy stel: "Die universaliteit van die teologie hang trouens direk saam met die feit dat dit juis direk of indirek oor God uitsprake wil maak. Daarom ook kan die teologie sig nie terugtrek op 'n spesiale openbaringterrein, om as 'n positiewe kerklike teologie in afsondering van die res van die wetenskappe te bestaan nie. Dit mag 'n probleemlose naasbestaan met die ander wetenskappe verseker, maar die universaliteit wat wesenlik met die Godsgedagte gegee is, word hierdeur ingrypend aangetas".

verantwoording van die wyse waarop ons daaroor nadink, en wat ons dan daaroor sê, maar dan nie in isolasie nie, ook nie as 'n verskuilde vorm van immunisering teen kritiek nie, maar as integrale deel van Gods hele skepping.

Ten slotte. Waarheen gaan Smit se (ingeperkte) ekumenies-ekklesiologiese verstaan van teologisering ons neem? Indien ons meen dat ons 'n Skrifteologie kan beoefen sonder verantwoording oor die grense heen van die ekumeniese kerk, sonder verantwoording waarin metodologies gevra word na die regverdiging van ons teologiese uitsprake, gaan ons ons in ons teologies-gereformeerde nadenke uiteindelik vervreem en isoleer van ons eietydse werklikheidservaringe. Weliswaar is Smit se toegespitste klem op en insigte vanuit sy diepgaande hermeneutiese nadenke 'n skoling in nederigheid, versigtigheid en openheid. Dit vind ek besonders. Maar as ons dan terselfdertyd die eietydse invloedryke natuurwetenskaplike insigte ignoreer, gaan ons meewerk sowel aan die toenemende bevraagtekening van die geloofwaardigheid van ons "geloofskreun" in God se goeie skepping, as die meewerk aan die eenkant verstil van ons lewendmakende belydenis van God se trou. Maar as ons saam met Smit deur Smit se besondere teologiese bydrae sou werk na metodologiese verantwoording, en ook nie die natuurwetenskaplike insigte ignoreer nie, meen ek dat Smit se eie woorde ons opnuut en anders – soos vir Augustinus - aan die hart sou gryp. Aan die hart sal gryp op die deurwerking hiervan op ons konkrete lewenspaaie tot in die fisiologiese "aar-diepte" van menswees, en dan voorts verby die hange van Tafelberg, ver oor die grense van die Kaapse vlaktes en die kuslyn van die Atlantiese oseaan heen, wanneer hy stel:

"Gelowige lesers wag dus op 'n woord wat saak maak, wat sin maak, wat betekenisvol en geloofwaardig *in-spreek* op die hede, wat hulle eie lewe vir hulle nuut *uit-lê* en aan hulle 'n nuwe verstaan bied van hulle lewenswerklikheid en van die geskiedenis" (Smit 2006:162).

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TREFWOORDE
Dirkie Smit
Hermeneutiek
Ekumenies-ekklesiologiese rasionaliteitsmodel
Teologie-wetenskap debat

KEY WORDS
Dirkie Smit
Hermeneutics
Ecumenical-ecclesiological model of rationality
Theology-Science debate

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Did Luther get it altogether wrong? Luther's interpretation of the function of the Mosaic law in Galatians

ABSTRACT

While a student at the University of Stellenbosch in the 1970s, I struggled through Herman Ridderbos' 600 page *Paulus - Ontwerp van zijn Theologie* (Paul – Design of his Theology). Half-way through the book a classmate, Dirkie Smit, came to my rescue by allowing me to have a look at some of his handwritten notes. These notes – and his verbal explanation, delivered in one late-night session – gave me with the key to understand Ridderbos' concerns. Suddenly I understood why Ridderbos used his first chapter to explain (and debunk most of) the different nineteenth- and twentieth-century schools of Pauline interpretation. I understood why the second chapter was one on *Grondstructuren* (foundations) and why the third chapter – in which Ridderbos really started to deal with the material from Paul's epistles – was about "In leven in de zoned" (In living in sin). Ridderbos' book introduced me to Paul and prompted me to reflect on the apostle in a way that eventually led me to do my postgraduate work in New Testament Studies.

