

# REFORMED WORLD

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## Communion and Justice

Eight regional  
perspectives for  
one Communion

**WORLD  
ALLIANCE OF  
REFORMED  
CHURCHES**

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30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Fondation pour l'Aide au  
Protestantisme réformé

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## Editorial

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These months are, as we hope and expect, the last for the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. From 18 June 2010 we hope that the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) will be in existence, bringing an end to WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council. The mission of the WCRC can be defined as: “Called to be a Communion of Churches, called to be committed to Justice.”

Given this mission statement questions do arise. What is, for the WCRC, the definition of Communion? Are there specific Reformed aspects of that? What are the implications of being a Communion of Churches? What will be the understanding in light of the wider ecumenical relations?

A second set of questions relates to the aspect of Justice in the above statement. What do we mean with Justice? Why is the Communion of Churches so specially committed to Justice? Is the aspect of Justice specific for the Reformed World? What theological understanding is there of Justice? What is the relation between Communion and Justice?

Questions like these are not only of interest for theological reflection. They go right to the heart of the existence of a World Communion of Reformed Churches. They have to be dealt with in order to set the agenda for the coming years of the WCRC.

Of course there has been thinking on these matters both in WARC and in REC. Otherwise there would not have been the decision to form the new body. However there has been a certain lack of global reflection on these questions, especially pertaining to the matters of Communion. It is a difficult and costly process to organise such a process of global reflection. Something neither WARC nor REC could have done without substantial financial support. Nevertheless, WARC and REC felt the need to organise such a process.

Therefore a project was developed of eight regional consultations on Communion and Justice. To be done so globally that more or less the whole WARC and REC constituency could be covered. The set up of this project was done because the Fondation pour l' Aide au Protestantisme Reformé (FAP) had informed WARC that it was prepared to help WARC with a substantial project in light of the new organisation. FAP celebrated in 2009 its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary and from the start of this organisation there was always a very strong relation with WARC. Once the project for the eight regional consultations on Communion and Justice was submitted FAP was prepared to help with the required funds for this project. It was a very generous donation!

The eight consultations have taken place. In this order:

Switzerland (Europe Region)	March 2009
Lebanon (Middle East Region)	March 2009
Brazil (Latin America Region)	May 2009
Indonesia (South East Asia Region)	June 2009
Ghana (Africa Region)	August 2009
USA (North America and Caribbean Region)	October 2009
New Zealand (Pacific Region)	October 2009
South Korea (North East Asia Region)	November 2009

All consultations were organised by the Office for Theology of WARC and I as the Executive Secretary for Theology was present in all. It was an intensive period of travel and work. But it was also very fruitful. A ninth and final consultation, also with help from FAP, will take place in March this year. For this consultation one participant of each of the regional consultations has been invited. In this final consultation we will bring together the results of the regional gatherings and work out a final document that will be, as we hope, very helpful for the future of the new organisation.

This edition of Reformed World is fully dedicated to the Fondation pour l' Aide au Protestantisme Réformé. It gives with articles from participants of the regional consultations a good insight in what was discussed in these gatherings. It also has the two papers written by me that were the basis of discussion in the consultations. With this edition of Reformed World in a special format, with pictures, we want to express our deep gratitude to FAP for its highly appreciated work to help the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the future World Communion of Reformed Churches!

**Douwe Visser**

# Préface pour le numéro spécial de "Reformed World"

Nous avons le plaisir de vous présenter dans ce numéro spécial de Reformed World les échos des neuf consultations théologiques sur le thème de « Communion et Justice » qui ont eu lieu dans les différentes régions du monde. Ces consultations régionales étaient organisées dans la perspective de la prochaine Assemblée Générale de l'unification entre l'Alliance Réformée Mondiale et le Conseil Oecuménique Réformé à Grand Rapids (USA) en juin 2010. Ce processus d'union devrait déboucher sur la création d'une Communion Mondiale des Eglises Réformées.

A travers la lecture de ce numéro spécial vous pourrez constater que ces consultations apportent une contribution essentielle à la réflexion ecclésiologique et théologique de ce processus d'union. La richesse et la profondeur des échanges se reflètent dans les divers articles. La communion n'est pas un but en soi, mais doit amener à un engagement pour la justice dans le monde, car elle est elle-même le fruit de la justice et de la grâce de Dieu. Les débats sur la Justice en tant que concept théologique et sur son articulation avec la Communion expriment la diversité de points de vues apportés par les représentants des différentes régions et permettront, je l'espère, dans le futur le développement d'une véritable théologie réformée de la justice.

Le Conseil de la Fondation pour l'Aide au Protestantisme Réformé (FAP) est particulièrement heureux de ce parrainage à l'occasion du 30ème anniversaire de la Fondation en 2009 qui a permis l'organisation de ces neuf consultations théologiques. Avec ce soutien important et exceptionnel la FAP exprime sa relation privilégiée avec l'Alliance réformée mondiale. En effet depuis sa création la FAP a soutenu l'ARM dans de nombreux projets et activités.

Je souhaite que ces consultations, rencontres, échanges et réflexions théologiques donnent aux Eglises Protestantes Réformées un nouveau souffle et une nouvelle dynamique pour vivre leur communion et de leur engagement pour la justice dans le monde.

*Pour le Conseil de la FAP*

*Sibylle Klumpp*

*Présidente*



# The World Communion of Reformed Churches as a global Christian communion

Douwe Visser

The new organisation uniting the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) will be called the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). The word “communion” is significant. At its last meeting in Trinidad, the Executive Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches offered the following definition:

Communion is an expression of our being together in the body of Christ as we move towards that oneness which is the gift and calling of God, fully expressed in the Trinity. Our desire to enter into communion signifies the commitment of our churches, in the richness of our diversity, to mutual caring, respect and service of one another, as witness to our common calling by the Spirit of God in Jesus Christ.

In this definition, communion is seen as a movement towards oneness. This oneness is seen as having its fullest expression in the Trinity. By speaking of a movement, it acknowledges that we have not reached the stage of an ideal full communion even though we are together in the body of Christ. One may ask whether “being together in the body of Christ” does not already mean a “full communion” that cannot be surpassed. The second part of the definition says what it means in practice to be a communion: it is a commitment to mutual sharing, respect and service of one another.

Obviously, only churches that are part of the Reformed family of churches can belong to this specific communion. This family comprises very diverse churches. The definition speaks of “the richness of our diversity”. It is a positive way of saying what could also be regarded as a deficit of the Reformed world. There is certainly no clear and unified understanding of what it means to be Reformed. Sometimes it is hardly more than: “I am Reformed because I am not a Roman Catholic or a Lutheran or an Anglican.” The organisation of Reformed churches is also “flat”. Most lack an ecclesial hierarchy and have no bishops or any real sense of *episkope*. Many are organised in a national structure with a synod as its highest

decision-making body, but in many Reformed churches local congregations have a congregationalist feeling. This situation has to be accepted. It is a basis for understanding what “communion” means when it is a communion of Reformed churches.

A communion of Reformed churches cannot be a superstructure that overrules the autonomy of the member churches. The communion starts with the member churches coming together and deciding to form the communion. It is obvious that the communion is present first and foremost when the churches are together, where they share the Lord’s table, where they discuss and take decisions, where they share their glory and their suffering, where they pray and sing together. Concretely this means that the communion needs a regular global gathering that brings the communion into a visible reality. It also means that the question of why there should be a World Communion of Reformed Churches is not one to be answered by the organisation itself. The staff of the organisation does not have to “sell” the need for it to the member churches. The member churches want the organisation, they want to be in communion, and they are willing to support the communion as is needed.

Although the communion of Reformed Churches cannot be a superstructure, the idea of communion undoubtedly influences the identity of the member churches. Being part of a communion is different from being part of an alliance. In the constitution of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the “alliance” is defined as a “fellowship” (I, 2). The strongest call for unity of the member churches is expressed in the purpose of WARC to “unite the forces of the member churches in common service wherever needed and practicable” (III, 6). This is a unity for a practical purpose. But elsewhere we read about the purpose “to widen and deepen understanding and community among the member churches” (III, 4) which is more general.<sup>1</sup> In the draft constitution of the World Communion of Reformed Churches the call for unity is much stronger. The WCRC shall first of all “foster communion among its member churches” (IV, 1). This has to be done by “promoting unity in and among churches through mutual recognition of baptism, membership, pulpit and table fellowship, and ministry” (IV, 1a). It could be debated whether the word “promoting” can be a purpose of the communion. Does not being a communion imply that there is already pulpit and table fellowship?<sup>2</sup> It looks as if for now the WCRC is more about fostering communion than about being a communion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The difference between “communion” and “community” in the English language is very small. It is strongest in the theological sense that “communio/communion” is the translation of the biblical Greek word *koinonia*.

<sup>2</sup> One of the questions is whether “mutual recognition of ministry” means that every minister within one of the member churches has the right to be called by a congregation of every other member church. It is obvious however that practical reasons already hinder such a process. There is for example the difference in language. It is no obstacle to the communion when, in order to work as a minister, specific local requirements are in place.

<sup>3</sup> See the WCRC paper *Towards a Communion*.

A significant change in the shift from “alliance” to “communion” is that the WCRC shall foster communion by “interpreting Reformed theology for contemporary Christian witness”. Nothing of this is found in the WARC constitution. It makes the communion of Reformed churches a place where Reformed theology is coordinated and developed. This has quite a few practical implications but it also makes the WCRC - if this purpose is fulfilled - a key player in the ecumenical world. However one may ask whether this process of interpretation is not hindered by a few obstacles, due to the current state of affairs within the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

The report to WARC’s Executive Committee in 2005 by the network core group on communion within the Reformed family and unity with the universal Church, asks some “provocative” questions:

Is what binds WARC member churches together purely our concern for social action or economic justice? Or can it be theological or confessional? Are we more than just not Roman Catholic, not Anglican, not Baptist, not Orthodox, not Pentecostal, etc.? Are we together in a meaningful and definable way rather than just because we don’t fit in anywhere else? Is WARC a body with clear identity or just a ragbag of misfits?

The question about “what binds WARC member churches together” is very relevant. If the answer indeed were only “our concern for social action or economic justice”, then the idea of becoming a communion would be senseless. Because that alone can never be a justification for being a communion. Many more organisations than churches have a concern for social action or economic justice. And even if churches have everything in common on the level of justice, they are not yet in communion. Defining communion as our being together in the body of Christ makes communion something very specific. It should be theological or confessional. Because communion, which finds its deepest expression in the Trinity, is something given. The gift of communion is an act of God’s grace. But what gives us then the right to call ourselves a communion?

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches is not a confessional organisation in the sense that acceptance of one or more confessions is a condition for membership of the organisation. In the constitution one reads only that “any church shall be eligible for membership whose position in faith and evangelism is in general agreement with that of the historic confessions” (II, 1.4). But a member church should also recognise “that the Reformed tradition is a biblical, evangelical, and doctrinal ethos, rather than any narrow and exclusive definition of faith and order” (II, 1.5). “Faith and order” is here used in an almost pejorative way and “ethos” is used in an inclusive way. Notwithstanding this, there is a confessional commitment.



The Reformed Ecumenical Council is an organisation with a much stronger confessional basis. In its constitution one reads that for the basis of the organisation, “the subordinate standard founded on the Scriptures shall be the Reformed faith as a body of truth articulated in the Gallican Confession, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Thirty-nine Articles, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession” (article II). The new body, one could say, is in between: “The World Communion of Reformed Churches is committed to embody a Reformed identity as articulated in the historic Reformed confessions and the Ecumenical Creeds of the early church, and as continued in the life and witness of the Reformed community” (article II). Most important is not so much having a confessional basis as embodying a Reformed identity. That is which binds together the member churches of this communion.

But what is a Reformed identity? Here it is interesting that the WCRC constitution links it with the life and witness of the Reformed community. Because for the Reformed community it is of vital importance to be aware that “the Church is not defined in terms of doctrine or structure, but of the activity of God in Word and sacraments.”<sup>4</sup> For the Reformed community, a lack of understanding of the church in this sense exposes us to a double risk.

The first risk is that members of the Reformed church movement are tempted to look for a structure that works in other organisations but is not part of the Reformed tradition. Reformed churches eye strong Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Lutheran church structures and think they want the same. Worldwide, they also want to be a communion because that makes you stronger. If this is behind the idea of being a communion, it will not work. Being a communion in order to have a stronger position within the ecumenical world will not work if the only driving force behind it is the wish to be like the others.

The second risk is that we turn the Reformed tradition or the Reformed confessions into a standard. In this way we will put an obstacle to God coming to us in his grace. We do this when we forget that our focus should be first of all on God’s sovereignty over all life. We should not focus first of all on our political preferences or our moral obligations. We should also not turn Reformed confessions into an barrier to the vitality and creativity of change. We should not forget the need for theology as the interpretative help for translating the activity of God in his world. In the Reformed world we have a great theological tradition. We should always be aware that theological reflection belongs at the heart of a World Communion of Reformed Churches. It should be an essential part of what we do in covenanting for justice work, mission work etc. It should also time and again stimulate ecumenism and stimulate our Reformed theologians worldwide to become ecumenical thinkers. Should

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<sup>4</sup> See David Cornick, *Letting God be God, the Reformed Tradition* (London: DLT, 2008), p.153.

there be a theological deficit in our ecumenical engagement, it would become superficial and therefore no longer challenging. Any lack of balance between “life and work” and “faith and order” is unhelpful.

With the idea of “communion” within the Reformed world, it looks a bit as if there was the idea that it is nice to be a communion and therefore we should also be a communion. Maybe it would have been more typically “Reformed” if in the recent past there had been deep theological thinking within WARC about the meaning of communion, leading to a process of acceptance by the member churches. Then it would have been logical for the new organisation to be a communion. In fact, there was a process more or less similar to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).<sup>5</sup> There too, one can see a historical process of member churches coming together because of sharing in the ministries of the organisation. And as in WARC, so also in the LWF there was the situation of apartheid in South Africa that required actions within the community going further than what a loose federation could offer. In the Lutheran case, however, this resulted in ecclesiological reflection about the LWF as a communion of churches. It may be helpful to quote one of the results of this reflection:

The Lutheran communion rooted in the unity of the apostolic faith... finds its visible expression in pulpit and altar fellowship, in common witness and service, in the joint fulfilment of the missionary task, and in openness to ecumenical cooperation, dialog, and community. The LWF is an expression and instrument of this communion.<sup>6</sup>

It is difficult to find in WARC or REC the same process of ecclesiological reflection about “being a communion”. The draft constitution of the World Communion of Reformed Churches defines “communion” in a theological way, but not after a process of theological reflection and consultation. This round of theological consultations is in fact the first explicit forum where member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches have the opportunity to develop a genuine Reformed theological perspective on “communion”.

