

REFORMED WORLD



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Breaking down walls, building bridges

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REFORMED WORLD

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Introduction

Jet den Hollander

What was it that made Peter realize that “God makes no distinction” (Acts 10.34) and that the good news is for Jews and Gentiles alike? Was it his exposure to people of many tongues and races in the everyday life of a cosmopolitan city? Was it his memories of Jesus bringing healing and wholeness to many who, according to regular norms, did not even qualify to be spoken to; Jesus who constantly crossed the lines and even learned to redraw his own in his encounter with the Samaritan women? Likewise, what was it that persuaded the evangelicals in the late 18th century to establish missionary societies and cross the seven seas? Was it the deep sense of crisis in revolutionary Europe that forced them to come to grips with their world and their faith anew? Was it the fever of expansion and discovery that gripped the church as it did the trading companies? How did mundane factors and the Spirit mix to give people the sense that their eyes had been opened, that they suddenly understood their calling in a new way and perceived new frontiers to be crossed? And we today, what is opening our eyes? What walls of separation need to be broken down, and what are the changing realities today that enable us to perceive with new eyes the walls of separation and the “them” separated from “us” on the other side? As part of Christ’s church, we have a vision of God reconciling humanity, in all its diversity, to himself in Christ. Implied in this vision is the need to identify and address all that separates people from one another, from God and from creation; to name the frontiers and break down the walls, also within the church.

In 1999, WARC and the John Knox International Reformed Centre established the Mission in Unity project, recently extended until 2005, as a catalyst: a helping hand to assist Reformed churches to rethink their mission and the barriers existing within the Reformed family which hinder that mission.

This issue of *Reformed World* focuses on initiatives aimed at breaking down some of these inner walls. Carlos Emilio Ham describes the fascinating journey of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba over the past five decades, and how it has sought to maintain a credible and united witness in the face of multiple challenges and threats. Jeong-Hee Ryu analyses a group of small Presbyterian churches in Korea that combine a conservative theology with a commitment to the ordination of women. Lukas Vischer looks at the role of theological colleges and how their ethos, curriculum and ministerial formation foster or hinder the future pastors’ development of a commitment to the church universal. Jet den Hollander reports on a mission in unity process in Uganda,

where reflection on mission has highlighted the need to not only work closer together as different Reformed groups, but also to break down the walls of separation between women and men, and consider the possibility of God using people of other traditions. The latter insight is developed even further by Peter Cruchley-Jones and a group of congregations in Wales, as they explore the exile theme and come to the disconcerting conclusion that there may be times when the church is “not God’s people”.

Are there indeed instances where our ecclesiology has become so narrow that it creates walls rather than breaking them down? What exodus is needed to start walking again as “people of God in the midst of all God’s peoples”?¹

Note

1. A phrase proposed by D Preman Niles to understand the relationship between people of the Christian faith and peoples of other faiths. See his paper “Toward the Fullness of Life. Intercontextual Relationships in Mission” presented at the WCC/CWM/CEVAA/UEM missiology consultation in London, UK, May 2002.

Contributors

Peter Cruchley-Jones, a United Reformed Church minister, serves in a team ministry in Cardiff, Wales, teaches missiology in St Michael’s Training College (Church in Wales), and is an honorary research associate in the department of theology & religious studies at Cardiff University.

Carlos Emilio Ham, a pastor of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba, served as its general secretary from 1993 to 2001. His father is also a Cuban Presbyterian pastor and his mother is an American missionary who served in Cuba for almost thirty years. In March 2001, he joined the World Council of Churches’ staff as Programme Executive for Evangelism.

Jet den Hollander of the Uniting Protestant Churches in the Netherlands is executive secretary of the Mission in Unity Project (1992-2005).

Jeong-Hee Ryu of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (TongHap), is currently a student at the PCK Theological Seminary.

Lukas Vischer of the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches has served as co-chair of the Mission in Unity Project advisory committee since 1999. He is a former moderator of the Alliance’s department of theology, and directs the programme commission of the John Knox International Reformed Centre, Geneva.

A Cuban experience of mission in unity

Carlos Emilio Ham

The Presbyterian Church was founded in Cuba by Evaristo Collazo, a Cuban lay patriot who fought against Spanish colonial rule in the 19th century. While living in Florida, USA, in political exile, he was converted to Christianity in the Reformed tradition. He returned to Cuba and founded the first Presbyterian congregation in Havana on June 26 1890. His wife Magdalena, together with the congregation, set up a school for poor children who could not afford to pay high school fees.

So from the very beginning Cuban Presbyterianism was marked by this rich heritage: patriotism and social commitment, with a strong participation of the laity and of women, and a special ecumenical orientation and engagement.

In 1898, Cuba attained its independence and constituted itself a republic. In place of Spain, the United States now became the dominating power.

At the beginning of the 20th century, with the support of US missionaries, the church developed rapidly, with the construction of many church buildings, schools and medical dispensaries, as well as Christian formation and church development programmes. The congregations were constituted as a presbytery of the Presbyterian Church USA, Synod of New Jersey. In the 1940s, Presbyterian and other Protestant leaders founded the Cuban Council of Churches and the ecumenical seminary in Matanzas.

Revolution

From 1954, Fidel Castro waged a guerrilla campaign against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. At the end of 1958, Batista fled the country. On January 1 1959, Castro's army captured Havana and the Cuban revolution came to power. From the beginning, bread and an honourable life for everybody were the great objectives. Land and housing reform laws were signed. An important literacy campaign, strongly supported by Protestant leaders, taught all Cubans to read and write.

Many Protestant pastors and Christians in general supported the revolution because they saw in it a way of solving structurally the great social needs of the Cuban people, such as education or public health, which were hitherto the responsibility of the churches and private institutions. In fact, some of them even fought against the Batista regime in the 1950s, for example, José A González, Frank País, Esteban Hernández, Rafael Cepeda, Raúl Fernández Ceballos, etc.

Theodore A Braun, in his recent book *Perspectives on Cuba and Its People*, analyses this period in a positive and constructive way: "...as Christians who remained in Cuba began to see the hungry being fed, the naked being clothed,

the poor being lifted (all of it by the government, outside the aegis of the church), they were filled with surprise. Here was God fulfilling the prayers and aims of the church through the instrument of a secular ‘Cyrus’. But there was a big difference – the needs of all the people were now being solved by structural changes in society, not the needs of individuals by Christian charity. That raised a challenge for the church: What was its mission if there were no longer poor people to help? The answer came down to the basic hermeneutical calling of the church: to interpret what God is doing in the world and to join God there. Thus Christians began to have an increasingly active role in revolutionary society.”