For this and for much more I am grateful to Dirkie and delighted to offer these reflections on Paul as part of this volume in Dirkie's honour. I have always thought Ridderbos' interpretation of Paul (and why he interpreted him in the way he did) was the one which I understood reasonably well. This is not to say that I, in later years, did not on occasion wonder whether and to what degree the Ridderbos interpretation of Paul that I knew was the pure Paul of Ridderbos and not the Smit reading of the Paul of Ridderbos. This did not lessen my appreciation of Smit's contribution to my thinking about these matters. It was his thoughts on the process of reading and interpretation – for example in his 2006 work *Neem, lees!* (Take, Read!) – that prompted me to reflect on Smit's influence on my reading of Ridderbos' Paul.

This brings me to the subject of this essay: the influence of reading strategies on the interpretation of texts. In recent Pauline studies the so-called Lutheran reading of Paul has been fiercely disputed. In my opinion, it would be fair to say that, despite staunch defenders, the tide is turning against the Lutheran reading. The question I turn to in this article is whether this tendency is justified, in other words: Was Luther's interpretation a valid one?

A LUTHERAN READING AND NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PAUL

Before I proceed: For the sake of clarity, a few remarks on how certain key phrases are used in this article.

First, the phrases "a Lutheran reading of Paul" and "a New Perspective on Paul" describe relative opposites. The latter is really a new perspective on Paul as he was understood in mainline Protestant tradition – which, in turn, was fundamentally shaped by Luther's interpretation of Paul. Thus, the terms "a Lutheran reading of Paul" and "the Old Perspective" are very close to synonymous. It is also important to remember that the socalled New Perspective is not one,

clearly defined concept. Many scholars have rightly pointed out that one should rather speak of this phenomenon in the plural – "New Perspectives on Paul" – since, in the words of Wax (2006:3),

> it could hardly be considered a "movement" in any cohesive manner. It continued to be a loose batch of similar opinions regarding first century Judaism and how theological concepts like salvation and justification would have been understood by those in the first century.

Second, the "Lutheran" reading is first and foremost Martin Luther's interpretation of Paul, but it is also more than that: It is also the dominant reading found in the Lutheran tradition – which subsequently became very much the dominant reading in most Protestant churches. It is wise to distinguish between these two meanings. Douglas Campbell makes the point that Luther's own interpretation of the concept of salvation in Paul's letters is more nuanced than that of the followers of the Lutheran tradition. He (Campbell 2009:265) remarks that "Paul *at times* speaks unequivocally of an intimate, participatory, and trans formational soteriology", which was at odds with his normal, "contractual" way of understanding the process of salvation.[1] Yet, for the most part, Campbell admits, Paul's way of speaking is not so much different from the way his followers later spoke about salvation. This distinction will be recognised in this article by speaking of "Luther's" and the "Lutheran (interpretation)" respectively, although for the most part there may not be a crucial difference between the two.

But why was it necessary to correct the Lutheran reading of Paul? A helpful way to answer this may be to describe three focal points in the discussions over the last two decades. Scholars claimed that they acquired new perspectives in three areas. This led them to discard, fully or partially, the traditional Lutheran reading.

A re-appraisal of first-century Judaism

In 1977, the New Testament scholar E. P. Sanders published *his Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. In this book Sanders argued that the Judaism of Paul's time was not a system by which the Jews earned God's grace by their observance of the Law of Moses. With reference to Jewish literature, Sanders showed that Jews in the time of Paul assumed that they were chosen by God to be his people. Jews did not think they had to earn God's acceptance as a result of keeping Torah. On the contrary, they assumed they were God's people by virtue of the fact that God made a covenant with Israel. The validity of the covenant that God made with Israel depended on God's faithfulness to his covenant. Of course, since God made the covenant with Israel, he expected them to uphold the Torah. Keeping Torah

> maintains one's position in the covenant, but it does not earn God's grace as such … Righteousness in Judaism is a term which implies the maintenance of status among the group of the elect (Sanders 1977:420, 544).[2]

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1 Campbell refers to the Finnish school of Luther interpretation, "primarily inspired by Tuomo Mannermaa", who "argues for a nontraditional center of Luther's thoughts in categories … in relation to Christintimacy, participation, transformation … The Finns argue vigorously that Luther's justification language and argumentation presuppose this more fundamental, intimate, participatory… stratum."