Communion as a gift of God’s grace is first experienced in an awareness of growing together. But what is revealed to us by God needs a continuation in further theological clarification. This may also help to answer questions that are logically connected to being a communion. Not only the implications of pulpit and table sharing are of importance. The relation between

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<sup>5</sup> See Jens Holger Schjörring, Prasanna Kumari, Norman A. Hjelm (eds), *From Federation to Communion: The History of the Lutheran World Federation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.235.

the local member churches and the worldwide communion also needs further thinking. Will the communion of Reformed churches decide what it is to be Reformed? There is the question of how decisions are being made. Will the “consensus system” really be the best option? There is the discrepancy of wealth. Does “communion” not imply a sharing of resources that could have enormous consequences? There is the question of the role of the Secretariat and its relation with the governing body. There is also the question of representation of the Reformed world. Does the communion speak for it and do member churches feel well represented? Finally, there is the important question of how we can have great differences in doctrine and life as member churches and still be part of the same communion.

What in Reformed tradition applies to a church - that it is defined as God’s activity in Word and sacraments - applies on a different level as well to the communion of Reformed Churches. It should be an ongoing challenge to give a clear message to the world expressing our faith that God indeed also acts in this world through the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

# The World Communion of Reformed Churches as a communion committed to justice

Douwe Visser

About ten years ago, someone in the congregation where I was working as a minister shared with me a problem he faced. He had stopped working 10 years earlier and had put part of his savings in a stock portfolio. That went so well that over the years of investment he had earned more money than during all his life of hard work. One might expect him to be happy with that profit, but for this man it was a psychological problem. How could one ever earn more by what he called “doing nothing” than by physical hard labour? This man in my congregation saw this as a sign of injustice.

Of course nowadays after the credit crisis his problem would maybe have been different. Now he would have lost money and maybe that would have been his problem of injustice. But that doesn't make much difference in this context: what people earn is not based on a system of equal distribution of wealth and not even on a system that you get what you deserve. We could also just think of the bonuses that have been paid in the world of banking. These bonuses are not only often a sign of gross overpayment; they are also one of the causes behind the credit crisis we face. A lot of people see this as injustice in our world.

In the Bible we find among the parables of Jesus the one about the labourers in the vineyard (Matt 20.1-15). At the end of the day all workers get the same amount. It doesn't make any difference whether they have worked a full day or just one hour. They all get the same amount. Jesus lets us know that this is regarded as unjust, a feeling most readers of this parable share. Jesus also tells us what the owner of the vineyard replies upon hearing the complaints of those labourers who worked the full day. He says to them: “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

In this parable there is an absolutely equal distribution of wealth regardless of how much people have worked for it. In any economic system this would have been regarded as unjust. Not even in the strictest communist society was there an absolutely equal distribution. One may ask whether Jesus in this parable is giving us an economic model. But he at least focuses on what is more than an economic model. This parable tells us about God's gift of grace. This gift of grace is the basis for our justification. We are all justified because we all

stand as sinners before God, and to be reconciled with him means that we all need the same amount of justification. We all get the same daily wage. Not because we worked so hard for it, but because Jesus worked so hard for it. It even killed him!

The usual daily wage for the work of justification is life, in a true holistic sense and with the quality of eternity. Concerning eternal life, there is an absolutely equal distribution. You cannot have less or more eternal life. Justification is the basis of our life before God. That life is sanctified, and that sanctification can only be made visible in a life of justice. The total of human justice - *justitia humana* - is a holy matter. When a church, or an organisation of churches, cries out for justice, that cry for justice can only be made clear with the assumption that this cry for justice is a holy matter. God has sanctified us to cry out for justice.

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In the Netherlands, my home country, a new translation of the Bible was published in October 2004. This translation had been awaited with anticipation. It was trying to be faithful to the original languages of the Bible but also to be very readable. It certainly fulfilled the latter expectation. It is, language wise, a great pleasure to read.

When this translation came out, my wife and I decided to start reading it from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. In this we follow the old practice that in the past was very common among Dutch Reformed people: to read at least once a day a passage from scripture at the table after finishing eating. We have read now in this way, not leaving out even a single verse, for more than four years, and have now come to almost the end of the Old Testament. So we have read all the prophets. We have read all 150 Psalms. When we read Psalm 14 it struck me very much that the old saying can be true: "Translating is betraying." The opening verse of Psalm 14 in the new Dutch translation reads, literally translated into English: "Fools are *thinking*: there is no God." If however we read the Hebrew Bible, then the opening verse of Psalm 14 is: "The fool says *in his heart*: there is no God." So something went really wrong with the new Dutch translation. Thinking is something rational.<sup>1</sup> But it is impossible to say that in the context of the Old Testament someone states in a rational way that there is no God. Atheism was unknown in that part of the world, in that time of history. The meaning however of the first verse of Psalm 14 is: although a fool may think there is a God, his heart is not in it. The heart is the centre of feelings, emotions and passion. The heart is the centre of a person's inner life and as such it is central to what someone does or does not do. A fool who says in his heart that there is no God may believe in God, but he does not show it in his

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<sup>1</sup> Thinking can have - and perhaps *should* have - an emotional side, but this is obviously not meant to be so in the new Dutch translation.

life. That is why the second part of verse 1 reads: “They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is no one who does good.” Saying that there is a God should not be something intellectual, something rational. It should be something of the heart. Something of doing good. Doing justice. Psalm 14 is just one example of how central righteousness or justice is in the Old Testament.

Psalm 14 is not directed against atheists. It makes clear to believers what it means to say with all your heart that there is a God. This is in line with what can be found in the sayings of Israel’s prophets. Prophetic voices are often very strong in their outcry for justice. But it should not be forgotten that this voice is often also raised against Israel itself. Those prophets who say only nice words about Israel are even regarded as false prophets. In raising a prophetic voice a church should realise that this voice is also directed against itself. This is a process in which all churches share. Not all at the same level, of course. It makes a difference when a church has the power of economic wealth. It also makes a difference when a church is confronted with a political system that prohibits freedom of speech. But the prophetic voice affects all, and not only the world outside the church.

The Old Testament prophets can be especially strong in their condemnation of injustice. Certainly when you read them page after page the harshness of their words can be a shocking experience. However, the prophets also come with visions of how the world should be. For example, the vision of the prophet Isaiah as we read in chapter 2:2-5:

In days to come  
the mountain of the Lord’s house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.  
<sup>3</sup>Many peoples shall come and say,  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.”  
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup>He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

This passage is full of activity. A mountain shall be raised above the hills. The nations shall stream to that mountain, the mountain of the Lord. Instruction shall go forth. There shall be judgement between the nations. Finally swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks: the image is of a blacksmith beating the hot metal on the anvil with his hammer. That is not “soft” work: it requires physical strength and a strong will.

Beating swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks has always symbolised the worldwide work of peacemaking- work that is sometimes regarded as “soft”. But if we really want our peacemaking to bring success then it should be done with passion, strength and determination. Ploughshares and pruning-hooks are tools used to cut away, clean the ground and make a new start. The destructive powers of war and aggression have to be cut away and the ground for peace prepared.

So too with the judgement between the nations. This judgement has to bring forth justice, as such opposed to the injustice under which so many people suffer. This requires the same hard work as making peace.

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The theme of the last General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches was “That all may have life in abundance”. This theme comes from John 10 where Jesus calls himself the good shepherd.<sup>2</sup> It is quite clear that the abundant life the good shepherd gives to his sheep is that they will find pasture. They will not live a life without hardship. The thief, the hired hand, the wolf, they all come. They can be seen as symbolising injustice that has to be resisted. But the pasture symbolises life. Following in the footsteps of Jesus, his community will seek to resist injustice. But his community also will try to find the pasture. Both are part of the church’s life-giving ministry. Here too we have to be aware that it starts

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<sup>2</sup> See Dorothy C. Bass, *Ways of life abundant*, in Dorothy C. Bass ed., *For life abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

with grace. God is the giver of life. There is no need for us to be stressed life-seekers. The grace of God sets us free but “the grace that frees is also a grace that forms”.<sup>3</sup> It is important to develop practices that will be foundational for a life-giving ministry. Many of these practices will not be found only in the Christian community. However, within that community they cannot be developed without theological discernment: “A practice must pursue a good beyond itself, responding to and embodying the self-giving dynamics of God’s own creating, redeeming, and sustaining grace.”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, this should not mean that Christian practices have to be set apart from other human practices or that the Christian community has to be set apart from non-Christian communities. God is present in the world and not only in the church. It is obvious that the Christian community can never participate in life-giving ministry without God and making that explicitly clear. The life-giving ministry of the Christian community is not just a political programme.

Resisting injustice cannot be done without being very explicit about situations or structures of injustice. To say only that we are against injustice is in fact a redundant statement. On the other hand, becoming concrete is a risky process. Within the community of member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, it is obvious that the analysis of injustice is not universally agreed. Within the group of Christian World Communions, the passion of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches has been met with some reservation. However, the commitment to justice embedded in a communion of churches that really lives by the gift of God’s grace will make this tension a fruitful challenge.

Let me explain that by telling you how it went with the choice for the theme of this year’s Uniting General Council. The presidents of WARC and REC, together with the two General Secretaries, worked on that in an email discussion in December 2007 and January 2008. I was involved because I was at the time still REC president. Many theme proposals passed between us. It had to be a quote from scripture and it had to include the two passions of communion and justice. Some of the proposals favoured by REC were not selected because there was not enough justice in them. Some of the WARC proposals were taken off the table because there was not enough communion in them. Finally - from WARC! - there came the proposal “Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace”. This is it, we two from REC thought. But I still wondered whether there was really enough justice in it. We were told that this was found in the word “peace”, with its echoes of the Old Testament term “shalom”. I hope that the resistance to injustice - and the commitment to life-giving ministry - will show our unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30.





# Communion and justice flourish together, nourishing each other in an “ever-shifting equipoise” of worship and work

Allen Sleith

The European area consultation<sup>1</sup> gathered around 20 delegates representing many of the WARC member churches in Europe and gave us the opportunity to reflect theologically on the two issues that have, for some time now, been the major concerns of WARC, namely, communion and justice. Our several days together convinced me that the proposed merger of WARC and REC to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) is indeed on the right lines, as encapsulated in the theme of the Uniting General Council: “Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace”, based on Ephesians 4.3.

In good Reformed fashion, this biblical text indicates the divine dynamic that inspires and sustains us in our common calling. Situated as it is at the beginning of Ephesians chapter four, it marks the transition that is characteristically found in the apostle’s letters, where he often proclaims the indicative of the gospel - what we might call its “theology” - as the necessary basis for what follows, namely, the imperative or “ethical” part. I don’t wish to make too much of that structure or even allow it to act as a hermeneutical straitjacket, but it does seem to me to be remarkably congruent with the themes of communion and justice and their necessary interrelation.

## The dream of shalom

In pondering further the conjunction of these twin foci in the New Testament phrase “Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace”, I was reminded of the words of the Anglican theologian John V Taylor in which he beautifully delineates what I believe both WARC and REC are striving after in their future vocation as the WCRC. Taking us back to the sometimes neglected perspectives of Israel’s Old Testament theology, his insights are worth quoting at length:

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<sup>1</sup> The WARC European area consultation on “Communion and Justice” took place in Rüdlingen, Switzerland, from 8 to 12 March 2009, hosted by the Evangelical-Reformed Churches of Schaffhausen.

In the Bible it is the Hebrew dream that matters. In practice their two little kingdoms fell far short of the ideal; yet the ideal lived on as a dream, not only in the visions and vituperations of the prophets, but in the value judgements of ordinary people and, no doubt, in a great deal of daily behaviour too. Their dream was summed up in the word *shalom*, something much broader than “peace”: the harmony of a caring community informed at every point by its awareness of God. And in that definition the kernel of *shalom*’s meaning is in the phrase “at every point”. It speaks of a wholeness that is complete because every aspect and every corner of ordinary life is included.<sup>2</sup>

In similar vein, Taylor continues:

What the Hebrews seemed to have perceived with particular vividness and to have articulated most clearly was the fact that this all-embracing inter-relatedness and answerability arose from one primary relationship which God had initiated. All the threads in their network of relationships, their “bundle of life”, seemed to run directly to a single nexus in the hand of God. The *shalom* depended on him. It was the blessing, benediction and benefaction in one, which he had covenanted to give them for ever.

The blessedness of this inter-related, God-related community might be thought of either as wholeness or as harmony. The wholeness was the all-inclusiveness of the framework of reference; the harmony was the reciprocity of all the parts. It meant a dancing kind of inter-relationship, seeking something more free than equality, more generous than equity, the ever-shifting equipoise of a life-system.<sup>3</sup>

It is my hunch - or better still, conviction - that Taylor’s quote manages to capture something of what the European area participants at Rüdlingen experienced over the course of our consultation. While we grappled with the various rich aspects that the word “communion” includes and implies, we did not become so obsessed with the sort of hyper-technical doctrinal hair-splitting that renders almost impossible any theological consensus at all. The papers we studied and pondered made much use of the Greek New Testament term *koinonia*, but we were happy to live with its multi-faceted nature as a key concept in which the life of God as Trinity, our inclusion in this relationship by grace, and our common mutuality as a Reformed Christian community called to witness to the wider world are all held together in an organic, unified whole.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John V. Taylor, *Enough is Enough* (London: SCM Press, 1975), p.41.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> See Thomas F. Best and Gunther Gassmann (eds.), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Faith and Order Paper No. 166, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1994, for more on the nuanced concept of *koinonia*. See also the paper delivered at Rüdlingen by Martin Hirzel, “About the theological meaning of communion and its impact on the forthcoming creation of WCRC”.

What still lingers with me is the notion that the dream or vision of *shalom* that formed such a vital part of the Hebrew scriptural testimony is somehow remarkably consonant with the Greek New Testament meaning of *koinonia*, and that both those biblical terms find contemporary expression in WARC's emphasis on the mutual correlation of communion and justice as our God-given gift and task. Important here are the various words that Taylor uses to describe the dream of *shalom* - wholeness, harmony, all-inclusiveness, reciprocity, inter-relationship, equipoise, etc. If the soon-to-be-formed WCRC is to serve the purposes for which we trust God is calling and equipping us, then it will require a similarly broad and enriching vision, but with the further distinction of being deeply rooted in the universal mission of the triune God as the letter to the Ephesians so magnificently states - "a dancing kind of inter-relationship" as Taylor puts it, evoking the patristic notion of the perichoretic movement of the triune God.