Revolution in the revolution

When the revolution became more radical, instituting a programme of wide-ranging reform and nationalizing private companies, people started to withdraw their support and many left the country. A great number of these private companies were owned by North Americans and, as a result, in January 1961 the US government severed diplomatic relations with Cuba. Three months later, following the abortive US-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion, the socialist character of the revolution was proclaimed and the United States declared an embargo against our people.

In response, Cuba developed closer relations with the communist states in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. These states were officially atheist. This policy was also imposed in our country but, to be honest, in Cuba, unlike other atheist countries, there was no open persecution of religious people. There was, rather, a subtle persecution. Religious people could not study journalism, psychology, foreign affairs or any other profession in which they would influence the minds or the ideology of others.

From the point of view of the structure and mission of the church, we were free to preach and to teach, but only within the four walls of the sanctuaries. The evangelizing effort of going out and reaching the people as an organized church, to share the “good news” as it is conceived traditionally, was not permitted. During these years, the question was not how to preach the gospel as an organized church, but how to live the gospel creatively and with integrity as Christians, as a community of believers, and how to bear witness to the living Lord in such a way that people come and ask you about it.

I still remember that in our youth meetings at church we used to comment on how people referred to us as good workers and good students, but said it was a pity we were Christians. They could not understand that we were honest and hard working, not in spite of our faith, but precisely because of it. And I am expressing this here not because of our personal merits. It was a result of the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives, in spite of our material limitations. It was indeed hard, so in those years we suffered an exodus not only of Cubans from

the country but also of Christians from the churches. The Presbyterian church, for example, lost 70 per cent of its pastors.

Our church today highly respects the minority of pastors that remained in the churches, under great pressures and in economic distress. I remember in the early sixties, when my father was studying theology in Europe, we were living with my mother's relatives in West Virginia, USA. We returned to Cuba in 1962, during the famous missile crisis, "against the traffic", due to my parents' commitment to the people and the church in Cuba.

So the two important hostile factors that kept the church from carrying out its mission in unity during all those years were, on one hand, the pressures of the atheistic government and, on the other hand, the harsh realities of the US embargo, which hurt (and still is hurting) the Cuban population, including the churches, particularly the pastors. Just to have an idea, we need to remember that the Presbytery of Cuba (as it was called at that time), was organically part of the Synod of New Jersey, so when the US embargo was declared, the pastors and their families suddenly stopped receiving their salaries and were in great need.

Our church got its independence from the mother church in 1966 and one year later the Presbyterian-Reformed Church was founded. That same year we ordained our first woman minister (Rev. Ofelia Ortega) and extended our relationships to the world church. Our church became a member of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches, among other organizations.

The isolation of the Cuban churches imposed by the US embargo has been to a certain extent a blessing, positive and beneficial for the life and mission of the Cuban church. It obliged us to write our own biblical studies, our own hymns and our own biblical-theological reflections, as well as our own Sunday school curriculum. This has helped us to develop a stronger and more united Cuban leadership. In 1977 we wrote our own confession of faith, the only one in Cuba and among all the Reformed churches in Latin America and the Caribbean.

At this point we should also recognize the important role that the churches both in Cuba and the US have played in breaking down walls of hostility and building a bridge of reconciliation and love between both our countries, in spite of the resentment of our governments and even of the Cubans both in Cuba and abroad. We can't write the history of the relationship between our two countries in the last forty years without taking this role into consideration, although we still have a long way to go.

The capacity of pastors and laypeople of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba to develop important positions of ecumenical leadership, both nationally and internationally, and at the same time to keep the unity of the church has always amazed me. I think that it has much to do with the notion of

“unity in diversity”. While we might have our differences, when we do not think the same, we still respect and accept each other. Of course we have tensions and contradictions among ourselves, but the commitment to the unity of the body of Christ is sacred and therefore stronger than what divides us. We recognize, of course, that it is easier to preserve the unity of a smaller church like ours than a bigger one.

Religious freedom

A six-hour meeting of 75 Cuban Protestant leaders with President Fidel Castro on April 2 1990 changed the course of our history. We spoke specifically about the negative effects on the population of the official state atheism, the issue of double standards, the need for access to the mass media for the proclamation of the gospel, the construction of new sanctuaries, etc.

Naturally the encounter did not come out of the blue. It was preceded by a series of events that contributed to the realization of the meeting itself, such as the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua (“Between Christianity and revolution there is no contradiction”, they used to say); meetings of Fidel Castro with Latin American liberation theologians; the visit in 1984 of the US presidential candidate, Rev. Jesse Jackson, who led Fidel Castro to attend a church service in memory of Martin Luther King, Jr; the book *Fidel and Religion*, in which Frei Betto interviewed Castro, a bestseller in 1985, etc.

As a result of the meeting, among other factors, the 4th congress of the Communist Party in 1991 changed its by-laws, allowing religious persons to become members. In 1992 a popular referendum was carried out, and the great majority of the population voted to adopt a secular constitution, Protestant pastors were elected members of the parliament, etc.

Economic difficulties

In 1989 the Berlin wall fell, marking the disintegration of the socialist system in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. As a result of this, our economy dropped drastically. Until that year, we used to import 16 million tons of oil per year. In 1992, we could only import 4 million (a quarter of the former amount!), which caused long blackouts, a drastic reduction in public transportation, food and medicines.

US policy not only remained hostile towards Cuba, but became tighter with the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act (Torricelli Law) which prohibits US subsidiaries based in other countries from trading with Cuba. The Helms-Burton Act, which tries to internationalize the embargo, using legal sanctions to avoid foreign investments in Cuba in property formerly owned by US citizens, has received a strong reaction from the European Union and the world community.

Of course the economic depression that Cuban people are suffering does not depend on international factors only. The centralization of the economy in

former times by the Marxist state, prohibiting private initiative, the failure of the socialist economy, not having, among other factors, the competition of the market which can be beneficial and creative, has also contributed to the crisis.

Religious revival

In the last twelve years, the drastic changes in the Marxist state, the Communist Party and the constitution of the nation, withdrawing its atheist character, the economic hardship, and the faithfulness and the mission in unity of the churches have allowed us to witness a tremendous religious revival. Now, the pews of many churches are filled with people seeking a word of hope and guidance. Denominations have had to train pastors and laypeople quickly and to make rooms ready in private homes for the newly converted.

People experiencing “emptiness” in their lives attend the churches, or practise other religions, to try to discover or rediscover a meaning for their lives. So one of the most important roles that the churches are called to play is to be a producer of meaning in the lives of the people, to teach them about the Bible, about that Jesus who transforms lives and societies, who teaches the real meaning of loving God and loving one’s neighbour.