2 "With the exception of Ben Sirach … in all the literature surveyed, *obedience maintains one's position in the covenant,* but it does not earn God's grace as such. It simply keeps an individual in the group which is the recipient of God's grace" (Sanders 1977:420). In other words: "obedience is universally held to be the behaviour appropriate to being in the covenant, not the means of earning God's grace" (421). Dunn

This was an argument that had been made before by Christian scholars like G. F. Moore in the 1940s and W. D. Davies in the 1960s, but Sanders' argument was much more influential. He described first century Judaism as "covenantal nomism" – the keeping of the law (Greek: *nomos*) maintained the relationship that rested on God's covenant with Israel. It is not by observing the law that one entered into a covenant relationship with God – it was the opposite: God made his covenant with the people of Israel of his own choice, and then gave them the Mosaic law.

If Sander's depiction of first century Judaism was correct, this would have consequences for the interpretation of Paul. If the Judaism that Paul interacted with did not *demand* that people keep the Law of Moses so that they could be included in God's covenant, then why did Paul so vehemently warn against the notion that someone may be justified "by observing the law" (Gal. 2:16)? Why did he so fiercely warn against the temptation to "rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God" (Rom. 2:17), if there were not some Jewish Christians who were tempted to do just that, if there were not Jewish Christians who thought that their keeping of the law would (at least partially) justify them before God? Why did Paul so emphatically renounce the advantage of a curriculum vitae that met the requirements of the law (Phil. 3:6) if there were no Jewish Christians who were attempted to do just that?

Paul clearly *did* warn his readers (at least in Galatia, but also in Rome and Philippi) not to rely too much on the Law of Moses. He also warned them against abusing it. But what was the danger in relying too much on the observance of the law – if it was not a matter that some believers might be tempted to think that their observance of the law earned them favour with God? What was the misuse of the law that Paul warned his readers against?

Sanders answered this question in another influential book published in 1983, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*. According to Sanders, when Paul criticised the law – for example, in Romans, Galatians and Philippians – he was not criticising early Christians who thought that they had to supplement their faith in Christ with good deeds – as many Roman Catholics in the sixteenth century thought. Paul was criticising those early Christians who thought and taught that to be fully part of the community of Christians, believers had to bear the "identity markers" of the law – circumcision, a *kashrut* diet and keeping the Sabbath. In other words, the only way for them to enter the early Christian community was through the Jewish gate – they had to become Jews first, before they could fully become Christians. Those who did not bear the "identity markers" of the law were not welcome as full members of the Christian com munity. If they were accepted, it was with certain reservations – they were, for example, excluded from full table fellowship. In Galatians 2 Paul answers the question, "Who is a member of the people of God?" with the teaching "that all who share faith in Christ belong at the same table no matter what their racial differences, as together they wait for the final new creation" (Wright 1997:122).

A retranslation of "pistis Christou"

The debate on the retranslation of *pistis Christou*[3] concerns the question whether this phrase

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(1990:335) agrees: "This covenant relationship was regulated by the law, not as a way of entering the covenant, or of gaining merit, but as the way of living within the covenant…" Dunn was, as far as we know, first to coin the phrase "the New Perspective on Paul", in a lecture in 1982 (Wax 2001:3).

3 *Pistis Christou* (Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9), or in its main variations *pistis Iesou Christou* (Rom. 3:22; Gal. 3:22), *pistis Iesou* (Rom. 3:26) *pistis huiou thou theou* (Gal. 2:20). Cf. Van Wyngaard (2007) for an introduction

should be translated as an objective genitive – "faith in Christ" – or as a subjective genitive – "faith(fullness) of Christ". Since the debate could not be settled on a pure grammatical level (Van Wyngaard 2007:4), other hermeneutical concerns influenced translations over the years. Those in Protestant circles, and the Bible translations in this tradition, normally chose to translate it as "faith in Christ" – the objective genitive – although the subjective genitive, "faithfulness of Christ", always had its few supporters. It may be fair to say that Luther's translation of the phrase as "faith in Christ" had a major influence on Protestant scholars and translators. For many of them, consciously or unconsciously influenced by Luther's theology, it seemed obvious that in Romans 3:22 *pistis Iesou Christou* had to be translated as: "This righteousness from God comes through *faith in Jesus Christ*" – and not "through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ".