### **An inspired and inspiring motto**

Hence, the theme "Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace" is a particularly inspired choice, for what it manages to convey concisely is a vital expression of that great epistle's central themes. The *koinonia* or unity-in-diversity of the triune God does not remain in some sort of static self-enclosed circle of eternal self-regard but overflows in creative love with the already envisaged outcome of not only sustaining, and at times restraining, the complex life of creation, but moreover of reconciling a perennially sinful and conflicting humanity so that may share in the blessings of redemption. The peace or *shalom* that is the ultimate goal of this process is not without pain, supremely manifested in the passion and death of God's Son, Jesus Christ, but through his being raised by the Spirit, the promise of new and eternal life is guaranteed. Yet a further remarkable feature of this narrative is that God calls a people into existence to be that community that enjoys communion with the Father through the Son in the Spirit, and thus also among its own diverse human membership too. For this community to "lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Ephesians 4:1) there is not, though, simply that supreme gift of communion resulting from divine grace but also the aspiration and task of structuring or restructuring the relationships and resources of both church and world so that injustice in its many forms is exposed, tackled and transformed.

At Rüdlingen, we acknowledged the tension that some people feel about the two terms under consideration: communion and justice. There are those who think that they are incompatible or that an emphasis on one is almost bound to preclude the other. On the one hand, we noted that the term "communion" can begin to almost take on a life of its own, and in this arguably more insular and pietistic turn, the community of faith is in

danger of becoming too concerned with its own internal life. Ironically, its initially worthy intentions to be rightly related to God in Christ by the Spirit becomes a sort of corporate example of what Luther described as the essence of sin –being curved in upon oneself (*incurvatus in se*). In such a climate, the emphasis nearly always inevitably falls on matters to do with internal structure and intra-ecclesial agendas, to the extent that the world to which God sent his Son and into which Christ impels us in the various aspects of witness and mission gets relegated to the secondary status of a vague, shadowy background. I caricature, of course, but there has been more than enough self-absorbed church navel-gazing in our various traditions over the years to act as a timely warning about what the WCRC might, without vigilance, become, if we neglected the laments of suffering and cries for justice that our world of wrong relationships still utters with such urgency.

On the other hand, we were freshly aware of the fact that the church *is* just that, *the church*. Yes, we hear the cries for justice and see daily images of global suffering through the media, and, if we care to look, in our own local neighbourhoods too. And yes, we are called by Christ to address the manifold needs of a hurting humanity with deeds of compassion as well as the arguably even tougher task of changing the factors and structures that cause such massive injustice and its degrading suffering. But these latter roles do not exhaust or define the being or action of the one church of Jesus Christ, nor any of its historic traditions. In the particular instance of those of us who call ourselves Reformed there is the not unimportant matter of understanding our identity as being a branch of the church that has certain *confessional* emphases that were felt at our inception to be matters of crucial importance and through prayerful biblical exegesis, theological interpretation and ongoing spiritual discernment continue to be decisive for our wellbeing as Christ's contemporary followers. As Jesus himself engaged in a ministry that was holistic in meeting people's multiple needs and through his Pentecostal Spirit empowered the first apostolic community to do likewise, so we too are called to a similar multi-faceted ministry – one in which we ought never to reduce our mission to the single dimension of fighting for justice in an often unjust ugly world.<sup>5</sup>

## **Tensions around terminology**

One of the most animated discussions in our consultation had to do with the notion of terminology. It was obvious that the debates and documents that arose from the Accra Confession left many people uneasy with some of the words and concepts that were much

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<sup>5</sup> The two papers by Douwe Visser on communion and justice presented in Rüdlingen and published elsewhere in this issue kept before us the necessary balance of these two realities in the future life of the WCRC.

to the fore then. In particular, the language of “empire” was felt to be especially emotive and carried with it too many negative connotations that seemed almost to equate some leading nations in contemporary globalisation with evil *per se*. Whatever sense of outrage or passion or even hint of understandable frustration lay behind such terminology at the time, a major consequence has been to make some of WARC’s rhetoric sound shrill, simplistic and moralistic in tone and also come uncomfortably close to the concepts and language of communism. Language works not just at the level of the content of particular words, it also works by way of association, and to use terminology more suited to political, economic or cultural contexts is to hitch your wagon too readily and unreflectively to the non-theological discourse of other disciplines. Furthermore, to tie any one people or nation or even politician into a one-dimensional stereotype is to do less than justice to the complexities and changing circumstances of the unfolding of historical realities.

In returning to our own primary sources as church, namely, holy scripture, we find that the letter we have already been considering has already anticipated the spiritual and moral struggles in which we find ourselves perennially engaged but furnishes us with conceptual language that is more apt and helpful than that of “empire”. In Ephesians 6:12 the apostle writes: “For our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” Evil, in other words, cannot simply be equated with this person or that people. Life is rarely, if ever, that simple. Even in the worst instances of gross evil, the church’s question is that deeper question about what spirit or power has temporarily taken possession of humans such that they have to be disarmed by the grace and power - or better still, the gracious power - of Jesus Christ.

In recent times, some theologians from the broad Reformed tradition have given nuanced attention to these themes. Karl Barth spoke of the “chthonic forces” or “lordless powers” that seem to take chaotic control of certain times or circumstances in which the ensuing evil is destructive of the good and opposed to God’s intentions.<sup>6</sup> In similar vein, H Richard Niebuhr speaks of the false gods, idols, “Chthonian deities” and “Olympian gods” that induce humans to oppose and subvert the will of God.<sup>7</sup> More recently, the New Testament scholar Walter Wink has written persuasively about the church’s need to take more seriously the language and dynamics of “the powers” as articulated in the

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Barth, *The Christian Life* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), pp.15, 214ff, 227ff, 232ff, 260, 266.

<sup>7</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture with Supplementary Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp.119ff.

Scriptural witness.<sup>8</sup> However one chooses to address the theme of evil, especially those instances of it that result in enormous and innocent suffering due to the sinful practices of others, it seems clear that we are still dealing with the age-old phenomenon of idolatry. And at least by using that language we are recognizing that all of us, whether in church or world, are perennially tempted to and afflicted by sin. To think otherwise is to court the danger of that self-righteousness to which Christ is implacably opposed.

### **Some European specifics**

A particularly interesting feature of our consultation was the testimony of some of our Reformed colleagues from European contexts where they are very small minorities. To take just a few examples, we were made more aware perhaps than before of some of the difficult or challenging aspects of being Reformed or Evangelical in Lithuania, Poland and Greece. While each of these countries is distinctly different in many ways, nonetheless we noticed a similar pattern of struggling to be heard or recognized in their native homelands. There was the observation - or even lament - that they were not afforded the same rights or status as other larger church communions or traditions and were often marginalised in perception or fact. It was heartening therefore, to hear how important is their membership of WARC - and, in due course, the WCRC - since it affords them the opportunity to belong to some greater entity than their own liminal existence back home. This sharing in a spiritual and structural communion is sustaining and enriching, not least in that a larger global body can act as voice and advocate where a local minority church might easily feel itself overlooked, oppressed or disempowered. And for those churches that are larger players in their own homeland, perhaps the witness of such smaller brothers and sisters elsewhere may counteract our tendency to taking things for granted in the more comfortable or privileged contexts in which we live.

### **A (Reformed) spirituality for social engagement**

On each morning of the consultation we began with a Bible study in which Ephesians chapter four was the chosen text. It was a worthwhile and enriching exercise. But it occurred to me quite early on that it would be a fitting thing for us to celebrate communion or the

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*, 1984; *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Powers that Determine Human Existence*, 1986; and *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, 1992; all Philadelphia, Fortress Press. For an example of someone from a more radical background who does use the language of empire see Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); *Who Will Roll Away the Stone? Discipleship Queries for First World Christians* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994).

Lord's supper too. My suggestion was affirmed by the conference leaders and a short service did indeed take place. Why did I suggest this? Because of my hunch that word and sacrament belong together; because the theme of communion features in our new name in the transition from WARC and REC to the WCRC; but above all because the Lord's supper conveys something significant beyond our Reformed tendency to read and listen, preach and teach. A conviction of mine is that the WCRC is and ought to be a body in which we encourage and facilitate good liturgical and spiritual practices with as much imagination and integrity as possible. A friend of mine, Derek Poole, calls this "a spirituality for social engagement" - "liturgies for life" in which communion and justice flourish together because they nourish each other in an "ever-shifting equipoise" of worship and work, the peace of Christ that passes all understanding.

When we partake of the bread at communion we are handling that basic necessity for which we pray - food enough for each new day - even as we remember Christ's broken body; and as we take the cup of wine, we sense not only the poison of some people's excess in an unjust world, but also the shed blood of Christ whose sacrifice makes just the human creature unable to save itself. Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace indeed! *Shalom!*

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# Conversion to Christ also implies a commitment to social justice

Anne-Marie Teeuwissen

Some of the participants in the Middle East consultation<sup>1</sup> had previous experience as delegates to WARC meetings or had worked together in the region, but for me, representing the *Église évangélique au Maroc* (EEAM), this was the first opportunity to meet with representatives of other Reformed churches and organisations in the region:

- The National Evangelical Union of Lebanon
- The Evangelical Synod of Syria & Lebanon
- The Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches
- The Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches
- The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt
- The Near East School of Theology and the Central Committee of the Evangelical Churches at NEST

We soon had the opportunity to find out about the day-to-day life of our churches, and how much they differ. From Beirut to Cairo and on to Casablanca, indeed, all of us live in Arab countries, but the cultural and social environments cover a wide range of situations. Centuries of Christian heritage have shaped churches in Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, but what about their future?<sup>2</sup> There is no need to detail the chronology of armed conflict in the region since World War I to measure the impact of politics on the life of churches in the Near East.

The tragic events of 1915 have brought Armenians to the region. For the best part of the second half of the 20th century, churches in North Africa have been seen as a legacy of colonialism ministering to expatriate communities. But as we enter the 21st century, the expatriate community is no longer essentially European: for large numbers of Sub-Saharan students, the place of worship is a vital place to get together. Migrants spend longer than

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<sup>1</sup> Delegates from Reformed churches in the Middle East region met from 27 March to 1 April 2009 at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut, Lebanon.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the future in the region, cf. George Sabra, "Protestantism in the Middle East today", *Reformed World* vol.56 no.2 (June 2006), pp.196-203.

they had initially hoped in Morocco, which has become a country of transit. In parallel, the presence of a few small Arab underground home churches in Morocco, the number of Algerians openly claiming their Christian faith and joining evangelical churches, and the way in which public opinion, the media and the authorities react to these new developments are but some of the elements which have changed the deal.

Dr Douwe Visser's presentation on communion led to a real debate about the theological meaning of communion. Dr George Sabra (Academic Dean at NEST) found it difficult for churches to *volunteer* to become a communion, since in its theological sense, communion is usually understood as a gift from God, an act of sovereign grace. Readers of *Reformed World* are familiar with the on-going debate about "What is communion and when is it full?"<sup>3</sup> Various translations into English of *koinōnia* may appear to fall short of the true meaning of the word *communion*, although it is one "which may enjoy ecumenical favour because it is a term that is both rich and vague, and thus suggestive rather than restrictive".<sup>4</sup> In Beirut, Arabic native speakers - the majority of the group - spent a good deal of time agreeing the best translation for the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) - *Sharikat al-kanaes al-muslahat fi al-'alam* - reminding us all of the importance of words and rigorous translation if concepts are to be well understood.

I found the many documents posted on the WARC website useful, as they provide non-specialists with the background to the main issues at the heart of debates in recent years. Although the focus for most of our discussions in Beirut was the future and the founding of the WCRC, reference was also made to some of the challenges faced in the past.

In the discussion concerning covenanting for justice within the new communion, for instance, it was reported that the Accra Confession had been received in a cordial way by some churches, but also in a critical way by others. What was its theological basis? How essential it is to specify what justice means from a Christian perspective, through the prism of grace. There is a definite need in our churches to be aware that conversion to Christ also implies a commitment to social justice. We experience real tension between certain forms of pietism and life-giving ministries. In Egypt, for instance, issues of justice are still trying to find a natural place in the church. From a regional perspective, the Palestinian issue can be seen as a model of how churches in the west speak about justice. But in the local Lebanese context, in the aftermath of the 2006 war, churches are no longer seen to be the leaders in denouncing the injustice of war. They have lost credibility and the human rights NGOs are now in the front line.

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph D. Small, "What is communion and when is it full?", *Reformed World* vol.56 no.2 (June 2006), pp.154-169.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p.158.

Is genocide not the ultimate injustice? While the Armenian genocide is still not acknowledged by all, the challenge to keep an identity as Armenians in another country is to a certain extent shared with Palestinians. The Armenian community, however, has its own specificity and approach to experiencing communion.<sup>5</sup> Some issues that relate more specifically to the status of women within the church (Lebanon), or family law and the way it applies to marriage and divorce across denominations (Egypt), were also seen as social injustice.

In one brainstorming session, we tried to define Reformed identity... Not such an easy job if you try to include local rather than western references and you live in Cairo or Rabat...! But as members of Reformed churches, we all felt strongly the need for a global structure that will enable our churches to bond in a deeper way. Symbolically, Dr Haidostian suggested the Lord's table as a model to look into in this phase of elaborating the new structure, reminding us of the centrality of the Lord and putting aside our individualities.

Throughout the consultation, as we discussed issues pertaining to past experiences or projected into the future to draft recommendations, we repeatedly stressed both the importance of methodology - defining goals and action plans, being rigorous about implementation and feedback - and the importance of being practical. We shared views about our churches, our countries, the world we live in. At times maybe we disagreed, but we also shared our hopes and beliefs, worshipped together in the small NEST chapel.

In order to remain connected to each other and to strengthen our ties, the need to materialize recommendations through joint projects seemed essential to us all. For a few days, WARC had given us an opportunity to stop and focus on who we are as churches in the region, what we do share, and in which direction we wish to move forward together. I returned to Morocco with a genuine desire for a more effective involvement of the EEAM in this network, and with a greater awareness of how much benefit could result for member churches from sharing experiences and resources more systematically on a regional level.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf Paul A. Haidostian, "Church communion in the Middle East : An Armenian Evangelical perspective", *Reformed World* vol.56 no.2 (June 2006), pp.209-220.