This climate of openness and religious freedom was encouraged even more by the visit of Pope John Paul II in January 1998 and the Cuban Evangelical Celebrations the following year. In each case, four different masses and celebrations were organized with the participation of thousands of people and broadcast on radio and TV. Significant also in this regard were the visit of an ecumenical delegation that same year, led by Dr Konrad Raiser, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, and the more recent visit by Dr Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. This climate means that the churches no longer have to limit their mission to the sanctuary, but can – and should – develop it out in society. So indeed the churches are encouraged to bear witness not only in the Jerusalem of the church, but to the ends of the earth, as we read in Acts 1.8.

Challenges in mission

The Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba as part of the body of Christ in the country is facing new challenges to its mission in unity:

- How to develop holistic diaconal projects in collaboration rather than in competition?
- As we try to do mission in society, how to be an expedition more than an institution?
- How to be faithful and promote justice in a dual-currency economy (where one can hardly survive without the “hard” currency) as a church, and as church leaders who often have better financial possibilities than those around them?

- How to cope with the “invasion” of “missionaries” (some of them “mercenaries”), who come with lots of dollars to try to “purchase” souls and even pastors and to proselytize?
- How to handle the “charismatic movement”, which can be a blessing, but also creates many divisions?
- How to minister in the context of ideological confrontations and polarization, both internally and in relation to the Cuban exiles?
- How to preach and teach the importance of reconciliation in society, starting right there in the church between the different groups in the congregations: those who remained faithful, those who are returning, and those who come for the first time?
- How to carry out mission in partnership with other churches and organizations abroad?
- How to cope with opportunism of both left and right?
- How to encourage the ecumenical spirit and commitment at a time when there is a reinforcement of denominationalism and apparently less ecumenical will or ethos?

These are some of the questions that challenge the commitment to mission and unity of the churches in Cuba today. The soil is ready for a fresh planting of the seed of the word of God. Not only that it is easier vis-à-vis the state, but also because it is more needed at a time when there is a readjustment of values in society. Our Lord Jesus Christ, before going to his Father, left his disciples the great commission: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt 28.18-20)

These verses, which form the conclusion of the gospel of Matthew, confirm that mission belongs to the Lord himself, and that he shares it with us through the Holy Spirit. He co-missions us to work along with him – which is expressed symbolically by the vertical dimension of the cross – but the mandate refers also to the call to work for each other – which is represented by the horizontal dimension. In this way our ministry has been commissioned by our Lord in favour of his kingdom here on earth and with the full conviction of his permanent accompaniment.

The difficult and challenging times through which we are living in Cuba today are a “kairos”, offering opportunities to analyse and redesign the role of Christianity and to continue working for the benefit and the unity of our people. The church is not ours: it belongs to the Lord and its future depends on the future of our people. So even when our specific concern is the unity of the church, our greatest mission is to seek the unity of all the people, of all humanity, and even of all creation.

The JungAng group of churches in Korea

Jeong-Hee Ryu

The history of Presbyterianism in Korea has been analysed in several studies. In this paper we want to draw attention to a group of Presbyterian churches whose main characteristic is their commitment to ordaining women to the ministry. They are little known, but deserve the attention of the larger family of Reformed churches.

Historically, Presbyterian churches in Korea were opposed to the ordination of women. On the basis of the teaching received through western missionaries, they held the view that the ordination of women was in clear contradiction to the well-known injunctions of Paul on the role of women in the church. The first Protestant denomination to ordain women was the Methodist Church of Korea. In a document entitled *Doctrine and Regulations* and published in May 1937, the church went on record as rejecting any “discrimination between men and women”. But, in fact, until independence, no ordinations of women took place. The only exception was that some women missionaries were ordained. After World War II, Korean women also began to receive ordination. Today, many women serve as pastors in local congregations.

A major event in the history of Presbyterianism took place in the 1950s. In 1952, the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea expelled Pastor Kim Jae-Joon because of his liberal views on biblical authority, and withdrew its recognition of Chosun Theological Seminary which he headed. A new church was founded – the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK). In 1956 the Assembly of this church voted in favour of the ordination of women to eldership. In 1974, it decided to ordain women to the ministry, and in November 1977, at a presbytery meeting in Kyeong Gi, Jeong Shin-Yang became the first woman in this church to be ordained.

For a long time the much larger Presbyterian Church (TongHap) rejected any attempts to introduce the ordination of women. In the 1980s and 1990s the plea for a new approach became more and more insistent, and finally in 1996, the ordination of women was officially accepted.

Most Presbyterian churches in Korea – among them KoShin, HapDong and DaeShin churches – continue to oppose the ordination of women.

There are some smaller Presbyterian groups which take a different line. There is, for instance, the JaeGeun (Reconstruction) Presbyterian Church which began to ordain women at a relatively early date. The evangelist Choi Deok-Ji is probably the first Korean Presbyterian woman to receive ordination. Of special importance, however, is the group of Presbyterian churches which came into

existence at the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s – the churches related to HapDongJungAng

The origin and history of these churches

In 1970 two pastors, one Presbyterian and the other Methodist, founded a theological seminary for students who, because of their age or their limited academic background, could not enter other theological seminaries. The Presbyterian pastor, Kang Yong-Shik, belonged to the Kyeongbuk Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Korea. His Methodist partner was Bishop Won-Hwang Lee, who was at that time Dean of Wesley Theological Seminary, the theological school of the Jesus Methodist Church. The new theological seminary founded by these two pastors was called JangRoHoeShinHakGyo.

The ministers trained at this seminary started about 40 churches. But they were not accepted by any of the registered denominations. So these ministers decided in 1974 to register with the Ministry of Culture and Public Affairs a new denomination with the name JangShin. Later, on February 28 1978, the name was changed into JungAng. The Methodist leader Lee Won-Hwang soon left this new denomination. But Jung Ang went on. In 1979 five leading pastors – Kang Yong-Sik, Baek Kee-Wan, Chung Yun-Song, Lee Seok-Yong, Jeong Hwi-Song – came after long discussions to the conclusion that the ordination of women should be adopted. They regarded this step as a necessary reform on the way into the future. The General Assembly of JungAng accepted their proposal in 1983 and one year later two women, Lee Kyue-Hee and Kim Mi-Ja, were ordained as pastors. But the young denomination suffered splits.

In 1984, one of the leading pastors, Chung Yung-Song, left the denomination and founded a new church which was registered in December 1984 with the Ministry of Culture and Public Affairs under the name BoSuJaeGun. Another of the leading pastors, Lee Seok-Yong, founded BoSuHapDong. In 1992, these two churches decided to merge. The united church took the name of BoSuTongHap.

In 1986, a third founding pastor, Baek Kee-Wan, chose in turn to leave JungAng and to found his own denomination. He retained for his group the name JungAng, while the remaining group changed it to HapDongJungAng (October 27 1986).