However, these assumptions have been challenged in the last two decades mostly by scholars from a Protestant background. Seminal in this debate was the 1981 PhD study by Richard Hays, republished in 2002 by Eerdmans as *The Faith of Jesus Christ,* which is how Hays translated *pistis Christou.* Hays insisted that his book does not only focus on the question of right translation, but "that the discussion of this problem should be placed in the framework of a more comprehensive debate about the story shaped character of Paul's theology" (2002:xxiv). This wider debate certainly refers to the question of where the emphasis should fall: on the Christian believer's faith in Christ (as it is stressed by the Lutheran tradition) or on Christ's faithfulness to believers. Hays admits in his 2002 preface that "the great adversary whose shadow looms over *The Faith of Jesus Christ* is Rudolf Bultmann" (2002:xxv), who was a strong supporter of the "faith in Christ" translation and which fitted neatly into his liberal Lutheran and individualistic interpretation of Paul.

Others have followed Hays. Douglas Harink (2003:28) rejects the traditional Lutheran definition of justification in Jesus Christ as "predominantly anthropocentric" and individualistic. According to Harink (2003:41), the phrase *pistis Christou* should not be translated as "faith in Christ" but as "the faith(fullness) of Christ" because the dominant narrative in the gospel is the story about God's faithfulness in relation to Jesus' faithfulness (2003:41). A pattern of non-Lutheran interpretation arose: Paul was not driven by his introspective guilty conscience for not fully keeping the Law of Moses (Stendahl) because his problem with the law was not that it was used by individuals to acquire God's grace through keeping as many laws as possible. Rather, Paul's criticism of the law originated from the social function of the law (Sanders and Dunn). Hence the *pistis Christou* that will save believers is not their "faith in Christ" but "Christ's faithfulness" to them (Hays, Harink, Wright, and others). Donfried (2007) was right when he saw this as a combined critique of the traditional "Lutheran" reading, which he felt called to defend. This pattern was supported further by a questioning of the third pillar in the traditional "Lutheran reading": a rethinking of the concept of justification.

A redefining of the concept of righteousness of God

The redefining of the concept of justification follows a process similar to the retranslation of *pistis Christou.* It questions the classic Lutheran understanding that describes justification by faith as the imputation of the righteousness of God on an unrighteous person, which is then received in faith by the person – a process that takes place in the individual believer. Justification – God's gift of righteousness received by faith – is imputed to the believer, thus making him or her someone who is justified by God. This is the traditional language of Protestantism. According to this understanding, the *dikaiosune theou,* the "righteousness of God", is an *objective genitive* – the righteousness which God bestows on believers.

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to the grammatical aspects of the debate.

This traditional Lutheran view is now questioned by a number of Pauline scholars. Should *dikaiosune theou* not be read (at least in some cases) as a subjective genitive, describing the "righteousness which belongs to God and proceeds from him" (Käsemann 1961:181)? Yes, in places Paul uses the phrase in the objective sense, for example, in Philippians 3:9, which contrasts "a righteousness of my own that comes from the law" with "the righteousness that comes from God". Also in Romans 5:17 Paul clearly speaks of "the gift of righteousness". But then there are many other passages where righteousness is not simply a gift from God that is bestowed on the individual believer, but a righteousness that is an attribute of God – and, when given to believers, it transforms the recipient of the gift. Think of Romans 1:17, which speaks of "a righteousness from God [that] is revealed"; or of Romans 5:5, where it is said that "our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly"; or of Romans 3:25, which says that Christ died so that God could "demonstrate his righteousness".

These examples do not deter from the fact that "righteousness" is a gift to believers, but rather reminds one that this gift is not an object – it is God's righteousness that transforms one when one receives it. That is why Käsemann (in 1961 already!) could say about righteousness from God:

> Die hier mitgeteilte Gabe ist nicht und nie von ihren Geber ablösbar. Sie partizipiert am Character der Macht, sofern in ihr Gott selber auf den Plan tritt, und mit ihr auf dem Plane bleibt (1961:186).

God's righteousness not only forensically declares that believers are not guilty, it starts to transform them and to transfer power to them. That is why God's righteousness in Romans 1:17 and 3:21 is referred to in the language of an epiphany: God's righteousness is not simply bestowed on an individual, it is revealed for everyone to see.