# Committed to being a communion

Carola Tron<sup>1</sup>

Those who know Latin American culture will know that we are a passionate people, quick to show our feelings when we meet, listen and react. The presentations by Dr Douwe Visser to our Latin American consultation on the theological aspects of communion and justice and their implications amply fulfilled the aim of stimulating debate and making us think deeply.<sup>2</sup>

## The context (or the text?)

This is an old issue, raised by liberation theology. Where do we start thinking? Do we begin with our situation or with theory? Do we begin with the biblical text or with the setting in which we are interpreting it? It is impossible to say that we can begin with theory or with a disembodied interpretation of the Bible. No such thing exists. It was thus vitally important for us to spend a whole afternoon sharing news from our churches in their national and regional contexts. Out of this exercise of listening to one another, we were able to discover how very varied are the social, economic, cultural and religious contexts of each Latin American country.

We were able to agree, for example, that the picture of wealth and poverty in Uruguay is not exactly the same as in Guatemala. We can also say that the identity and ecclesiology of the church in Cuba is very different from that of any other Reformed church in Latin America. And we could multiply examples. It is a platitude to say that there are no two identical institutions just as there are no two identical experiences of proclaiming the Gospel. I wish to emphasize that fact of diversity, because, with two ways of interpreting contradictory situations alongside one another, sometimes they are complementary and sometimes in conflict. Diversity in unity is a constantly developing process and it would be possible to say that our consultation concentrated on it.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the Spanish by Tony Coates.

<sup>2</sup> The Latin American consultation took place at São Paulo, Brazil, 1-5 May 2009, and brought together some 20 people representing the Reformed Churches in Argentina, the Evangelical Church of the River Plate (Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina), the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Chile, the Presbyterian Church of Chile, the Presbyterian Church of Colombia, the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Cuba), the Evangelical Church of Dominica, the Reformed Calvinist Church of El Salvador, the Presbyterian Church of Venezuela, the Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate (Argentina and Uruguay). There were also representatives from the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America (AIPRAL) and WARC.

Who are we, the Reformed churches in Latin America, today? What role are we playing in the orchestra of which we are part with the rest of the churches at world level? What is the identity of the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America (AIPRAL)? What are the tensions in play between unity and diversity in belonging to a world body?

For a long time we have been speaking in the name of Latin America, understanding by Latin America a social and economic Third World situation. This idea has become less clear in recent decades, in which globalization has created First World and Third World situations in each country and has obscured the origins of the great economic forces that have no geographical location or visible identity, with the result that their effects and consequences are blurred, invisible and anonymous.

The world economic crisis has come as no great surprise. It is calling us to work in communion for neighbours who were previously felt to be remote, part of another world, and are now in need, to share testimonies, and to have a faith helping us to resist and to hope for change and justice. We exchanged many thoughts on how we have been regarded by sister churches elsewhere in the world and what image we have of ourselves, remembering that we have often seen ourselves as victims.

Categories are undergoing change, stimulated by new ways of seeing things that have to be taken into account. We identified the resources that we have and wish to share with other brothers and sisters, and not only in Latin America. We realized that for many decades now we have been developing our own theologies in a Latin American context, and not in a European or United States context. It is now time for us to share our theological output, and our theologians, in communion with others. Other examples of communion have been the joint mission programmes with sister churches in other countries, for example, Colombia with the United States in a peace programme. We also desire to be able to show real communion through an exchange of ministers. It is important to continue the practice of mutual recognition of ministries without allowing differences in academic requirements to become a filter to screen out vocations or to create a First World and a Third World within our churches.

## **Our ecclesiologies**

We have many different historical identities. There are the Latin American churches that arose out of immigrant communities who founded their own churches in various countries, and then there are the churches that came into being and have grown through the missionary work of sister churches in the United States or Europe. Our different churches are passing through a time of change marked by the economic and political changes taking place in various Latin American countries, mostly marked by a centre-left trend as governments are

democratically elected. State social policies mean that the churches have a greater public role and participate in state programmes by obtaining resources and by networking with other NGOs. The churches are also developing their prophetic role in society through their involvement in environmental issues – for example, in the church in Chile. The voice of the churches in social and political issues should always be prophetic, but it becomes difficult to maintain when the people themselves are divided and confronted by opposing or sectarian political positions that also cause division and conflict within the churches, as in Venezuela. At other times, taking on a prophetic role involves high risks, especially when violations of human rights are committed by the state itself and its policies, as in Colombia and the traffic in weapons and drugs.

## Communion

It is clear that there are different understandings of the theological concept of communion arising out of concrete experiences of being church in different contexts. We share here some thoughts on communion that are incorporated in our final statement:

*We consider that:*

Communion should be two-directional in relation to the churches and the world. Churches should regard themselves as equals and not as some having a mission to others. Churches of the North with missionary work in the South and churches in the North should acknowledge that churches in the South are also church.

The Communion<sup>3</sup> is a communion of the churches and should seek always to be at their service, creating spaces for dialogue, encounter and participation, and ensuring that bureaucracy does not stand in the way of activities.

Being in communion entails mutual recognition of ministries.

Communion includes all aspects of life, including the spiritual aspect.

Part of sharing the riches of each region includes sharing our theologies and our liturgies, which are an expression of our Christian joy, and sharing our own understanding of Reformed identity.

We commit ourselves:

- to break down the paradigms that work against the promotion of life and to free ourselves from prejudices that divide us
- to share in supporting the Communion

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<sup>3</sup> The World Communion of Reformed Churches.



- to share our experiences of faith in our own contexts. Our churches can bear witness to the work and practice of unity at local level and to our ecumenical experiences
- to share in responsible stewardship of what God has given us by caring for the planet's resources
- to share our experiences of diaconal work
- to promote face-to-face encounters with brothers and sisters from other regions, since, although it is correct that we live in a world of communications, direct encounter is still necessary

### **The covenant for justice**

The Accra General Council put the seal on the covenant for justice after a long journey marked by stories of struggle that took on a personal identity in the faces present and the testimonies given there. Thus it is not a moment in time, nor a mere document, but the confirmation of an antecedent process and a commitment to carry it forward in the form of being Reformed churches that intend to continue to identify strongly with social justice based on God's justice. Beyond the particular ways in which the Accra Confession has been taken up in each local church, what we churches are called to be in our own contexts should be in harmony with the practice and situation of our peoples. Accra is thus much more than a study document, it is a yardstick by which to measure the extent of our communion with one another. If Accra makes us uncomfortable, if it is not consistent with the daily life of our members, then we are not sincerely seeking communion nor are we engaged in implementing the confession. There cannot be communion between a few only, nor can communion exist alongside injustice without a prophetic voice being raised on behalf of the weakest. Our churches cannot evade their responsibility to proclaim the Word of God when it is a word that condemns injustice.

*As regards justice, we affirm that:*

We need to recover the biblical concept of justice and its inclusiveness.

Genuine communion entails a covenant for justice.

In the Old Testament, the vision of justice as a concern for widows, orphans, foreigners and the poor arose out of the memory of the Israelites of having been freed from slavery because of their cries of pain. It permeates the Old Testament. Jesus not only took these traditions into account but also practised justice. He *is* justice, as can be seen basically in the Beatitudes. He not only proclaimed it but demonstrated it in concrete action. The Reformers and Calvin also sought to implement it in their experiment to create a just city.

In order to promote justice, we must acknowledge that theology, economics and ecology are closely linked.

God's justice transcends the logic of centre and periphery. God calls us to work for justice and we have to work on these issues in all places equally.

Within the framework of justice, we in the churches of AIPRAL are in solidarity with those suffering because of the world crisis, and we believe that it is time to leave behind biased attitudes and unite to confront the injustices of this globalized world. The cry for justice is part of our call from God.

In order to work for justice, we have first of all to ask what the meaning of poverty is. Then we must meet, share and get to know the different forms of poverty in our contexts.

Some important aspects to ensure that our communion is committed to justice:

- to attempt to put ourselves in the place of others
- to restore theology to make it more everyday, rooted in daily life. Justice also begins at home. There is at times a contradiction between what we say and what we do. The remnant in Israel, for example, were not all those who went about their daily business, but those who let themselves be transformed by a prophetic voice
- to continue using that courageous and significant tool, the Accra Confession, in our local churches and in the region

## **The location of the communion**

As the days passed, we discovered where there were resources, experience and knowledge that we used as we confronted adversity and that strengthened us. We have something to give and should not only receive, for in sharing what we are and have we achieve dignity as individuals and as churches.

As regards breaking down the division between centre and periphery, and taking on new roles and relocating ourselves, we make the offer to accommodate the new office of the World Communion of Reformed Churches in Brazil. We have the resources and experience of ecumenical work at regional level through AIPRAL, which has gained significance in its member churches. That offer put the finishing touch to our consultation and it is the expression of our unanimous desire to take on for a time from this part of the world the task of fulfilling the dream of a true Communion founded on the justice that testifies to the love of God.

## **The challenges**

Neither the North, nor the South, not developed here nor underdeveloped there - we have all awakened to the reality of globalization: the fact that it is difficult to put your finger on where power lies. It has no face, no location, no identity. It thus accepts no responsibilities. Whenever it wants, it will invent a new North, a new South, a small company of those with jobs and a large company of the jobless. We shall thus continue to commit ourselves to renew the covenant for justice, seeking to make full communion not a dream, but a task for all days and all places. With our Reformed identity, we are called to seek the way to bear witness to God as we condemn injustice and confess and proclaim the full communion of the kingdom.

## **I come to offer my heart (song)**

***Fito Paez - Liliana Herrero (Argentina)***

Who said that all is lost?

I come to offer my heart.

The river swept so much blood away.

I come to offer my heart.

It will not be so easy - I know what happens.

It will not be as simple as I thought,

How to open my heart and take out my soul.

A stab wound of love.

A cradle always open to the poor.

I come to offer my heart

As a document that cannot be altered.

I come to offer my heart.

And I will tie the ends together in a knot.

I shall go calmly.

I shall go slowly.

I shall give you my all, and you will give me something.

Something that makes life a little easier for me.  
When there is no one near or far away.  
I shall come to offer my heart.  
I speak of other lands and of hope.  
I speak of life.  
I speak of nothing.  
I speak of changing this our home.  
Of changing it for change's sake.  
Who said that all is lost?  
I come to offer my heart  
When satellites do not reach,  
I shall come to offer my heart.

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# Carry The Burden Together, Whether Heavy or Light An Indonesian Perspective on Communion and Justice

Richard A.D. Siwu

## Welcoming WCRC

If nothing is in the way, in June 2010 two international organizations of Reformed (Protestant) Churches, i.e. the *World Alliance of Reformed Churches* (WARC) and *Reformed Ecumenical Council* (REC), will unite in one new organization, namely the *World Communion of Reformed Churches - WCRC*. This intention is confirmed following the decision of the Joint Meeting of WARC and REC Executive Committees in Geneva, 21-30 May 2009. WARC has more than 200 member churches with approximately 75 million worshippers across more than 100 countries, while REC has about 30 member churches with approximately 5 million worshippers across 20 countries. Both have their roots in the reform by John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John Knox, and other reformers. WARC was established in 1875 and 1891, whereas REC was founded in 1946.

There are 28 WARC member churches in Indonesia; six of them are members of REC as well. Members of both organizations basically do not have significant, controversial differences in terms of doctrine or dogma. Should one try to distinguish between them, distinction would be based historically on the characteristics of their mother churches or their European evangelists or missionaries, that is, the orthodox or less orthodox, or, the conservative or more liberal. Even so, it is still difficult to make such distinction because in reality these churches are in general doctrinally conservative and morally pious. Both organizations inherit the characteristics of 19<sup>th</sup>-century European Christianity from the pious evangelists who emphasized piety and salvation. However, they are open to ethnical, social and cultural diversity; even in their life as church organizations and congregations they are indeed community churches and much affected by the local practices and culture. It is not surprising since they grow and develop in ethnic-based communities.

How large is the Reformed church in Indonesia? Statistically speaking, as notified by the office of Protestant Church in Indonesia (GPI), Indonesia today has a population of around

230 million, nearly 10% of which are Christian. Protestants about 19 million, about 75% of which are Reform. It means the Reformed Churches in Indonesia contribute about 18% (± 14,5 million) to the total 80 million members of WARC and REC.

The unification of the two Reformed Churches organizations and the change of their names from *Alliance* and *Council* to *Communion* (Indonesian: **persekutuan**), are obviously the consequences of their respective “change” of theological vision. Instead of walking their own separate ways in one Calvinist Reform tradition, they are now walking hand in hand in one “communion”. They unite in one big family of Calvinist Reformed Churches. From one perspective, this unification can be said to be the resurrection of Calvinist reform spirit, in consistency with his motto: *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*. They are now united in one “communion” to collaboratively respond to the various challenges of globalization era, especially the issues of neoliberalism, pluralism, injustice, etc. Welcoming the unification of the two Reformed Churches organizations, we have been invited to analyze those issues. Within the above context, this paper aims to present an analysis, from the Indonesian perspective, of communion and justice, which is the central issue in Reformed Churches on the occasion of the Uniting General Council of WARC and REC.

## **Christianity in “Diversity”**

Long before the arrival of the Westerners and their modern culture in Nusantara<sup>1</sup> Indonesia (the Indonesian Archipelago), the traditional society consisted of three cultural groups: ethnical culture, Indic culture (Hindu and Buddhist India) and Islamic culture.<sup>2</sup> Indic culture entered Indonesia in the first century when Christianity was born in the Middle East, while Islamic culture was introduced in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. However, when the modern Western culture arrived, not the entire area of Nusantara had been predominantly under the influence of Indic or Islamic culture, especially many islands located in eastern Indonesia. Christianity was introduced to the population of these islands during the Western colonialism, and then grew and developed overtime.<sup>3</sup> To acknowledge the factual social, cultural and religious diversity, Indonesia has had the motto “*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*” since its independence in

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<sup>1</sup> Nusantara is the name given to the islands once part of the Dutch colonial administration, which are now within the territory of the Republic of Indonesia.

<sup>2</sup> Eka Darmaputera, “Pancasila and the Search for Identity and Modernity in Indonesian Society: A Cultural and Ethical Analysis” (Ph.D. dissertation). Boston College, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Social pluralization is happening today along with modernization and globalization, making distribution of people is hard to contain. Consequently, population cannot be mapped as it was in the past where the population of one particular region consisted only of local ethnicities or natives. Pluralization is also happening in terms of distribution of religions in Indonesia. Eastern Indonesia, that was previously predominantly Christian, now have a growing number of Moslem population. Similarly, in the regions that did not have Christian population there is a growing number of Christians.