A further split was due to an initiative of some women pastors in Jung Ang. A number of women pastors had formed a separate presbytery in JungAng. It was called YuMok (women ministers). But some of these women pastors decided to leave JungAng and to create a separate denomination called DaeHan-YeSuGyoJangRoHoeYuMokChongHoe (Women Pastors Presbyterian Church). The new group was established on September 15 1986 at Damascus Church under the moderatorship of Rev. Park Jeong-Ho. But disputes arose. Only one year later, Park Jeong-Ho and her followers seceded from the denomination

and founded YunHapYerMok (Korean Women Pastors Presbyterian Union). They decided to accept male pastors. The remaining group eventually also adopted the same policy. They changed their name to DaeHan-YeSuGyoJangRoHoeKiChanSeongDaeChongHoe. “KiChanSeongDae” means “holy tower with prayer and praise”.

The divisions which have occurred in the years since the foundation of JungAng are not due to doctrinal differences. Basically, the five churches share the same conservative teaching. Both in theology and in spirituality they are close to the majority of Korean Presbyterians. But they came to the conclusion that the ministry of the church should be equally open to men and women. Together with a conservative theology they also share the commitment to the ordination of women.

The five churches differ in size. The largest are HapDongJungAng (80,000) and JungAng (219,000). The other three are much smaller. JungAng has experienced rapid growth in recent years and is still growing.

Profile of the five churches

1. *Presbyterian Church HapDongJungAng*

As HapDongJungAng is the oldest of the five churches, the description offered here gives more details than for the other four churches.

Size

Total membership: 80,000

Congregations: 756

Ordained ministers: 1,000 (men 460, women 540)

Elders: 50 (surprisingly, there are no women elders)

These data given by the officers of the denomination differ slightly from the information provided by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism:

Total membership: 85,700

Congregations: 719

Ordained ministers: 719 (about half and half, men and women)

Theological background and spirituality

HapDongJungAng shares in the traditional teaching held by all Presbyterian churches in Korea. It regards the Westminster Confession and the Long and Short Catechisms, as well as the Apostles' Creed, as its doctrinal basis. It places strong emphasis on the Presbyterian church order.

“Immanuel Spirit” is an important motto for the denomination. In one of the denomination's documents, “Immanuel Spirit” is described in the following terms:

We live on Immanuel Spirit.

1. Our purpose in life – to glorify and rejoice in God

2. Our way of life – to repent of our sins and believe in the gospel; to achieve sanctification through the Bible and prayers; to become witnesses to the gospel to the end of the earth in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
3. Our ethos:
 - We rely on no one and nothing but God and his Bible.
 - We live exclusively before the eyes of God.
 - We do everything in faith.
 - We know that the church, the body of Christ, is the praying house of the Father. We found churches and serve them in loyalty until death.
 - We love both good and evil people, but hate sin. We pay respect to those who deserve respect and are on the side of those who need our solidarity.
 - We do not dwell on other people’s shortcomings – we do not see them, speak about them, nor listen to reports about them.
 - We fight a holy fight unto death against Satan and sin, but we do not fight against people. Even when they slander and kill us, we will not lose our inner peace, love and holiness; we will bless them without polluting our minds, lips and faces.
 - We love our parents, brothers and sisters, and our wives and children in the Lord. But above all we love the Lord, taking upon us our cross and following him by overcoming ourselves.
 - We take the narrow path of truth, even though it may mean loneliness, adversity, dishonour and even death.
 - We reject honours, interest and sexual immorality.
 - We live honestly, diligently, faithfully, and reject devious means.
 - We are committed to faith, hope and love.

Liturgy

The liturgy of HapDongJungAng follows Presbyterian patterns, as is evident from the following Sunday morning order of service (taken from the weekly bulletin):

Sunday morning service

Doxology (silent prayer)	Church choir
Invocation (reading Scripture)	Presiding person
Praise	All believers
Reading	Presiding person and all believers
Confession of faith (Apostles’ Creed)	All believers
Praise	All believers
Prayer	One believer
Scripture reading	Presiding person

Praise	Church choir
Preaching	Preacher
Offering	All believers
Prayer of offering	Pastor
Announcements	Presiding person
Praise	All believers
Benediction	Pastor

Other services including Praising Service and Wednesday Service

Silent prayer

Praise

Prayer (spoken by a representative of the community)

Scripture reading

Preaching

Praying together aloud

Praise

Benediction (or the Lord's Prayer)

Theological school

The HapDongJungAng General Assembly Theological Seminary, located at the same address as the church's office, offers a four-year undergraduate course. About 50 students are enrolled annually. An equal number of students follows a two-year M Div course. The seminary also organizes extension courses.

Pastor Kang Yong-Sik, founder of the JungAng Presbyterian Church, is the present dean of the seminary. According to him the priorities in theological education are prayer, understanding the word of God and evangelism. In systematics, the seminary makes use of the theological thinking of Hendrikus Berkhof.

Mission activities

The church is heavily engaged in world mission. More than 70 missionaries, male and female, are active in countries such as Australia, Canada, China, Greece, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, the USA, and Vietnam. The church exercises little oversight of their activities. Some of the missionaries receive missionary training in transdenominational institutes.

Relationships with other denominations

HapDongJungAng is a member of the Christian General Council of Korea, the Council of Presbyterian Churches in Korea, and the Association of Theological Seminaries, and is a stockholder of the Korea Christian Television System. Despite the similarity of theological convictions, there is no communication with the four churches which seceded from HapDongJungAng.

Address: 448-3 Hongeun dong, Seodaemun gu, Seoul, tel. 02 3216 3777, fax 02 3216 0639

2. Presbyterian Church JungAng

The church, resulting from the first split in 1986, has grown rapidly since 1996. Its membership has by far surpassed the membership of the original JungAng Church.

Size

Total membership: 218,744

Congregations: 851

Ordained ministers: 1,037 (proportion of men and women about 40/60%)

Theological school

JungAng General Assembly Theological Seminary offers a four-year undergraduate course. It admits around 50 students every year. On December 20 2000, with government authorization, the church introduced an M Div course.

Mission activities

JungAng missionaries are active in the US, Japan, Australia and the Philippines.

Denominational office address: 383-30 Weolgye 1 dong, Nowon gu, Seoul, tel. 02 943 3124

Theological seminary address: 128-1 Weolgye 4 dong, Nowon gu, Seoul, tel. 02 918 2273, 918 2863

3. Presbyterian Church BoSuTongHap

Total membership: 3,527

Congregations: 169

Ordained ministers: 249 (proportion of men and women about 40/60%)

Structure: seven synods

Theological school

The BoSuTongHap General Assembly Theological Seminary is located at the same address as the denominational offices.

Mission activities

According to the moderator of the church, Rev Jeong Yeon-Song, the church is not yet strong enough to undertake missionary activities abroad. Priority is given to missionary work in Korea, especially in rural areas.