This is a very important point that should not be missed, writes Käsemann. It reminds one not to think of the righteousness of God as a gift received by individuals. Paul's view of human beings is often misunderstood in such a too individualistic manner, and as a result, it is forgotten that the place where God's righteousness should be revealed includes the theatre of history. Receiving the righteousness of God is not only a solitary experience of the individual believer; it is foremost the saving act of God, a manifestation of God's eschatological glory.[4]

These exegetical remarks made by Käsemann in 1961 and by others helped scholars such as N. T. Wright (1997) and Harink (2003), forty years down the line, to see more clearly the consequences of God's righteousness for the wider world in which we live.[5] That is why Harink could argue that, with this New Perspective on Paul, we understand that justification is best conceived in terms of "God's rectifying justice", which liberates and transforms the world and brings human beings into "a way of life that corresponds to the pattern of Jesus Christ's own faithfulness" (2003:28). Wright distinguishes this interpretation of the righteousness of God

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4 "Alles Gesagte läst sich dahin zusammenfassen, dass dikaosune theou für Pauls die sich eschatologisch in Christus offenbarende Herrschaft Gottes über der Welt is … die Gottesgerechtichkeit von Paulus [ist] nicht primär auf das Individuum bezogen…" (1961:192).

5 Wright argues that the core of Paul's gospel is not justification by faith, but the death and resurrection of Christ and his exaltation as Lord (1997:45). "Justification is the doctrine which insists that all those who have this faith belong as full members of this family, on this basis and no other" (1997:132). "'Righteousness' thus comes to mean, more or less, 'covenant membership', with all the overtones of appropriate behaviour, e.g. Phil. 1:11" (2001:591).

from Luther's interpretation. Luther corrected the medieval understanding of distributive righteousness, but "directed attention away from the biblical notion of God's covenant faithfulness and instead placed greater emphasis upon the status of the human being" (2001:591).

DID LUTHER REALLY GET IT THAT WRONG?

A lack of space does not allow for an examination of all three claims made by the New Perspective movement. Therefore, the focus will be on the first and most important issue: Was Luther (and the tradition that followed him) mistaken in his interpretation of Paul's polemic against the law? And if it is the case, should Luther's reading be discarded?

The first answer is yes. Luther's reading of the historical reasons for Paul's polemic against the law was indeed wrong. According to Luther, Paul's polemic was against (Jewish and Gentile) Christians who thought and taught that faith in Christ should be supplemented by observance of the law – just as, in Luther's own time, many Catholics believed, preached, and implied that one's faith in Christ should be supplemented by good works. See, for example, Luther's commentary on Galatians 2:4 and 16:

> Now the truth of the Gospel is, that our righteousness comes by faith alone, without the works of the law. The corruption or falsehood of the Gospel is that we are justified by faith, but not without the works of the law. With this condition annexed, the false apostles preached the Gospel. Even so do our … Papists at this day … Yet hereupon is the whole Papacy grounded: For there is no religious person (monachus), but he hath this imagination: I am able by the observation of my holy order to deserve grace of congruence, and by the works which I do after that have received this grace … (Luther 1953:98, 131).

This might have been true of most Catholic interpretations of the faithworks interaction in the sixteenth century, but the New Perspective is right in its claim that this was not Paul's primary concern in his correspondence with the Christians of Galatia. He was addressing the question: Who belong to the people of God as defined by God's revelation in Christ – and, therefore, who may be allowed into the communion with those who belong to the body of Christ? Who are allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper? Who have full access to possible positions of power? The reasons why proponents of the New Perspective are right regarding this issue are the following:

1. The (potentially disruptive) question of who were regarded as full members[6] of the first-century Christian communities was a question that all these communities had to answer in some way or another.

The reason for this was simply because, in most of those communities, there were people from both Jewish and Gentile descent. Before Jesus, the rules were clear – even if they were not upheld by all: Jews and Gentiles could not share in close fellowship. They could not eat together – it was forbidden by the Law of Moses.

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6 Membership should here not be misunderstood as a formal membership as in the twentyfirst century, but simply as an indication of who was regarded, by the majority members of a group, as belonging to the group.

In any gathering that included both Gentile and Jewish Christians, the law had the potential to severely restrain intimate fellowship on an equal footing. Equal and intimate fellowship could only happen if the law was ignored. If the law was upheld, such a gathering could only function on an unequal footing: Gentiles could meet with Jews, but could not enjoy table fellowship with them.