<sup>4</sup> “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” is a Sanskrit term that means unity in diversity.

1945. As a result, Christianity grows and develops in the context of socially, culturally and religiously diverse society.

Christianity that was introduced to Indonesia was initially three-faced, following the motto of the Portuguese and Spanish in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. *Gospel, Glory, and Gold*<sup>5</sup>. It means that Christianity spread by evangelists or missionaries arriving together with Western colonialism was driven by three things: “evangelism”, more precisely spreading Christianity, expanding influence and territory, and seeking economic/material gains. In other words, the initial stage of evangelism in Indonesia was, on one hand, to spread Christianity due to the belief that this was the only religion that could bring mankind to salvation, and on the other hand it had something to do with the “glory and superiority” of Western religion, politics and economy. The missionaries first arrived together with the Portuguese in Maluku (Ambon and Ternate), in the eastern Indonesia, who wanted to establish direct trade route with spices-producing communities. Unfortunately, Christianity resulting from these Catholic missionaries did not develop for about two centuries due to the weak upholding and service to the souls won.

Evangelism continued after the arrival of the Dutch in Indonesia, marked by the arrival of *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), a Dutch transnational company holding the right of monopoly in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. On one hand, it marked the beginning of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, which turned out to last for three and a half centuries (350 years).<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, this was also the beginning of Reformed Protestant evangelism and Christianization in Indonesia. It turned out that not only was VOC given the authority over trade and administration, it was authorized to support evangelism efforts and churches organization under the *Nederland Hervormed de Kerk*.<sup>7</sup> When VOC collapsed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, its trade monopoly and power broke down; this automatically led to the breakdown of communications between Indonesian and Dutch churches.

The Dutch evangelism continued in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by the *Nederlandsch Zendelinggenootschap* (NZG), an evangelism association based in the Netherlands. Driven by European piety of that period, the evangelists carried out evangelism and Christianization systematically in ethnical communities in Java and Tanah Karo in North Sumatera, as well as in eastern Indonesia areas such as Maluku, Minahasa, Timor, Toraja, Poso, Bolaang Mongondow, etc. Through evangelism, not only did they bring Christian values, but also the

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<sup>5</sup> A.A.Yewangoe, “Potret Kekristenan di Indonesia” in *Format Rekonstruksi Kekristenan*. Jakarta 2006, pp. 15-25.

<sup>6</sup> Indonesia declared its independence in 1945, acknowledged later in 1949 by the League of Nations (which later became the United Nations).

<sup>7</sup> According to J.L.Ch. Abineno. VOC “paid for everything,” including pastors who became its employees. *Sejarah Apostolat di Indonesia I & II*. Jakarta, 1978.

modern values of the new civilization. They introduced modern school education, medical services, agriculture and even construction. These results of evangelism gave birth to the Indonesian Protestant Churches (*Protestansche Kerken in Nederlandsch-Indie*), which in reality were rooted in ethnical communities and cultures. The message here is that Calvinist Reformed Protestant Churches in Indonesia are ethnically plural and culturally diverse.<sup>8</sup>

## What are Communion and Justice?

If we learn or study the Indonesian version of the New Testament published by the *Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia* (Indonesian Bible Society), we will find not less than fifteen verses exclusively mentioning about “*persekutuan*”, as the translation of Greek *koinonia*.<sup>9</sup> In comparison, the same term is translated as *fellowship* in the English version of the Bible. In Indonesian language, the two English terms *fellowship* and *communion* are translated as “*persekutuan*”. This term comes from Malay “*sekutu*” which has a few meanings such as “unity”, “pair”, “combination”, “friendship” or “fellowship”, “union”, and “federation”. In this respect, the English term *alliance*, within the context of churches as used by WARC, is also translated into Indonesian as “*persekutuan*”.

What is actually meant by “communion” and how should we understand it theologically in the framework of Calvinist Reform tradition as well as biblically? Before going any further, let us look first at theological and biblical analyses by two Reformed theologians.

Karel Blei in his paper “Communion and catholicity: Reformed perspectives on ecclesiology,”<sup>10</sup> mentions that “*koinonia*” is a biblical term. In relation to this, in Calvinist tradition which is the theological realization of John Calvin, the church is understood as “communion”. And, as a communion, the church is the “body of Christ” consisting of people or groups that are different but maintain unity among them. Therefore, *communion* is closely related to “unity”. Furthermore, referring to Romans 15:26 and so forth and 2 Corinthians 8:4 and 9:13, Blei says that the church is a communion of service. The church is not an “institution of salvation” distributing deliverance according to its own understanding, but a “communion of salvation”, that is, a communion of people listening to the Word of God and sharing salvation.

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<sup>8</sup> What Dr. Henriete Hutabarat-Lebang mentioned in her sermon during the Opening Service of Calvin’s 500 years’ Celebration, 29 May 2009, at John Knox Center, Geneva, was correct that Reformed Churches in Indonesia demonstrated more of their ethnical culture dimension than Calvinist tradition.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 10:16; 15:22; 15:58; 2 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 4:18; Philippians 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; Philemon 6; 1 John 1:3; 1:6; 1:7.

<sup>10</sup> RW, Vol. 55 (4) December 2005, 369-379.

Blei's views, in my opinion, can be seen as a new paradigm in understanding the responsibilities of the church.<sup>11</sup> It is no longer viewed as the only "way" to salvation or "agent" that distributes salvation of *the hereafter*, as it was understood and practiced during the colonial era. However, as one missionary communion, the church is called to participate in "God's mission" (*missio Dei*) in the world through service **for humanity and for justice**.

Not too differently from Blei, Douwe Visser in a special biblical analysis of the theme of Uniting General Council WARC and REC mentions that "communion" is related to the plea for unity, since basically the church is called to be a communion.

The plea for unity has to do with something the church is *called* to do. And if we regard unity as one of the basic elements of communion we could say, that the church is called to be a communion.<sup>12</sup>

Visser furthermore mentions that the church is a communion that receives gifts by the grace of Christ (verse 8). As objective evidence of response to Christ's love, the first thing to do is to form a communion of the body of Christ. Becoming a communion is a continuous process which, qualitatively and quantitatively, is unending until we reach the perfection of Christ. Further than that, the call to be a communion is a duty **to establish peace and to be committed to justice**.

Looking at the two theological and biblical analyses above, it can be concluded that the purpose of forming a communion is to "maintain unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace", so that Christ-given gift of love to each member is also used in serving one another in the framework of peace and justice. In other words, **to be in communion** is a **calling to uphold justice through its service**. So, communion and justice are two interconnected things. In my opinion, this should be the way Reformed Churches understand *diakonia* in the context of globalization today.

### **"But what about you? Who do you say I am?"**

Churches in Indonesia have for ages been following and imitating what their mother churches in the West, especially in Europe, do; from their theology and theological practices to the

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<sup>11</sup> The new paradigm of church missionary responsibility, in my opinion, is based on the theology of *missio Dei*, that is, participating in God's mission in the world. It firstly appeared at the International Missionary Conference in Willingen (1952) and later on at the WCC General Assembly in Uppsala (1968). See Norman Goodal, ed. *Mission under the Cross. Addresses Delivered at the Enlarged Meeting of the Committee of the International Missionary Council at Willingen, Germany, 1952*

<sup>12</sup> "Ephesians 4, the context of a Theme", *RW*, Vol. 58 (2&3). June-September 2008.

church procedures and system. That is why churches and Christianity in Indonesia have been for many years considered to be merely the representation of the West in the East, or even seen to be virtually identical to colonialism. Even though in the academic world theological practices that are based on the context of Indonesian churches or ways to analyze theological issues in a contextual manner began to be developed four decades ago, such change of academic paradigm has not been followed by contextualization in the life of the church. The old paradigm - the theological inheritance from the ancient European churches' theological practices and church procedures that emphasized on "triumphalism" - is still dominant. Churches in general pay more attention to physical construction as a reflection of institutional *power structure*. As a result, sustained by personal piety, faithful activities are introverted, that is, directed towards the interests of the church as an institution rather than towards becoming a communion concerned about humanity and world issues. Ironically, this kind of orientation has been abandoned by their mother churches in Europe. After all, isn't it the ecclesiology that was built upon ancient Roman civilization that became the target of criticism and reform by the reformers including Calvin?

Now churches in Indonesia also have to answer Jesus question to Peter, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" Churches in Indonesia actually have a contextual way to understand and interpret "**communion**". As it was mentioned earlier, these churches are culturally very close to local cultures that offer local wisdom. They even grow and develop socially and culturally within ethnical communities. In other words, ecclesiology of Indonesian churches is actually rooted in the local wisdom at the grass root communities rather than in the theology developed upon Western Christianity from ages ago that emphasized more on power structure development of the church institution.

Concretely, the Indonesian Reformed Protestant Churches' contextual concept of "communion" can be traced within the culture of the ethnical communities. At least, it is the vision of the theologians and leaders of Indonesian Reformed Churches during the Theological Consultation for Southeast Asia organized by the Department of Theology of WARC on 12-16 June 2009 in Yogyakarta. They think that it is time for churches to really probe into the local wisdom, that is, the cultural values that exist in the communities where the churches grow and develop, such as, for example, *tongkonan* in Toraja, *mapalus* in Minahasa, *manonob* in Timor, *rumah betang* in Sumatera, or *gotong-royong* in Java, etc. All of these are patterns of local life as a communion having the values of wisdom; ways of sharing joy and sorrow, or helping and supporting, or bracing one another. Furthermore, communal life built on the basis of helping and supporting one another is consistent with God's words that faithful people have the obligation "**to revive the heart of the contrite**" (Isaiah 57:15), or "**to offer each other a helping hand**" (Galatians 6:2) . In my community

in Minahasa there is a saying that *si tou tinow tomouw tou*, meaning “people are born to revive their fellow human beings”.

In reality, such life pattern can still be found in many local communities. Aren't these local values and wisdom also the contextual realization of *koinonia* (communion) in local setting, which in turn would also become the theological contribution from Indonesian churches to the World Communion of Reformed Churches?

Going further, let us read carefully about what is called “local wisdom” in the life patterns of ethnical communities in Indonesia:

First, I want to say here that in Indonesian culture communion is understood as communal life in peace and harmony. Indonesian society is communal and plural, consisting of diverse ethnical communities. Despite the diversity, we could still find one similar cultural concept of harmonious communal life; maintaining good relationship between one another in a family, neighborhood, or a wider community. They have to show and keep good behavior, respect and appreciation, live in harmony with the environment and recognize differences. Living in harmony goes hand in hand with living in peace. Such concept, I think, is in line with what Paul advised the Corinthians, “Be of one mind, live in peace” (2 Corinthians 13:11).

Secondly, related to what has just been mentioned, the term communion has the meaning of **solidarity** and **partnership**. Literally, communion can be understood as union or alliance, but essentially it is a fellowship driven by dynamic power. Therefore, for Indonesian people, fellowship is not merely to live in a community, but to live in a communion; considering their fellows as partners. In general, local congregations in Indonesia use the term “fellowship” for spiritual meetings such as “prayers group” or “Bible study group”. They call it *fellowship of prayer*. In such meetings they experience togetherness and **brotherhood and sisterhood**.

In a wider context, the term communion is also used for building partnership between denominations or church institutions. For example, in 1984 the name Council of Churches in Indonesia was changed into **Communion** of Churches in Indonesia. The reason is that the term communion is closer to the concept of *ekklesia* in the Bible, since it has the sense of living in a community of different members yet having the same mission in Christ and sent to the world. Therefore, in the effort to internalize and actualize their mission in the midst of Indonesian plural society, churches nowadays try to demonstrate solidarity and live in peace and harmony with people of different religions. Hence, the essence of communion here is obviously to live in solidarity and to build partnership.

In my opinion, in a communion that has and applies solidarity, each member can receive equal assistance, help and support, equal treatment, and *dunamos* - power - both spiritually



and socially, as advised by Apostle Paul (Acts 20:35; Romans 12:13; 2 Corinthians 8:7; Ephesians. 4:2).

Thirdly, a communion is just like a **family**. A family is a communion of man and woman (and children) united by God. In a faithful family, all members share joy and sorrow, burden, food and enjoy fellowship and pray together, and support, motivate, and help one another. When someone is sick, all family members feel the pain as well; when they are in sorrow, all feel sad and cry; but when they are happy and joyful, all of them rejoice (Romans 12:15). It happens similarly in local congregations or communities; when someone is suffering or in need, the others will help and share the burden so that people in that communion experience **solidarity**. Indonesians express it in the proverb *ringan sama dijinjing, berat sama dipikul* (carry the burden together, whether heavy or light). In other words, many hands make the work light. The same thing applies when someone is happy and joyful; the congregation or community will rejoice with that person.

As in many local communities, various **syukuran**<sup>13</sup> (events as an expression of gratitude to God) take place in local congregations to celebrate different personal, family or communal events. Thus, communion is also **to celebrate life**. Members of a communion celebrate God's grace by enjoying food and drinks together and experience "life to the fullest" (John 10:10). At least, this is also a moral and ethical concept, or "theology", practiced by Indonesian traditional communities. Such celebrations can still be seen in most ethnical communities in Indonesia. And, for the purpose of preserving the ethical and moral heritage and continuing the practice of "helping each other", the proverb is taught in schools.

As a conclusion, **communion** and **justice** are essentially inseparable, interconnected and overlapping in local or ethnical culture in Indonesia. Hence, even though the terms "justice" or "injustice" cannot be explicitly found in local or ethnical vocabulary, all descriptions above show that living in justice means that people in a communion **receive equal treatment, support, help, share with, and love each other**. This is also, as a minimum, the essence of the discussion during the WARC Theological Consultation in Yogyakarta, June 2009. Justice exists when in a communion "everyone **receives what they are entitled to**", and "at the same time keeps the **mutual balance** together". More than that, justice is not only about self interests, but about "**rights and recognition**" for all "**mankind and God's creatures**". In other words, church communion is a calling to carry out God's mission in the world through witness and service to uphold justice.

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<sup>13</sup> Every ethnical community in Indonesia has its own term for *syukuran*, such as *slametan* in Javanese community. These events are organized to celebrate different occasions in human life. See Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*. Illinois, 1960.