Address: 433-3 JanGan 3 Dong, Dongdaemun gu, Seoul, tel. 02 2246 4524

4. *Presbyterian Church KiChanSeongDae*

The original name of this church, when its pastors were exclusively women, was YuMok (Women Ministers). In the late 1980s, when it decided to admit male ministers, the denomination changed its name to KiChanSeongDae. The meaning of the name is “holy watchtower of prayer and praise”. As this name indicates, the church places great emphasis on prayer and praise. Rev. Kim Ji-Hyeon, the moderator of the church and dean of the theological seminary, is said to receive poems from God in prayer and to compose, sing and even publish music discs.

Theological school

Paul KiChanSeongDae Theological Seminary defines its aims as follows: “We aim at fostering qualified ministers to serve the denomination and world mission; we want to educate called people with burning hearts for world mission so that they may become strong enough to be victors in mission in our time; we seek to fulfil the purpose of the Holy Spirit who wants to establish churches, mission centres and other Christian institutions by fostering dedicated workers who are willing to be even martyrs according to the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ and according to the example of St Paul’s faith and activity; we want to foster workers who are armed with prayer and praise and equipped to embellish every part of Christian ministry and world mission through the ‘theory of praise’.”

No data on size, mission activities and relationships with other denominations are available.

Address: 1879-1 Daelim 1 Dong, Yeongdeungpo gu, Seoul, tel. 02 847 5875, fax 02 847 8199

5. *Presbyterian Church YunHapYerMok*

Total membership: 11,024

Congregations: 220

Ordained Ministers: 290 (all but 2 are women)

The church gives the following account of its self-understanding: “God’s purpose and providence is to save the whole world, the whole of mankind. To this end God poured out the Holy Spirit on men and women servants without any discrimination between them. Responding to this call, many women have engaged in ministry, but only a few denominations give them the opportunity to receive ordination; and in some denominations which accept women’s ordination, married women are granted little opportunity to serve as ministers. In harmony with Ps 68.11, where we read, ‘The company of women, having

found its home, cries out the good news', we have founded a new denomination, YunHapYerMok, to offer an institutional guarantee for women to minister. We are sure that this is in accord with God's will."

Theological School

YunHapYerMok General Assembly Theological Seminary defines its programme as follows:

Doctrines and creeds

Our doctrinal position is pure evangelical Christianity.

We adhere to Calvinism as it is based on the Bible.

We adhere to the tradition of the church, i.e., we confess the apostolic faith.

Through theology we seek to explain in academic terms the faith rooted in the apostles' witness.

Our faith builds on repentance, justification, regeneration, healing, resurrection and the second coming.

Purpose

Our purpose is to teach devoted students theology and doctrines which are based on the Bible so that they may become good pastors with the spirituality, knowledge and the character required to meet the needs of our time.

Mission activities

A good number of missionaries are engaged in India, New Zealand, China, Japan and the USA.

Relationships with other denominations

An application for membership in the Christian General Council of Korea was turned down on the ground that the church was constituted exclusively by women. The church is a member of the National Evangelization Movement and other similar associations.

The arguments for women's ordination in the JungAng churches
Representatives of the JungAng churches generally hold that women's ordination is "biblical". But how do they deal with texts such as these?

- Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. (1 Tim 2.12)
- As in all the churches of the saints, women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask

their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (1 Cor 14.33-35)

Their response is as follows.

- a) In order to interpret these verses correctly, it is necessary to be aware of their historical background.
- b) These passages call on women to show the virtue of obedience. They are not meant to prevent them from being disciples of the Lord.
- c) In Paul's day, some churches suffered serious disorder because of an eruption of charismata. Therefore Paul demands silence from women. But he does not exclude them from all affairs of the Lord.

In addition they refer to biblical passages from the Old and the New Testaments supporting the idea of women's ordination.

- a) In the Old Testament women were called as prophetesses and judges (Miriam in Ex 15.20 and Deborah in Judges 4.4).
- b) The New Testament refers to many women who became disciples and followed Jesus (Lk 8.1-4).
- c) There were prophetesses at the time of the Apostles (Philip's daughters in Acts 21).
- d) Other passages supporting women's ordination can be found in Ps 68.11; Acts 2.18, Gal 3.28-29, Prov 12.4, Lam 31.22; etc.

Their theological position is orthodox and conservative Calvinism, but they firmly believe that the church is always in need of reform – it should correct itself in the light of the truth and adapt itself to the needs of the time. They have been informed that many churches in the West practise the ordination of women and know that many women have already been ordained.

But the deepest reason of their assurance about women's ordination is prayer. In prayer they have been led to the conclusion that they should choose this way. Their conviction was confirmed by the Spirit in prayer and could therefore resist the sharp criticisms which they received from conservative circles.

As long as they were only a small minority among the theologically conservative churches, they were often treated as "heretics". Faced with such opposition, many church members felt embarrassed and tended to avoid women pastors. A special blow was the refusal of the Christian General Council of Korea to receive YunHapYerMok into membership. But gradually the attitude of believers changed. They realized that women pastors could minister as effectively as male ministers. Their female qualities, such as motherly care and love, were called for. Many people even began to prefer women pastors as ministers.

Some talented women who had completed theological studies but could not be ordained for the simple reason that they were women joined the JungAng churches. In fact, in all five denominations female ministers outnumber male

ministers. Women ministers are not suffering any discrimination in their activity. They are respected also beyond the boundaries of their denomination.

In 1996 the Presbyterian Church in Korea (TongHap) decided to introduce women's ordination. Through this decision a new situation arose. Since a sizeable church has changed its position, the criticism has diminished. The position of the JungAng churches became "respectable"!

The overall assessment in the JungAng churches of the ordination of women and the exercise of the ministry by women is as follows:

- Women are better qualified for the ministry than men.
- Female care is an essential dimension of the ministry.
- Women ministers are needed in our time.
- Women ministers are purer and more truthful than men, because they have less responsibility than men for earning a living to support their family.
- As women are less likely to succumb to sexual immorality and moral corruption, people tend to place more trust in women ministers.
- Women pastors need not be confined to special ministries. The responsibilities to be carried out by a pastor should be defined on the grounds of his/her talents and the nature of the task, and not of gender.
- Women pastors tend to show more limited tolerance to various kinds of people. For this reason they are not to serve a big church.