Such gatherings were not simply hypothetical. I elsewhere argued that, in some first century Jewish communities, the category of "God-fearing Gentiles" was such a group of people who were on an unequal footing with their Jewish compatriots – they were Gentiles who worshipped the God of Israel and, because of that, they were recognised by Jewish communities as God-fearing Gentiles (Wessels 1988:114). Some "God fearers" fully converted to Judaism – they were called "proselytes" (literally: "those who went over"), which meant that they undertook to keep the law and abide by its identity markers: they were circumcised, agreed to keep a *kashrut* diet and observe the Sabbath. They were Gentiles who actually became Jews – and, as a result, they enjoyed full fellowship with their Jewish compatriots. "God fearers", on the other hand (irrespective whether the term was used or not), remind us of another group of Gentiles that shared the Jewish faith, people who were "religiously" Jews but, because they did not meet the requirements of the law in respect to the identity markers (circumcision, *kashrut,* Sabbath), they were not regarded by the Jewish community as Jews, even though it was granted that they were "God-fearing".

Nearly all early Christian communities around the Mediterranean faced this problem: Will they allow a similar pattern of two tiered "membership" (proselytes and God fearers) that existed in some Jewish communities to be replicated in the body of the Messiah? To people looking back from a Christian perspective two millennia later, the choice seems obvious – but not so to early Christian com munities, where leadership and power were more often than not in the hands of Jewish Christians. For many of the latter the obvious answer was to keep the law as identity marker, and to expect of newcomers to follow the age-old pattern. After all, Jesus came as the Jewish Messiah, as a fulfilment of Jewish prophesies.

Peter's behaviour in Antioch shows that, despite his exposure to converted Gentiles, he still followed this line and still expected the law to function as an identity marker. Paul strongly disagreed. He saw that with God's revelation in Jesus a new age had dawned, an age wherein the only identity marker of the people of God was whether someone was grafted by faith "into Christ". This is why Paul addressed this issue in his letter to the Galatians. He had learnt that other Christians suggested to the Galatians (most of whom were of Gentile origin) that they would only be true "children of Abraham" if they accepted the law as their identity marker. This is not true, Paul wrote to the Galatians. The true children of Abraham are "those who believe" (Gal. 3:7).

This issue – the interaction between Jewish and Gentile Christians – is something Paul found necessary to address in almost all his undisputed letters. In Romans 9 – 11 he cautions the Gentile members of the powerful Roman Christian community that they should not be arrogant and look down upon Jewish believers, because the Gentile believers are grafted into the Jewish believers. With regard to tension arising from the practical question whether believers should eat kosher or nonkosher food, Paul cautions that this is an issue where groups should allow for difference (which implies that it cannot be a law to be applied to everyone). The guiding principle should be to do whatever builds up fellow believers "for their good" (Rom. 14 – 15) and whatever takes care of those "whose faith is weak" (Rom. 14:1) and those

who have "a weak conscience" (1 Cor. 8:10-12). In Philippians 3 Paul affirms that he now regards the advantage that the law brought as expendable, and that his righteousness does not come from the law (v. 9). However, the evidence is too inconclusive to decide whether he refers to the law as an identity marker or as a system of good deeds. It is of little significance that 1 Thessalonians and Philemon do not address the issue, since both are very short documents.

However, in Colossians and Ephesians, which may be early deuteroPauline letters,[7] the matter is addressed. In Colossians 2:16f. Paul warns his readers that they should "not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day" – which are clearly Jewish identity markers. In Ephesians, the bulk of the epistle is used in an effort to persuade the readers that Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two [that is, Jew and Gentile] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing line of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments (Eph. 2:14).

Although the Epistle to the Ephesians is formally addressed to Christians of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, large parts of the letter focus on the Gentile Christians, to remind them that they are not second-class members of the Christian community, but full members. A consequence of God's reconciliation in Christ and of the Spirit providing access to the Father to both Jewish and Gentile Christians (Eph. 2:18) is that "you (Gentile Christians) are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household." If Ephesians was a circular letter sent to many congregations, as many scholars think it was, the evidence is even stronger that one of the most crucial issues in Paul's interaction with his congregations was the message that the Mosaic law should not be allowed to socially divide Christian communities into two groups, namely a first-class Jewish and second-class Gentile group. It con firms that the first and foremost problem that the Mosaic law presented in these communities, was not the question whether an individual believer was justified by faith in Christ alone (that is, without supplementary good works), but whether the law still functioned as an identity marker for Jews – and thus placed them in a different category than Gentile Christians.