## Challenges and Struggles

In the context of Reformed Churches forming a world ecumenical communion, churches in Indonesia are facing a few key challenges:

Number one is **dependency**. Even though congregations at grass root level are much affected by local tradition and culture, at the formal level churches are still continuing their heritage from the colonial era. Even though twenty-five years ago in the General Assembly of the Council of Churches in Indonesia (now the Communion of Churches in Indonesia) churches agreed upon the commitment to self-reliance in terms of theological thoughts, human resources and financial resources, such commitment has not been fully realized. Of course, in theological academic world, the effort to develop contextual theology has been made, starting with reforming the curriculum and theological work methodology. Also, both in theological education and in congregations, human resources are improved qualitatively and quantitatively, but they are not equally distributed among Reformed Churches. In terms of funding, some major churches do have sufficient sources of fund, but many smaller churches are in poor financial situation. Even worse, in this poor situation, partnerships with European or American churches are still considered to be “mother-to-children” relationships, where young churches keep feeling the sense of dependency.

Realizing and responding to this fact, the Yogyakarta Theological Consultation appeals to fellow Reformed Churches to develop partnerships that can share theological thoughts, human resources and financial resources. I think this appeal has taken a step forward towards its goal which is not merely church “independency” but also the “interdependency” of Reformed Churches in Indonesia. Hopefully it can be realized and have an impact on Reformed Churches community in the world. Furthermore, hopefully it can be seen as a “trick” or awareness to change the colonial mindset of young and mother churches. In this respect, all parties should realize that we need and depend on each other. If this can materialize in the form of communion at the national or regional level, Reformed Churches in Indonesia will give a historic-theological meaning to the formation of world communion of Reformed Churches.<sup>14</sup> This will not only serve as evidence of deliverance, but also as evidence of sustaining the spirit of reform (*Semper Reformanda*).

Number two are the issues of **pluralism, fundamentalism, and suppression of freedom of religion**. Even though the society has been socially, culturally and religiously pluralistic

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<sup>14</sup> This should as well serve as a “mirror” and “challenge” for all Protestant denominations in Indonesia that have been united in the **Communion** of Churches in Indonesia since 1984. The commitment to independency is not complete should they not have the commitment to interdependency, so that sharing of theology, human and financial resources can be applied bilaterally between the respective churches.

for a very long time, the issue of pluralism is still fresh considering the direct and indirect impacts on the society, especially on religion.

Interaction between religions and cultures takes place intensely both physically and non-physically. Physically people meet everywhere; in universities, offices, shopping malls, etc. Non-physical interaction happens through mass communication, books, magazines, newspapers and especially electronic media. In this way people encounter different kinds of doctrine, teaching and tradition, *vis-à-vis* they face various cultural and religious truths. As a consequence, it brings about the rise of religious fundamentalism in Indonesia. It is a reaction to protect traditional identity that is considered to be the inarguable truth. In reality, religious fundamentalism in Indonesia arises not only among Moslems but also among members of the church.

Among Moslems, fundamentalism arises from particular *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools)<sup>15</sup>. Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia has a political dimension with an ideological goal to found a state based entirely on sharia laws and doctrine.<sup>16</sup> Should this materialize, there would be formal distinction between Moslems and non-Moslems (infidels), which logically means distinction of rights and obligations between citizens. What is alarming is that there are symptoms of political pressure from the fundamentalists on the government and the state to exercise control over freedom of religion; something that is against the state constitution.<sup>17</sup>

Comparably among members of the church, fundamentalism also arises in particular theological schools and in particular church communities, including in Reformed Churches. Nowadays theological schools with fundamentalist background are growing in number like mushrooms during the rainy season, and fellowships of prayer are also growing in churches. The dissimilarity between Islamic and Christian fundamentalism in Indonesia is that the Moslems tend to establish an Islamic state based on *sharia laws*, while the Christians form exclusive fellowships and develop “prosperity theology”. The similarity is that both are constructing an introvert type of religious practices. It is understandable why it has been

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<sup>15</sup> *Pesantren* is a traditional Islamic theological school educating children and youth seeking to become exclusive and conscious Islamic believers. In Indonesia, especially in Java, many *pesantrens* are modern; they are open to modern science and, consequently, have undergone change (see Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, Illinois, 1960). Nevertheless, there are still *pesantrens* where the teachers (*kiai*) still have the old mindset.

<sup>16</sup> For information, around the beginning of the founding of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945, there were three prominent political powers pressing on their own ideology: secular nationalist, religious (Islam) and communist. But then the three forces made a commitment that the state should not be founded on the basis of sharia laws nor communism, but on the basis of *Pancasila* (five principles: Belief in Unitary Deity, Humanism, Unity of Indonesia, Democracy, and Social Justice).

<sup>17</sup> In the Constitution of 1945 Chapter XI, Article 29, paragraph 2, it is stated that: “The state guarantees all citizens the freedom of worship, each according to his/her own religion or belief”.

extremely difficult to establish interfaith dialogues between religions, or ecumenical cooperation between churches, with such introvert concept and attitude.

Number three are **economic globalization and neoliberalism**. The key challenge of neoliberalism is free competition in many sectors; from economy and commerce to religion. Domination of global imperium forces is getting clearer in the economic and commercial sectors following the growing domination of TNC and MNC, drowning small-scale economic actors and businesses and forcing them to become only the “distributors” of conglomerate production.

Sectors having some historic connection with the church, for example, are education and health. Regardless of whether these sectors were in the past the vehicles for evangelism, communities can directly access health and educational services through these hospitals and schools. Many community and national leaders enjoyed modern education in Christian schools and adversity in accessing health services has been addressed in a similar manner.

Now, with various government policies referring to the principles of liberalism, quality status must be gained through free competition. Unfortunately, the standard of quality mentioned above has to, like it or not, follow the criteria set by the market economic giants, which means that, *nota bene*, schools have to provide various highly expensive modern facilities. State schools at basic and secondary levels receive grants from the government, but private schools, including church-owned schools do not. Also, in the near future, universities, state and private alike, will have to share the same fate. So, the costs of administering higher education will eventually become the burden of students if the universities do not have adequate financial resources. It is foreseeable that the ones capable of continuing their study to universities are only those with high economic capability. Just like other kinds of products, higher education will also become a commercial commodity.

What has been mentioned above is only an example of the impact of neoliberalism, where the gap between the rich and the poor will be bigger. The point here is the concern that the social function of the state will be eliminated by the power of liberal economy. Should it happen, there would be impoverishment and destruction of sense of togetherness and human dignity. In my opinion, this is also a matter of injustice that has to be addressed by the church. Can communion of Reformed Churches be of one force having the “power” (*dunamos*) to uphold justice in the midst of global imperium forces?

Number four is **“upper current” and “undercurrent” ecumenism**. Following the issues of pluralism and fundamentalism are “ecumenical” activities among members of congregations. In religious life, especially that of the church, interaction between different traditions is unavoidable. This phenomenon indicates as if ecumenical countercurrent, or

characteristic of post-denominational era, is happening. The fact is that many members of congregations are starting to transform the tradition and doctrine inherited from Europe in the past. Many members of traditional churches, including Reformed Churches, now would not hesitate to get together in “prayer meetings” and “mass evangelism” and other fellowships of similar nature. By doing that, ecumenism is not an “upper current” phenomenon only present among church elite or leaders, but also present in the “undercurrent” or among the members. If church-elite style of ecumenism exists at the institutional or organizational level, then members’ style of ecumenism exists at personal and spiritual level. This “undercurrent” ecumenism runs freely, ignoring the constraints of church “bureaucracy” or tradition. On the contrary, “upper current” ecumenism runs formally between church leaders and institutions.

Notwithstanding this, the flourishing “undercurrent” ecumenism often worries traditional institutional churches. This is due to the fact that “undercurrent” ecumenism is considered to be criticism towards traditional institutional churches that show less concern over mission or evangelism (in a traditional sense, seeking souls or Christianizing). Moreover, “undercurrent” ecumenism often gives an impression of “spiritual arrogance” and “intolerance or exclusivity” towards or over traditional churches. And, above all, “undercurrent” ecumenism is seen to have the goal of proselytizing traditional church members.

“Undercurrent” ecumenism in Indonesia is actually only a reflection of the strong current of global religious revitalization movement. They are the fruit of “reborn” or “newly born” experience among the members of traditional institutional churches (*main stream churches*). The problem is that the church where one was baptized and raised and became a member of does not provide or give the “time” and “space” for him/her to express mental and spiritual experience (something that traditional churches do not have) through church rituals or service or actions. Consequently, militant groups are formed, the “para-churches”, within church communities in the form of small prayers meetings to big groups. They grow no longer on the basis of personal remorse, but because they have spiritual militancy and commitment to evangelism and service. But again, aren’t Protestant Reformed Churches in Indonesia, as mentioned earlier, actually the result of evangelism by pious missionaries who have personally spiritual experienced being “reborn” or “newly born”?

In my opinion, within the framework of common service and witness, the two ecumenical currents should not be contrasted but should fulfill each other and serve as auto critique towards traditional churches. If “upper current” ecumenism emphasizes on **the oneness and integrity of the body of Christ**, then it should be performed with the understanding that in church communion all members can receive service and fullness of faith for the purpose of accomplishing church mission in the world. On the contrary, “undercurrent”

ecumenism emphasizing on **mission and evangelism** should be performed with the understanding that Jesus Christ' mission is for the salvation of all human beings and for the integrity of God's creatures. By doing so, justice will also be complete, to include all aspects of human life: spiritual, economic and ecological aspects, and also the entire God's creatures.

### **Understanding the Accra Confession: A Final Note**

The **Accra Confession** is a faithful commitment of Reformed Churches as a response to the issues of **economic injustice** and **global ecological destruction**. What is happening in Indonesia is actually similar to what countries in Africa are experiencing in terms of economic injustice and environmental destruction.

Ever since the post World War II period until early 1960's, two ideological powers had developed and influenced many of the so-called "underdeveloped countries" or "poor countries" that are generally located in the southern hemisphere (Asia, Africa, and Latin America), including Indonesia. There are two myths here; one is **growth**, or progress, the other is **revolution for change**. Both are the products of "developed countries", but attractive to many poor countries in the southern hemisphere. Why are these ideologies attractive? The reason is that both promise transformation of life from impoverished economy to a better one. The difference lies in their strategies; the myth of growth promises prosperous economy, while the myth of revolution offers equality and social justice.

In the case of Indonesia, President Soekarno, one of the most influential leaders in Asia of that time, opted to promote the promise of revolution. He even embraced many leaders of "underdeveloped" countries in Asia and Africa in one political power that he called "the New Emerging Forces". And, he was also the one inventing the term "Third World" during the Asia-Africa Summit in Bandung in 1955, used for Asian and African countries non-partisan to the West or the East. However, many of these countries eventually chose to become socialist-communist countries and made friends with their East European counterparts rather than with capitalist-liberal states in Western Europe or America.

However, in mid-1960's, President Suharto changed Indonesian ideology from revolution to development by selecting the economic growth strategy. Consequently, in trying to change the status from a poor country to a prosperous one, from underdeveloped to developing, Indonesia implemented strategies that brought industrial countries to prosperity. These strategies became stronger after the 1990's when socialist-communist states in Eastern Europe collapsed. When capitalism became the victor, then it became imperative for Indonesia, just like for other poor countries, to access loans from developed industrial countries to build various infrastructures to achieve a better level of economy. Then, Indonesia joined the pool of "debtor" states and became dependant on capitalist "creditors". Finally,

they would have to repay their loans by “pawning” their natural resources including oil, nickel, and forests to the rich countries. I think this is a form of neo-colonialism by rich countries over poor countries, and theologically and biblically an economic injustice.

Next, in terms of ecology, who are actually indebted and commit injustice? According to “Accion Ecologica,” an educational civil society organization, ecological debt is:

“.....debt accumulated by Northern, industrial countries toward Third World countries on account of resources plundering, environmental damages and the free occupation of environmental space to deposit wastes, such as greenhouse gases, from the industrial countries”.<sup>18</sup>

All this, in my opinion, has contributed to climate change and global warming; a frightening ecological problem for mankind today. In this case, the church mission is not only to fight economic injustice at global and local levels, but also ecological injustice for the sake of human generations, universe and species and the integrity of God’s creatures.

On 11-15 May 2009, a week before WARC Executive Committee meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, the World Ocean Conference was conducted in Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia; Manado is well-known as a “Christian area” where the biggest Reformed Church in Indonesia grows. The idea and initiative to hold the conference came from the governor of the province, who, *nota bene*, is a member of a Reformed Church. Most of the local committee members were members of church congregations. The governor was able to bring his idea to the national government and the world, and it was accepted as an official program of the United Nations. More than that, the international conference issued one declaration, the **Manado Ocean Declaration**, which includes, among others, an appeal to the international community to cope with marine and environmental damage.

Even though they did not formally represent the church institution, and the conference itself was not organized by the church, they indeed have carried out one of the church main missions in keeping “peace, justice and the integrity of creation”. Aren’t these the “fruit” of the Spirit that are worth noting as a part of the reform spirit and tradition? Unfortunately, the report from the Area Council on UN and JKIR during the WARC Executive Committee meeting in Geneva, May 2009, failed to notice the highly significant world conference, despite the fact that WARC Executive Committee meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in October 2007

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<sup>18</sup> WCC, JPC Team, *Alternative Globalization. Addressing Peoples and Earth*. Geneva, 2006, p. 37

had responded positively by promising it would be communicated to the UN through their American Presbyterian Church representatives upon notice from Indonesian members of the Executive Committee.

In conclusion, speaking about “communion” and “justice” on the occasion of uniting the world Reformed Churches from the Indonesian perspective, we are actually discussing about the church duty to participate in God’s mission to deliver human beings and all creatures from injustice that represents itself in poverty, discrimination, neo-colonialism, and so on. Will the World Communion of Reformed Churches be able to address these issues for the sake of justice? I believe that if we can apply the principle of “*ringan sama dijinjing, berat sama dipikul*”, that is, “carry the burden together, whether heavy or light”, driven by the spirit of reform and guided by the Spirit of Christ, then “nothing is impossible for God”.

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# Live out our faith as witnesses to the grace of God

Léonard Tegwende Kinda

In June 2010 the member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) will unite to form one body, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) Certain key considerations on both sides have led to the setting up of the one organisation: the desirability of being organised and becoming one family and to maintain one identity in the setting of world communions and religious communities.