Conclusions

1. The ordination of women is a relatively new question in the history of Presbyterian churches. Only in the course of the 20th century did Presbyterian churches begin to come to the conviction that women should share in the ministry of word and sacrament. It is not surprising, therefore, that the question caused disputes and conflicts. In the context of the Presbyterian churches in Korea this almost inevitably meant divisions. The JungAng churches are to be seen as part of the larger debate among Presbyterians on the ordination of women.
2. The position of the JungAng churches is particularly interesting because they combine a basically conservative theology with an openness to reform and renewal. Normally, conservative churches tend to reject women's ordination. These five churches are an exception. Could they serve, perhaps, among conservative Presbyterian churches as an incentive to revisit this question?
3. The churches were led to separate themselves in order to give women ministers a "home". They went as far as establishing a presbytery consisting exclusively of women pastors. At a time when the majority of the Presbyterian churches refused to ordain women, this move was perhaps legitimate. But a

new situation now prevails. The question therefore arises whether separation still must be maintained. The history of the Reformed churches is full of examples of divisions which continued despite the fact that the original reason for the dispute had disappeared. There are therefore good reasons for initiating new approaches among Korean churches.

Theological schools – a dividing force?

Lukas Vischer

Theological schools and mission in unity

When the 23rd general council (Debrecen, 1997) recommended that a study project on mission in unity be set up, it expressed the hope that study materials could be developed which would help WARC member churches to “understand the role of theological schools as a uniting or dividing force in churches, and identify ways for Reformed seminaries and schools to promote unity”.¹

Nearly three years have passed since the Mission in Unity Project was started as a joint effort of the John Knox International Reformed Centre and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The efforts so far undertaken have confirmed that theological schools play an essential role in either uniting or dividing Reformed churches.

Wherever initiatives towards unity have been started, it soon turns out that the issues of theological education and theological schools need to be addressed. How can theological education contribute to a deeper sense of communion among Reformed churches? How can theological schools collaborate more closely in order to build up together the one body of Christ?

What must be our response to these questions? As a first step, the advisory committee of the Mission in Unity Project published a paper on Reformed ecclesiology under the title, “Keeping the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”.² It was meant to provoke a discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of Reformed ecclesiology. What do we have to say on the church of Jesus Christ? How can a more realistic approach to the theme of ecclesiology be developed in Reformed teaching?³

But the general council had, of course, more in mind. It called for reflection on theological schools both as places of theological learning and as institutions, and in particular on the relationship between theological schools and the life and witness of the churches. If the movement towards closer bonds among Reformed churches is to advance, efforts need to be made to deal with this wider question. It is our hope that ways can be found to reach a new awareness of the issues involved in the years to come.

Theological education held in high esteem by Reformed churches

Reformed churches attach great importance to theological reflection, theological education and education generally. The number of theological schools and educational institutions run by Reformed churches is impressive. Even small churches regard the foundation of a theological school as one of the first priorities.⁴

The emphasis on theological education has roots in the Reformation of the 16th century. Since the Reformers insisted on the preaching of true Christian doctrine, they had to make sure that people were trained for the ministry of the word. Preachers needed to be familiar with the content and meaning of the gospel. To establish the recognition of biblical truth in Geneva, Calvin set an example by interpreting, in sermons and lectures, almost all the books of the Bible. But he also took the initiative in 1559 to found the Geneva Academy, a school to train pastors – to minister not only in Geneva but in other places as well. The *Académie* soon developed into an important centre of Reformed theology.

It is interesting to note that Calvin promoted the idea of a special ministry of “teachers” (*docteurs*). In his eyes four ministries are essential for the life and mission of the church – the *pasteurs*, the *anciens*, the *diacres* and the *docteurs*. The function of the *docteurs* is to study and to interpret the Bible and Christian doctrine. While the pastors are involved in all kinds of daily duties, they should be free to devote their time entirely to study and teaching. In Reformed theology, especially in the period of Reformed orthodoxy, the value of the ministry of *docteur* was strongly affirmed.⁵

When Reformed churches engaged in mission work, they normally gave high priority to theological education. At an early stage, indigenous people were trained and ordained to the ministry. This was, for instance, the case in Korea; many attribute the phenomenal rise of the Christian movement in Korea to this fact. Mozambique can be cited as another example. When the country became independent in 1974, the number of ordained pastors in the small Presbyterian church was higher than the number of priests in the Roman Catholic majority church. In many countries, Reformed missions decided to offer opportunities of general education – as a way to communicate the gospel to society. In several Latin American countries, for instance, Presbyterian missions concentrated efforts on the missionary “tool” of schools; the expectation was that educated people would see the light of the gospel and serve both the church and the country.

The double role of theological schools

The multitude of theological schools represents, no doubt, an enormous potential. In hundreds of places, theologians – *docteurs* – reflect on the meaning of God’s word and seek to communicate the gospel to a new generation of ministers and lay people. The schools are the expression of an impressive theological zeal. Often, they give birth to constructive new insights and theological perspectives.

But the multitude of theological schools also represents a threat to the coherence of Reformed theological thinking. On the whole, there is little communication among the various centres of theological learning. Schools tend

to be self-sufficient and develop their thinking and their activities along separate lines. Often, both in the past and in the present, theological schools have been the cause of splits, or have been a hindrance to achieving unity.

A few examples may serve as illustration:

- With the rise of liberal theology in the Swiss churches in the 18th and 19th centuries, the authority of the historical Reformed confessions of faith and even the ancient creeds was called into question. In response, theological schools were founded to maintain the traditional teaching of the church.
- In 1953, a major split occurred in the Presbyterian Church of Korea. The cause was a dispute over the authority of Scripture. The general assembly decided against the use of historical-critical methods in interpreting the Bible, and a group of professors decided to establish a new seminary. Eventually the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) was formed.
- Theological schools can easily develop into a symbol of identity of an individual church. In order to overcome separation, an agreement needs therefore to be reached on the role of each theological school in the united church. Hostility and competitiveness need to be replaced by complementarity and collaboration. In the union negotiations between the Netherlands Reformed Church (NHK), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, for instance, the future place and function of the schools proved to be a crucial question. How will the various schools serve the life of the united church?
- Often, especially in Korea, theological seminaries are established with a view to the outreach of the church. Pastors are trained to become missionaries and to found new congregations. Theological schools in Korea have been the source and centre of several separate Presbyterian churches. Korean missionaries often apply the same method abroad. In many countries, Bible schools, theological academies, even universities, have been founded, to advance the missionary cause (Bolivia, Uganda, Russia, Ukraine). Often, little attention is paid to the relationship with existing educational institutions.

Freedom and communion

How can theological schools serve the communion and the common mission of the church effectively? The basic thesis of this paper is the following: If Reformed theological schools are to contribute to a deeper sense of communion among Reformed churches, a clearer understanding of the nature of theological reflection is required: both of its *freedom* and of its roots in the *communion of Christ's church*.