2. In the Letter to the Galatians this was clearly the issue Paul addressed. That is why Paul mentions his confrontation with Peter in Antioch in such a pivotal place in the letter. Before Paul begins his theological argument, he submits his credentials. His law free mission to the Gentiles has already been ratified fourteen years ago by none other than the Jerusalem leadership: "James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars" (Gal. 2:9). When Peter later deviated from this agreement, Paul had the right to repudiate him in public, which he did.

In his exegesis of Galatians, Luther clearly did not give an accurate account of this situation and of Paul's attempt to convince his implied readers. Instead, Luther (and the Lutheran tradition) read Galatians through the lens of Luther's own interaction with the Catholic Church on the issue of how the sins of Christians are removed, or put differently: how they receive God's righteousness, that is, how they are justified.

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7 In light of the present debates on Paul, this assumption may have to be reviewed because it can be argued that one of the main arguments of those who argue that Paul could never have written Ephesians or Colossians, is that the ecclesial concern of these two letters do not fit well with Paul's main agenda, which (it is assumed) was justification by faith. It is no surprise that some of the most vocal exponents of this circular argument come from a Lutheran background, for example, A. Lindemann (1975).

Conclusion

But does this mean that Luther's interpretation of Galatians was altogether wrong? Caution is needed in answering this question and for the following reasons:

First, the Mosaic law was used as an identity marker (to show who belonged to Israel, Abraham's children). When this practice was also used in the early Christian community, the law in effect excluded some believers from intimate fellowship on an equal footing. However, this usage of the law as an identity marker and mechanism of exclusion does not mean that the law served only as social marker. It is quite possible – and this is indeed my argument – that the use of the Mosaic law, which in a specific social situation functioned primarily as an identity marker, could also have a secondary effect (in that same social situation) on some of those people who bore the much desired identity markers contained in the law, namely to regard themselves as morally superior to those who did not. That could easily have happened. Paul's own language in Galatians 2:15 suggests this: "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners'." Such a superior moral attitude would be a natural development. In fact, it is difficult to believe that first century Jews were not tempted to think they were blessed with a superior moral system in the Mosaic law. It is quite natural to believe that this attitude of moral superiority led to an understanding among some Jewish Christians that, although they were sinners, they were at least more righteous than Gentile believers.

It is easy to see that in such a situation there would be pressure on Gentile Christians to up their observance of the law so that they too could become more righteous.

There is no explicit evidence that this actually happened in Galatia, but that is not the argument here. The argument is that there is enough evidence that Paul anticipated such a tendency towards moral superiority, to which he responded in his letters. I suggest that is one reason for Paul's abundant use of the terms "righteous" and "justified" in Galatians 2 and 3. There are indeed indications that Paul's critique is *not only* against the law as an identity marker, but also that law observant (mostly Jewish) early Christians could come to think of themselves as more righteous. Evidence of this secondary critique of the use of the law is Paul's warning in Galatians 3:21: "For if a law had been given that would impart life, then righteousness would certainly come by the law."

Second, even if that was not the case – if Paul did not issue this secondary critique on the law in Galatians – then it still does not mean that Paul's warnings in the epistle about the Mosaic law as an identity marker could not, in a later situation, be used to warn against other (but similar) misuse of the law. Let us remember what the implicit assumption was of those who wanted to keep the law as an identity marker: They wanted Gentile Christians to be circumcised, to follow a kosher diet and observe the Sabbath so that they could be seen as proper Jews, proselytes – not only as God-fearing Gentiles who did not keep the identity markers – *so that they could be accepted as God's people.* Implied in this assumption is that only those who belong to Israel – and who bore its identity markers – were righteous enough to be part of God's covenant people and, therefore, to enjoy intimate fellowship on an equal footing. To this assumption Paul bluntly said, No! – people become part of God's people by God's grace alone.

In another, not completely different situation 1 500 years later, Luther was confronted with a situation in which ethnic boundary markers played a negligible part in deciding who could be part of the people of God – in fact, the church prided herself on her catholicity. But there were

other conditions put in place which mediated (and thus could control) who could be reconciled to God and who will, therefore, be included in the people of God. To these conditions Luther said a clear, No!

The situations differed, but were the issues – that the grace of God alone decides who belongs to God and to his people – so much different? I do not think so. To me it seems that Luther's exegesis of the Mosaic law in Galatians may have been historically inaccurate, but his reading was hermeneutically valid. It was indeed an example of a legitimate merging of the interpretative horizons of author (Paul) and reader (Luther).

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