

## Introduction

Páraic Réamonn

*“For half the world’s population the brutal reality is this: you’d be better off as a cow. The average European cow receives \$2.20 (£1.40) a day from the taxpayer in subsidies and other aid. Meanwhile, 2.8 billion people in developing countries around the world live on less than \$2 a day.”<sup>1</sup>*

“That all may have life in fullness” is the theme of our 24th general council (Accra 2004). In a world where people are better off as cattle, and even the cattle go crazy,<sup>2</sup> what does it mean to have life in fullness?

Karl Barth famously urged us to travel through life with the Bible in one hand and our newspaper in the other, but in today’s world the tension between the reality captured by the media and the promise conveyed by scripture becomes acute.<sup>3</sup>

This double issue of *Reformed World*, published in English, French, German and Spanish, contains the study texts and Bible studies for participants in the 24th general council, but should attract a wider readership.

The Bible studies invite us to accompany Naomi on her journey from Judah to Moab and Ruth on the return trip – a highly symbolic itinerary if ever there was one.<sup>4</sup> The study texts survey some of the contemporary threats and challenges to life, then reflect theologically on the meaning of life, and finally consider what our theme implies for us as Christians and our Reformed and United churches in mission, covenanting and spirituality. Philippe Kabongo-Mbaya’s study on Jn 10.10 first appeared in English in our December 2002 issue on life in fullness in Africa, but we reprint it here for the convenience of participants and in four language versions.

Most of these materials were drafted in 2002, reviewed at a consultation in December, subsequently reworked by their authors and further edited by the Geneva secretariat. Each piece is rightly attributed to its original author, but all are the product of individual and collective effort.<sup>5</sup> We send them forth in the hope that they will be widely used, by Accra participants and others, for personal and communal study. Good reading!

### Notes

1. Charlotte Denny, “Cows are better off than half the world”, *The Guardian*, August 22 2002.
2. Bovine spongiform encephalitis (BSE), one of Britain’s more recent contributions to progress, is popularly known as mad cow disease.

3. Provided, of course, that the media do not simply feed us propaganda, a trend that grows globally as they more and more become the plaything of corporations and conglomerates.
4. That all things come from God and return to God is the structuring principle of Aquinas' *Summa* of theology and Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and, indeed, of scripture itself.
5. A model, then, of what we would like the churches of the Alliance to be: a fellowship of common life and action.

## Contributors

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