In many schools, theology is expected simply to confirm and to defend the teaching and the positions held by the church. Other schools consider theological research and thinking as an exercise which is to be carried out in complete independence from the church. Thus, theology is exposed to two temptations. Either it confirms and solidifies the *status quo* and moves in narrow circles, or it develops theological insights without regard to the communion of the church. Freedom and responsibility towards the communion of Christ's church must be brought into constructive relationship. The relationship must not be allowed to collapse into an either-or. Freedom is to serve the communion of the church.⁶

In the first place, the vocation of theological reflection is to lift up biblical truth. By doing so it is bound to challenge the *status quo* and point beyond the church in its present form. Theology is called to address issues which have so far not been clarified by the church. Theological schools just confirming the *status quo* fail to live up to their vocation. In order to fulfil their vocation, theological schools need to be free to develop their research, their thinking and their teaching.

At the same time, the other side needs to be stressed. Theological reflection always takes place *within* the communion of the church. Theology seeks to interpret the faith confessed by the church. It has its roots in the praise and prayers offered by the church. Both teachers and students are members of the church. They are called to serve a community, not the abstract vision of a church not yet existing, but an actual community with its strengths and weaknesses. As members of *this* community they are also servants of the church universal in all places.

What are the implications of this double commitment?

Theologians and teachers are *accountable* to the church. Theology is not an individual performance. In the Reformed tradition, however, church authorities are not entitled to exercise any control over the soundness of theological reflection. No imprimatur is required. Rather, theologians are expected to exercise self-control. Several old books of order contain the rule that no pastor should publish any book without previously having consulted at least two of his colleagues.

To combine creativity with respect for communion, a *culture of dialogue* is called for. A theological discourse needs to be developed which is characterized by both clarity and the will to understand and appreciate divergent positions. There is room at theological schools for different theological perspectives. Departing from the general line is no reason for expulsion or secession. There are, of course, limits to diversity. Teaching needs to remain within the boundaries of the confession of the church. But theological schools will not seek uniformity of teaching; they will promote theological thinking through a diversity of approaches.

Often, Reformed theologians adopt an aggressive and polemical style. They seem to believe that authentic theology requires the effort to demolish theological adversaries. Unfortunately, the Reformers, including Calvin, have set the model of this style. In their writings they often attack, caricature and denigrate their opponents. Often, they use scathing language. There is no doubt a legitimate place in theology for fair polemics. But there is a difference between clear straightforward criticism and the *rabies theologorum* which creates bitterness and antagonism. Calvin has also been exemplary for another effort – to formulate common perspectives going beyond apparently irreconcilable positions.

Sound theology will always take place in an atmosphere of *prayer and worship*. It is a rigorous intellectual exercise. But *theo*-logical reflection is carried out in front of God – prayer is the framework of all theological activities. In Reformed theology, this is not a matter of course. Often, the dimension of prayer in theology is neglected. Often, the effort to interpret the biblical message is regarded as in itself a sufficient act of worship. Reformed theology often has a touch of intellectualism.

As theologians are members of a *specific* community, they will reflect on behalf of this community: What is its context? What form should its witness take? What are the issues calling for a theological answer? Theology is bound to be contextual and should not be ashamed of being contextual. Reformed doctrine is not a system giving the answers to all issues in all contexts.

At the same time, there is an increasing need for *common* reflection on the global challenges which the church faces today. Even more than in the past, theological reflection has become a common task. An interaction needs to take place between contextual and intercontextual reflection. So far, Reformed theology is relatively weak in this regard.

Training of ministers

The same two dimensions of freedom and communion also apply to the training of ministers. The training of ministers must take place in an atmosphere of both freedom and commitment to the church – to its tradition, its calling and its witness. Students are to become free and responsible persons. They should learn to think and interpret the Bible and the Reformed tradition on their own. They are not to become copies of their teachers, and any inclination to “cloning” on the part of teachers should be resisted. True education enables students to discover themselves and interpret their calling.

But clearly, theological schools must also be places where students are made aware of the church, the “mother of all believers” (Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, 1). They are to learn what it means to be part of Christ’s church. Theological schools need to introduce students into the service of the church. Ideally, theological education leads to a passion for the church, the fulfilment of its calling, its unity and its mission.

Through the act of ordination, normally after the successful conclusion of theological studies, students are accepted as ministers by the church. Ordination is an act of the church – recognizing the vocation of the candidate, the church includes him or her into the company of ministers of word and sacrament ; while the candidate commits himself or herself to the service of the church, the church agrees to recognize and to honour his or her service. The crucial question is in what way the prospect of this act is present in the course of theological training. Is theological training an end in itself or does it lead to the service of the church expressed through the act of ordination? Often, ordination is treated as if it were a mere appendix to final examinations.

What are the implications for theological training?

In addition to conveying the theological knowledge which is required for responsible theological thinking, students need to be made familiar with the history, the present situation and the witness of the church they belong to, as well as with the life of the Reformed churches of their country and indeed worldwide. Reformed Christians have on the whole only a limited knowledge of their own church. Theological teaching tends to overlook the reality of the Reformed churches as they actually exist today. In order to participate in the reform of the Reformed tradition, accurate knowledge of the churches involved is required.

The time spent at a theological school also should include an experience of shared Christian life. Students must be given the opportunity to learn what it means to be members of Christ's body.

The theological school – teachers and students – need to form a worshipping community.

At an early stage of studies, opportunities should be offered to discuss with students the vocation to the ministry. The issue should not be postponed until the eve of ordination. Theological schools need to be a place where pastoral care is exercised.

Theological schools and the authority of the church and its leadership
The relationship between theological schools and the church has often been the cause of tensions. To advance the cause of the gospel, ways of mutual affirmation and constructive collaboration must be found.

Theological schools need to enjoy a certain degree of independence from the church. They are to challenge the church. Calvin's insistence on the ministry of *docteurs* is significant in this respect. They are freed from daily obligations in order to be able to devote themselves entirely to the interpretation of the word. The same freedom is to be granted to theological schools. It is in the self-interest of the church to respect this freedom. On the other hand, theological schools have to respect the fact that they do not represent the voice of the church. They are the theological conscience of the church but they do not speak on its behalf.

The ultimate authority lies with synods and assemblies. This implies that synods and assemblies can intervene in extreme cases of false teaching or mismanagement.

There is then a double temptation: for the church, to treat theological schools as simple “tools” or, for theological schools, to claim entire independence from the life and witness of the church. A sound relationship can only be established if both sides commit themselves to partnership – reminding themselves through a sustained dialogue of their respective functions.

Some implications:

Training ministers is not the only function of theological faculties. They are to be places of theological research. They are to contribute to the *theological inspiration* of the church. Each individual faculty member has his or her function. But there is also a function of the faculty as a whole. Through combined efforts new issues can be clarified and new perspective offered to the church.

To achieve this, there is need for an *interdisciplinary approach* within the faculty. The various disciplines of theology – Old Testament, New Testament, history, systematics, pastoral theology, etc. – must not be allowed to be pursued and taught in isolation from one another.