Increasingly, the present situation has led us to a greater realism, to an ecumenism that includes the *oikoumene*, an openness to the whole inhabited earth, based on the historic confessions of faith and on a recognition of the cultural values of the churches both near and far. The churches have visions and cultures that differ to a greater or lesser extent, and their life, mission and witness are the foundation of the organisation. That willingness to respect local expressions of the faith is also favourable to ecclesiological diversity.

## What sort of Reformed communion?

During the African theological consultation, participants reflected on the shape of the new Communion to come.<sup>1</sup> We prayed, studied the Word, meditated, studied the history of the two organisations, and our vocation 'to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:3).

Through reviewing the history of the two world organisations with the help of a presentation by the WARC Executive Secretary for Theology, and drawing on the experience of other communions, participants examined the concepts of synod, council, and alliance (or covenant) to gain insights into the concept of communion. In effect, communion is an inevitable development from the history and activities of the two organisations. It is communion that unites us through our faith in Christ, baptism and eucharist (1 Cor 10.16-17).

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<sup>1</sup> The African theological consultation, the fifth in a series of eight, brought together leaders of WARC and REC member churches in Africa, delegates to the 2010 General Council, the WARC General Secretary, and the WARC Secretary for Theology and Ecumenical Engagement, who had also been REC President.

According to the WCC Canberra Assembly, the unity of the church to which we are called “is envisaged as a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognised and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God’s grace to all people and serving the whole of creation. The goal of the search for full communion is realised when all the churches are able to recognise in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness.”<sup>2</sup> The WARC Executive Committee in Trinidad in 2007 defined communion as “an expression of our being together in the body of Christ as we move towards that oneness which is the gift and calling of God, fully expressed in the Trinity. Our desire to enter into communion signifies the commitment of our churches, in the richness of our diversity, to mutual caring, respect and service of one another, as witness to our common calling by the Spirit of God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> That statement follows the line of the work initiated by WARC and REC

The participants endeavoured to discern God’s will by Bible study on Ephesians 4. That chapter contains in itself the whole message of the letter to the Ephesians: the church’s calling as the body of Christ and its mission in society. The one body of Christ includes a diversity of members who have answered the Master’s call (Eph 4.2), who are brought together to reflect their unity through faith in the Holy Trinity, as proclaimed in Scripture and received in baptism. The members of the body of Christ must “live a life worthy of the calling” that they have received (Eph 4.1). They must “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4.3). They are called to live a new life of holiness and love (Eph 4.20-32).

In the light of the gospel, participants all agreed on the need to move forward towards the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). As we saw it, the WCRC represents an already existing unity, but one, however, that is still to be achieved eschatologically and accomplished by Christ.

Although we were agreed on the need to move forward towards communion, some basic questions remain:

- How is it possible to reconcile the independence of each member church with the values and responsibilities of members of a communion where the members should make a common confession, owe one another mutual respect and mutual accountability, and are committed to work in solidarity for justice?

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Kinnamon (ed.), *Signs of the Spirit* (Geneva: WCC and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p.250.

<sup>3</sup> World Alliance of Reformed Churches consultation on communion and justice, August 2009.

- Are we to establish a Reformed world communion or a world communion of Reformed churches?
- What will be our approach to table and pulpit fellowship?
- What should be our response when a member of the communion has principles and practices that are out of step with the convictions of other members of the communion?<sup>4</sup>
- How can the communion hold together its two characteristics of being both confessional and ecumenical?
- What will be the mission of the new communion?

It is only possible at this stage to give tentative answers to those questions. They will have to be discussed at the level of local communities in order to provide maximum information to delegates to the Uniting General Council.

While not anticipating those responses, we agree with Douwe Visser that “being a communion should also be an ongoing process of reflection what it means to be a communion.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Communion and commitment to justice**

In the Bible we frequently find passages in which God is calling Abraham’s descendants to be just, righteous, defenders of widows and orphans and to welcome and protect foreigners. “To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.” (Prov 21.3).

Justice is an extremely difficult concept to define. It is applied in a given context taking account of social peace and value systems and standards. To make a just judgement involves an assessment of the situation by someone who is wise in order to maintain a certain balance - peace - in a given setting. The parables of the workers hired at different times (Matt 20.1-15) and of the prodigal son (Luke 15.11-32) are good illustrations. Each of those parables presents an individual who makes decisions that affect two other individuals, one whom the justice of the decision benefits and the other who feels wronged by it.

As a communion of Reformed churches, “We believe that God has made a covenant with all of creation (Gen 9.8-12). God has brought into being an earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. The covenant is a gift of grace that is not for sale in the market place (Is 55.1). It is an economy of grace for the household of all of creation. Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalised are preferential partners,

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<sup>4</sup> The position of certain churches on apartheid, the ordination of women and of differently abled people are illustrations of this.

<sup>5</sup> Douwe Visser, *Moving towards Communion: the World Communion of Reformed Churches*.

and calls us to put justice for the “least of these” (Matt 25.40) at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant (Hos 2.18-23).<sup>6</sup>

The Accra consultation participants were given an overview of the present world situation: in fact, a powerful threat, produced by men and women who have chosen Mammon, hangs over God’s creation. There is the economic chaos, the shock waves of which struck in September 2008, and which have resulted in job losses, divorce, people abandoning children and parents, and suicides. There is the nuclear threat posed by certain states against defenceless populations. There are the consequences of global warming on fragile and powerless populations who are themselves unable to ensure that they will survive.

In our review we acknowledged the historic commitment of the Reformed churches. In fact, each church in its own context is witnessing to the gospel by its commitment in various spiritual areas, development, promotion of human rights and freedoms, economic justice and justice towards the created world. The celebration of the 500th anniversary of Calvin, the pillar of the Genevan Reformation, has reminded us of the contribution made by the Reformation to social and economic justice in Geneva, in Europe and throughout the world.

This commitment is also evident at world level. WARC and REC member churches, inspired by Christ and the 16th century reformers, have risen up against injustices that have appeared from time to time in one part of the world or another. Particularly noteworthy has been the commitment against apartheid, the commitment against the nuclear arms race and the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, and the commitment against war and economic injustice.<sup>7</sup>

However, while injustice reigns in the world, it is no less present in the churches and their institutions. We can see injustice in admission to the ministry, in the treatment given to church staff as regards appointments to leadership positions (in the case of women, young people, minority ethnic groups, differently abled people, etc.).

The member churches are thus invited to remove the beam that is in their own eyes (Matt 7.5).

The member churches have recognised the need to be more committed to justice. However, some basic questions remain:

- What is justice? Is it enough simply to condemn injustice, or should counter-proposals be offered?

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<sup>6</sup> WARC, *Proceedings of the 24th General Council*, p.157, ‘The Accra Confession’, section 20.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the statements from Kitwe 1995, Debrecen 1997 and Accra 2004.

- What sort of theology and public witness is appropriate?
- How can we provide members and communities with resources to act in the field of justice?
- How is justice embodied in local contexts?
- What impact does unity in mission have on justice issues?
- Do we practise what we preach?

We are looking to the delegates to the Uniting General Council to produce answers to those questions.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches is a gift from God. As a communion of faith we are called to live out our faith, inwardly and outwardly, as witnesses to the grace of God, who has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus Christ. We acknowledge that we are messengers of the God of love, peace and justice. We humbly acknowledge that at certain times we have been unintentional and complicit agents and passive witnesses of injustice against the creation. Whatever the origin of that injustice, we all suffer from it. United in our faith in Christ, and guided by the Holy Spirit, we receive with hope our Lord's words, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matt 5.6).

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# The link between the eucharist and social justice

Shu-pin Chiu

## Why the eucharist?

For members of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT), it is not unusual to be asked: “Are you a social activist, too?” “Why do you Presbyterians always air an opposing view, and even act against the government?” The reason why the PCT makes this impression on most of the Taiwanese people is that it has been actively involved in the issues of social justice, the people’s struggle for democracy and the national identity of Taiwan and has been often criticised for its political engagement by members of other denominations and non-Christians. The church is convinced that it should not and cannot be alien from the society and the political reality of Taiwan. The oldest and biggest denomination in Taiwan, it follows the footsteps of the earlier foreign missionaries and their great efforts in charity and social welfare. The church describes itself as a church devoted to social justice and is proud of its involvement.

Among the committees under its General Assembly, the Committee of Church and Social Affairs is responsible for articulating the PCT’s concerns for justice, organising resources inside and outside of the church to fight for its concerns, and arousing the consciousness of its members and the people in Taiwan to care for justice. How much attention the church pays to the ministry of the committee can be marked by how it raises funds for the committee. Usually, every committee under the General Assembly receives an annual distribution from the Assembly, and the church offerings on a specific Sunday are assigned to the committee that is remembered on that Sunday. However, the Committee of Church and Social Affairs has another source of income: the services that celebrate the eucharist. Half of the offering from those services will be given to the committee.

Allman points out that the eucharistic liturgy forms both individual and communal moral character.<sup>1</sup> That part of the offerings from the eucharist is given to the Committee of Church and Social Affairs shows not only that the PCT takes the ministry of the committee seriously,

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Allman, “Eucharist. Ritual & Narrative: Formation of Individual and Communal Moral Character”, *Journal of Ritual Studies* 14 (2000), p.60.



but also that the church links the ministry of the committee to the significance of the eucharist and intends to inspire members to partake in the struggle for justice through the practice of the eucharist. Nonetheless, in my experience, the connection between the committee's ministry and the eucharist has never been properly explained to the congregation. Church members just take it for granted. It is the purpose of this paper to explore how the setting of the eucharist provides a foundation for the church to commit itself to the struggle for justice and stirs up its members to support their church in this work.

The synoptic gospels certainly contribute to the PCT's understanding of the eucharist. However, the eucharistic words used in the PCT are drawn from 1 Cor 11.23-25,<sup>2</sup> and the context of the Corinthian church helps the members of the PCT to understand the significance of the eucharist. The paper, thus, will mainly study the context of Paul's teaching of the Lord's supper in the Corinthian church and some of the important components of the eucharistic words that might also appear in the synoptic gospels that bring out the urge to the Christian community to do justice.

### **Social divisions in the Lord's supper**

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul placed the institution of the Lord's supper after his rebuke to the Corinthians for abusing the common meal at which the Lord's supper was eaten. Because the Corinthians did not eat the bread or drink the cup in a worthy manner, Paul felt compelled to remind them of the true meaning of the eucharist by repeating the actual words of institution. Paul pointed out what their unworthy manner was in the Lord's supper and clarified the appropriate attitude for the believers to celebrate the eucharist in relation to others.

When the Corinthians gathered to eat the Lord's supper, instead of eating together, they were sundered by some who were well off going ahead with their own private meal, thus despising the church by shaming those who had nothing. When they gathered for the common meal, the social divisions among them were manifested. Instead of being united in the Lord's supper, they were divided by the social divisions at the table. The "haves" could come earlier because they were wealthy enough to be able to control their time and to afford to bring their own meals, while the slaves and the poor bonded to their masters and employers could not help coming late and leaving hungry because nothing much was left for them.<sup>3</sup> The people who went ahead might believe that they were eating the Lord's

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<sup>2</sup> General Assembly of the PCT, *The Handbook for Worship and Liturgy* (Tainan: Ren-Kwang, 1996), pp.25-6. While the words are recited, the actions are also repeated.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1987), p.418.

supper; Paul told them that they were not eating the Lord's supper, indeed, they were showing contempt for the church of God by shaming the "have-nots" among them.

The social divisions within the Christian community might be unavoidable, but for Paul the split in the community caused by the social divisions was not acceptable. The divisions between the "haves" and "have-nots" wounded the holiness of the community, and the dignity of the poor as children of the creator of all human beings was called into question. The basis of the common meal, which was justice and holiness, and the integrity of the community were damaged by their behaviour.<sup>4</sup>

For Paul, the Lord's supper is not just any meal, it is the meal in which at a common table with one loaf and a common cup they proclaim that through the death of Christ they are one body; and therefore, they are not just any group of socially diverse people who can maintain those differences at this table. Since they were the one body of Christ (11.27), they were gifts to one another to seek the benefit of one another. They were to discern themselves, and not to abuse their brothers and sisters who were lesser in social status, because they were members of the same body of Christ. The equal sharing of the common meal is a symbol of the integrity of the Christian community that values and maintains its holiness and justice.

Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the social-ecclesial sharing of food and drink is the essential pre-condition for celebrating the Lord's supper.<sup>5</sup> All Christians must be able to participate equally in the table-sharing of the church that celebrates the Lord's supper. The table-sharing of all the members of the Christian community - whether they are powerful or powerless, rich or poor, free or slaves, men or women, Jews or Greeks - in the one broken bread and the cup constitutes the church as the one body of Christ. The forming of the church, as well as the symbolic ritual of the church, is not possible without equality in the table-sharing of the Lord's supper.<sup>6</sup>

An equal table-sharing requires abandoning social discrimination among those who partake in the body and blood of Christ. Social discriminations destroy the unity of the church. Striving to overcome social discriminations, divisions and prejudice is an essential condition for the Christian community. The central symbol of the Christian community is not a law, a

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<sup>4</sup> Luise Schottroff, "Holiness and Justice: Exegetical Comments on 1 Corinthians 11:17-34," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 79(2000), p.53. 1 Cor 11:27-30 also implies the profanity due to the divisions and thus the death and illness caused by the collapse of holiness.

<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Tablesharing and the Celebration of the eucharist" in Mary Collins and David Power (eds.), *Can We Always Celebrate the Eucharist?* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1982), pp.9-10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

holy place, or a ritual formula, but the concrete sharing of the Lord's supper without discrimination and ignorance, sharing the table in justice and love. The community gathered around the table of the Lord's supper has to struggle to overcome its social divisions and discrimination among its members; otherwise it makes itself answerable for "profaning" the body and blood of its Lord.

Keeping the boundary between those who are rich, privileged, and powerful and those who are poor, oppressed and powerless is therefore excluded. There should be no divisions among God's people when they are sharing at the table of the Lord's supper. It is likewise unacceptable to be indifferent to the poor, unprivileged, and oppressed, and to what is unjust outside of the Church, when we regard all human beings as God's people created in God's image. Therefore, rejecting discrimination against the lesser in social status in the Lord's supper should also arouse concern about the stratification in the society and the world.

### **Paul's call for "remembering the poor"**

Another point that can be used to illustrate Paul's argument for overcoming discrimination against social inferiors is his call for "remembering the poor". It is one of the aims of the Christian community to prevent its members from economic distress,<sup>7</sup> not only within a congregation but also within the broader church. In some of his letters, Paul spoke about "remembering the poor" and appealed to the gentile churches for donations for "the poor among the holy ones at Jerusalem". The motif of remembering the poor also appears in 1 Cor 16:1, and he referred it as "the collection for the saints". Even though for Paul the collection was a way to bring unity between gentile and Jewish believers, the attempt to bring relief to the poor cannot be ignored either. He spoke of this collection in terms that are full of theological content: fellowship (2 Cor 8.4; 9.13; Rom 15.26), service (2 Cor 8.4; 9.1,12,13; Rom 15.31), grace (2 Cor 8.4,6,7,19), blessing (2 Cor 9.5) and divine service (2 Cor 9.12).<sup>8</sup> He regarded the collection as a ministry to establish a relationship between Christian Jews and gentiles, a loving service in behalf of others displaying Christian *koinonia*, a blessing brought to others by the believers, and an act of service to God. All of these together suggest that for Paul the collection for the poor is not just a matter of money, but a response to the grace of God and a ministry of God to God's people. It builds a relationship between the believers and God, and among themselves and others - they give thanks to God by their offering and build a bond of fellowship between God's people inside or outside of their own congregation by keeping the poor from poverty.

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<sup>7</sup> Schottroff, p.54. In Acts 6: 1-7, the community takes care of the poor and needy.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p.812.

“Remembering the poor” is a ministry of God, because the basic human rights are endowed upon the poor by God.<sup>9</sup> In many biblical passages, especially in the psalms and the prophets, God is portrayed as having a special concern for the poor, especially for the orphans, the widows, and the oppressed. God is summoned to judge and to do justice for the widows, orphans and the oppressed, to maintain the rights of the lowly and the destitute, to rescue the needy and to deliver them from the hand of the wicked. The people who are treated wrongly cry to God for vindication. They are convinced that God will do justice for them, thus, the people who are oppressed by the social, economic and political systems should naturally appeal to God to restore their rights of which they have been deprived unjustly.

Paul’s call for “remembering the poor” actually means “making a collection for the poor” in order to deliver them from their desperate situation. It is to maintain the basic human rights of the poor, the needy and the oppressed, and to work with God to establish justice in the world by eliminating inequalities and inferiority. It is a further step of seeking and maintaining justice for the poor in their actual struggles in their daily life rather than merely including them in an equal table-sharing in the eucharist in the church setting. It starts from the awareness of the church members being in the same body of Christ and from the demand of being a community of holiness and justice. It should be expanded to the concerns for all of God’s people in the world in order to bring them justice.

The textual context shows that Paul intended to correct a church that did not care about the poor but humiliated them even at the table of the Lord’s supper, which is the embodiment of Christ’s love for them and their being in the same body of Christ. The basis for the common meal is holiness and justice, and the table-sharing signifies sharing in justice, holiness and fellowship.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the partakers of the eucharist are challenged to break the boundary of social discriminations in the eucharist, to bring justice for the poor, to maintain the holiness of the community and to build up the Christian *koinonia*. Moreover, the justice they are challenged to carry out is not merely welcoming the poor among them as co-members of the body of Christ to the common meal of the Lord’s supper. It demands active involvement in justice-seeking to work with God to bring justice in the church and in the world. By doing so, the believers are doing God’s ministry to God’s people and establishing fellowship with people and with their God.

## **The eucharist as remembrance**

According to Paul and Luke, Jesus in instituting the eucharist gave his disciples the command to “do this in remembrance of me”. In accusing the wealthy Corinthians of abusing the

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<sup>9</sup> *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, s. v. “Just, Justice.”

<sup>10</sup> Schottroff, p.54.

Lord's supper by going ahead with their own private meal and thereby humiliating the poor, Paul indicated that the "haves" had apparently lost touch with the meaning of the supper itself. He therefore repeated the words of institution in his letter to remind them why they celebrated such a meal in the first place, a reason that went back to Jesus himself. "In remembrance of Jesus" made their gathering to eat the Lord's supper significant. It was what made their table-sharing different from the other meals. Luke held the view that the Last supper was a Passover meal, which was a remembrance itself, and that attaches a lot of meaning to the command.

### **A Jewish and biblical understanding of remembrance**

"This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me...This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." According to Paul and Luke, Jesus said these words in instituting the eucharist. Many scholars such as Fee, Jones and Klauck suggest that Paul's concept of remembrance - *anamnesis* in Greek - has been certainly influenced by the significant and broad meanings of the Jewish concept of remembrance. Therefore, it has to be understood against its Jewish and biblical background.

Jones suggests that, for the Israelites, remembrance is not just an abstract concept or recollection. It does not mean an inactive, disinterested thought, but a thought or an image that has direct and immediate power to influence a person's will and to make people commit themselves to action.<sup>11</sup> When people "remember" something or someone, it does not necessarily mean that they have an objective and concrete image of the event or the person. Rather, the event or the person is called forth to them, and that causes them to decide the direction of their will and to take action. Remembrance has effects on a person's will and action and cannot be separated from action. Remembrance is an active commitment to a person or an action.

Therefore, remembrance is not concerned merely with the past. It has three dimensions: "remembrance" of past events should have the consequence of inspiring people to take action in the present and in the future. By remembering an event in the past, it becomes both present and future.

In the Hebrew Bible, remembrance is often closely bound up with the cult - a feast, a sacrifice or an offering. For the Israelites, the cult brings them to the remembrance of God. Besides, when they talk about the remembrance related to God, it is usually God's mighty deeds that are remembered.<sup>12</sup> According to Matthew and Mark, the eucharist was instituted

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<sup>11</sup> Ray C. Jones, "The Lord's Supper and the Concept of Anamnesis," *Word & World* 4 (1986), p.435.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.435.

during the Passover meal, a cult in which the remembrance was especially related to God's mighty deeds in the Exodus from Egypt. In the Passover meal, the person who remembers God is put into the contexts of God's mighty deeds in the Exodus in the past and of God's will for the present and the future. The past becomes present in the cultic rituals, and the participants become their forebears. They participate in God's mighty deeds of salvation in Israel's past and anticipate the future salvation. In the Lord's supper, the partakers also participate in God's mighty deeds within a new Exodus through the saving power of Jesus and look forward to the future salvation.

In the light of Jewish and the biblical understanding, "do this in remembrance of me" challenges the participants of the eucharist to take action in the present. What should the action be? What is its purpose? This has to be explored in the context of Passover.

### **Remembrance in the context of Passover**

Whether the Last Supper was a Passover meal is still debated, but the context of the Passover meal and the words of institution are decisively important for understanding the Last Supper. The meaning and message of the Passover is one of the keys to reveal the significance of the Last Supper.<sup>13</sup>

The Passover is a remembrance of Israel's redemption and liberation from the slavery in Egypt. All of the elements of food in the Passover meal are connected to remembrance and function as signs of the misery, slavery, and liberation related to the Israelites' experience in Egypt. The bitter herbs are to remind the Jews of bondage; the unleavened bread is to remind the Jews of their misery; and the Passover lamb is to remind them of God's saving action and grace.<sup>14</sup> They point back to the time of slavery and oppression, but they also make the past events a present reality for the Jews. The past events describe current realities: their struggle for liberation and redemption has to be completed afresh in every epoch, and has to be integrated into their being at every stage of their history. Exodus and Passover are never completed and past events for the people. The people are always on exodus and always in the process of passing over to God's grace.<sup>15</sup> The past events become present and relevant to the people in every ages; God's saving action is re-experienced every time when the Passover is celebrated. The misery, bondage, and liberation that were experienced by their forebears in Egypt are also experienced by them today.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.442. Jones points out that the interpretation of the Last supper in the light of the Passover does not depend on whether it was a Passover meal. Joachim Jeremias acknowledges that even if the Last supper was not a Passover meal, it was surrounded by the atmosphere of Passover.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.443.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Andersen, *Making the Eucharist Matter* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1998), pp.68-9.

In instituting the eucharist, Jesus not only celebrated the Passover in remembrance of the past but also recreated and enriched the meaning of the Passover. What Jesus did and said granted new meanings to the old tradition of the Passover. Jesus regarded himself as the bread and the wine in the Passover meal. The terms “body” and “blood” stand in parallel and denote not just the physical body but the “person” or “self”.<sup>16</sup> The expressions do not merely refer to Jesus as the Passover sacrificial victim whose blood is poured out and whose body is placed on the altar. In sharing the bread and the cup, Jesus was sharing his own personality with those who participated the meal with him. It suggested fellowship and sharing of his way of living and being.

Just as the unleavened bread is the food on the Israelites’ journey from slavery to liberation, Jesus now is the “bread” for the Christians’ journey from being bound by their own ways of living to being like Jesus. Just like the unleavened bread of the Exodus, to receive Jesus’ body and blood symbolises a new beginning of their lives. The body and blood of Jesus in forms of bread and wine, which nourish and sustain their lives in their journey, also initiate the solidarity of the Christian community.<sup>17</sup>

The Israelites are expected not to forget their sufferings in Egypt by repeating the Passover rituals every year to remember God’s grace and give thanks to God. They are also urged to be concerned for the poor and the oppressed and those who suffer various types of disadvantage, because they themselves had the experience of being enslaved and living in the lowest class of the society. Their memory of slavery should keep them from exploiting those people. By repeating the Last Supper, Jesus’ self-giving for others should reform the character of those who partake of the eucharist. How Jesus lived and who Jesus was should guide the way how the believers live and act in relation to others.

## **Remembrance as imitation**

Paul often spoke about imitating him as he himself imitates Christ (1 Cor 11.1; 1 Thess 1.6). Castelli argues that the concept of education in the ancient Greek, Hellenistic and Roman world was based on imitation. Students imitate their teachers to learn and to acquire some skills.<sup>18</sup> Among the Hellenistic Jews, ethical imitation was strongly emphasised. Influenced by the Hellenistic culture, Paul often set himself as an example for the believers. As for himself, he was an imitator of Christ. As a result, to imitate him is to imitate Christ. The believers imitated him in order to be imitators of Christ. The Pauline teaching of imitation

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<sup>16</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (London: A&C Black, 1991), p.183.

<sup>17</sup> Andersen, p.72.

<sup>18</sup> Elisabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville: Westminster, 1991), pp.81-85.

is the basis for Christian life as participation in Christ. It is a strong tradition to characterise Christian life as the imitation of Christ and the gospels speak of the same appeal as the call to follow Jesus.

The command to “do this in remembrance of me” is an invitation to imitate Christ. It does not intend only the liturgical repetition but also urges upon the believers the necessity of imitating Christ in the inner attitude that motivated the events of his passion in their daily life.<sup>19</sup> It is an imitation that actualises Christ. In the eucharist, the believers make their own the very actions that Jesus himself performed. It does not simply recall past events as past, as realities completely over and done. Rather, this liturgical imitation of Christ effects what it signifies. It is an effective memorial of him, making him present in his saving deeds. It means that his followers should live out the imitation in their daily life. It is the fountain from which flows the rest of the church's life. As Jesus at the Last Supper ritualised the inner love and obedience that motivated his whole life on earth, so too the ritual of eucharist is intended to explicate the Christians' imitation of Christ and to shape their character to be like Jesus in their everyday life.

Accordingly, Paul warned the Corinthians that if they did not express their concern for each other in their dealings with one another, then when they met together the common meal would not be the Lord's supper. Their imitation of the Last Supper was impressive only in liturgical appearance and actually empty and meaningless in reality. The believers' imitation of Jesus, therefore, must be part of the ongoing imitation that is the whole of Christian life. “Do this in remembrance of me” is not only an outward liturgical repetition of Jesus' words and actions in instituting the eucharist, but imitating Jesus in the saving events - the actions expressing humility, love, and obedience to God. In the eucharist, Christians are demanded to respond to Christ by imitating him in relation to God, to their fellow believers and to the people.

The eucharist is a thanksgiving, memorial, communion of fellowship and meal of the kingdom. It is so only because the passover, or deliverance, of Christ imitated at the eucharist is the greatest act of God that can be thanked for, has to be remembered, calls for the fellowship of the believers and anticipates the coming of the kingdom. What makes this liturgical eating unique is Christ himself. If the eucharist is seen as fundamentally the imitation of Christ to remember him, it demands an outward manifestation of this conviction to correspond to the historical events of the life of Christ in order to fulfil his command of “Do this in remembrance of me.”<sup>20</sup> Christians must imitate Christ in his ministry and self-giving,

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<sup>19</sup> John D. Laurance, “The Eucharist as the Imitation of Christ,” *Theological Studies* 47 (1986), p.291.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.295.



even if that means they have to pay the cost of discipleship, enduring rejection, contradiction, and opposition for proclaiming God's love and mercy, for doing justice and peace, and for caring the lowliest, in a way that is contradictory to and subversive of the conventional wisdom and values of the society. Through imitating Christ in the liturgical practice of the eucharist, the moral character of the individuals and community is formed and reformed. The death of Jesus and its meaning are proclaimed and remembered in the eucharist to make that power of Jesus and the saving act of Jesus a present reality for the community and the world.

## **Conclusion**

Injustice is not a remote reality or an abstract concept in our own age, and probably not in any age. We are all vividly aware of pressing millions of people living in dehumanising and conflict situations, a rapidly expanding resource gap between the Third World and other countries and between the rich and the poor in certain societies, worldwide problems of hunger, wars that seem never come to an end, international terrorism... The churches have proclaimed the principles of social justice and have called Christians to concern themselves with the problems and needs of the people as brothers and sisters. However, there is always a gap between teaching and practice in the church, especially when there are political issues involved.

As a church that is deeply concerned about justice, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan has experienced the tension of "being or not being involved in political issues" within and without the church. There is a vivid and tangible link between the eucharist and the problems that affect peoples' lives. The PCT connects its ministry for justice to the eucharist through giving the offering from the occasion. The practice says: "You are the body of Christ, therefore, care for one another in the world created by God." It urges us to remember those who are oppressed economically, socially and politically and to imitate Jesus' ministry in bringing love and justice to the world.

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# REFORMED WORLD

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## World Communion of Reformed Churches

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council will unite to form a new body: the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). The Uniting General Council will take place in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, in June 2010. The theme of this historic event will be: "Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace". The ground of the uniting assembly has been prepared by a series of theological consultations sponsored by the Geneva *Fondation pour l'Aide au Protestantisme réformé* on "Communion and Justice". They have taken place in Switzerland (Europe), Lebanon (Middle East), Brazil (Latin America), Indonesia (South East Asia), Ghana (Africa), in the USA (North America and Caribbean), New Zealand (Pacific) and Korea (North East Asia).

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