Theological schools must seek to promote theological thinking in the church generally. Very easily, theology can develop into an esoteric enterprise. Often, the language used at theological schools can no longer be understood by a wider public. Schools and synods use different discourses. Mutual understanding becomes difficult. There is need for a permanent theological debate within the church. Theological schools must seek opportunities to promote it, e.g., by visits to congregations, by vacation courses, etc.

The institutional dimension

Theological schools are institutional realities. It is important that they are aware of their particular institutional identity and its impact on their understanding of the gospel, their teaching, the relation to the church and its eventual renewal.

There are widely differing types of schools, for example:

- schools which have been founded and are financed by churches
- schools which are independent of the church and are financed by endowment or by an association of friends
- schools which depend on mission agencies, and are financed, wholly or in part, by money from abroad
- theological faculties which are part of a university, and are financed either by the state or by endowment

Each type has its strengths and weaknesses. Each type has an influence on the ways and methods of teaching. To each type corresponds a style of doing theology. Conscious efforts are required to overcome the limitations inherent in each type if they are to contribute to the unification process of Reformed churches.

Institutions tend to be self-sufficient. They represent a small world and are not open as a matter of course to the wider world. There is, with all institutions, a certain degree of inertia.

By what kind of steps can theological schools contribute to the unification process ?

Ideally, Reformed theological schools within the same country should *relate to one another and seek to collaborate*. They can exchange teachers and students. They can launch common initiatives, e.g., student encounters, courses to prepare for ordination, etc. They may perhaps form a national association of Reformed schools. Through joining forces they can contribute to forming a generation of pastors prepared for a ministry in a united church.

Instead of competing with one another, theological schools can seek to develop *complementary roles*. While one school concentrates on higher education, another can give more room to lay training. One school may be entrusted with the pursuit of a special project. The vocation of another school may be to serve a particular language group, etc.

At the same time, Reformed theological schools need to regard themselves as part of the international reformed “theological community” and actively participate in international contacts. Much already happens in this regard – exchange of students, meetings of international theological association (Calvin-Congress, International Reformed Theological Institute, etc.). But in order to develop a concerted approach to global issues, additional efforts are required. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches has an important role to fulfil in this regard. Through its activities (offering a focus for a network of theological schools, consultations on crucial issues, leadership training courses, etc.) it can create the framework within which Reformed theological thinking can develop in new ways – in more deliberate exchange and dialogue, in mutual affirmation and critique, in the perspective of the church universal.

Notes

1. *Debrecen 1997: Proceedings of the 23rd general council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches* (Geneva: WARC, 1997), pp.221.
2. *Keeping the Unity in the Spirit through the Bond of Peace, A Theological Reflection on Reformed Ecclesiology*, Geneva, 2000 (available from the Mission in Unity secretariat in Geneva).
3. Lukas Vischer, ed., *The Church in Reformed Perspective: A European Reflection* (Geneva: John Knox Series, 2002).
4. The – incomplete – list of theological schools published in Jean-Jacques Bauswein and Lukas Vischer, eds., *The Reformed Family Worldwide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), pp.563-699, bears witness to this characteristic of the Reformed tradition.

5. Calvin explains in the *Institutes*: “Next come pastors and teachers, with whom the church never can dispense, and between whom, I think, there is this difference, that teachers preside not over discipline, or the administration of the sacraments, or admonitions, or exhortations, but the interpretation of scripture only, in order that pure and sound doctrine may be maintained among believers. But all these are embraced in the pastoral office (*Institutes* IV, 3.4).” [S’ensuyvent les Docteurs et les Pasteurs, desquels l’Eglise ne se peut jamais passer. Or je pense que c’est la différence entre ces deux especes, que les Docteurs n’ont point la charge de la discipline, ne d’administrer les Sacramens, ne de faire les exhortations et remonstrances: mais seulement d’exposer l’Ecriture, afin qu’il y ait toujours saine doctrine et pure conservée en l’Eglise. Or la charge des Pasteurs s’estend à toutes ces choses.] Calvin assimilates the offices of the prophets and the teachers: “The prophetic office was more excellent in respect of the special gift of revelation which accompanied it, but the office of teachers is almost of the same nature and has altogether the same end (*Institutes* IV. 3,5)” [L’office des Prophètes a esté plus excellent, à cause du don singulier de revelation qui leur estoit fait: mais l’office des Docteurs a du tout une mesme fin, et s’exerce quasi par un mesme moyen.] In the *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques* of the Church of Geneva (1561) he returns to the subject; now he identifies the *docteurs* with the teachers at the schools, in particular the theological school: “The specific ministry of the teachers consists in passing on to the faithful the sound doctrine so that the purity of the gospel should not be corrupted either by ignorance or misguided opinions. In today’s situation, we use this title for those helping to conserve the seed for the future and to make sure that the church does not suffer from a lack of pastors and ministers. Therefore, to use a more common expression, we call them the order of schools. The ministry which is closest to the ministry of pastors and most intimately linked to church government, is the one of those reading theology. It is important that there be teachers in both Old and New Testament ... (43-44).” [L’office propre des Docteurs est, d’enseigner les fidèles en saine doctrine: afin que la pureté de l’Evangile ne soit corrompue ou par ignorance ou par mauvaises opinions. Toutesfois selon que les choses sont aujourdhui disposées, nous comprenons en ce titre les aides et instrumens pour conserver semence à l’advenir, et faire que l’Eglise ne soit desolée par faute de pasteurs et ministres. Ainsi pour user d’un mot plus intelligible, nous l’appellerons l’Ordre des escoles. Le degré plus prochain au ministère et plus conioint au gouvernement de l’Eglise, est la lecture de Théologie: dont il sera bon qu’il y en ait au vieil et nouveau Testament.] There was never unanimity among Reformed theologians on the nature of this particular ministry. In particular, various opinions were held about the election and ordination of teachers. Who is responsible for electing teachers? Should they be ordained? If yes, who has the authority to ordain them? Should the theological academies “create” teachers? Or was the authority with the church? While some theologians defended the view that schools were not merely *appendices ecclesiae*, others maintained that the church alone

was entitled to name and ordain teachers: “The right of election belongs to the whole church. Whoever does not enter the ministry through this door is a thief and robber (John 10). This right has not been granted by the church to the teachers of academies... The church alone grants them the right to teach and the authority of being a teacher.” (Guillaume du Buc/Bucanus, professor of theology in Lausanne, d.1603, in Heppe, *Reformierte Dogmatik*, pp.547-548).

6. Maurice Kouam, dean of the theological faculty of Yaoundé in Cameroon, gives a vivid description of this tension: “If the tension between academic rigour and faithfulness to the church disappears, the consequences for the church can be very negative. If academic rigour dominates entirely, the verdict is clear: science without conscience is the ruin of the soul. We end in spiritual barrenness... But if faithfulness to the church is the only criterion, it means the death of the dynamism of the gospel and the church is led gradually into a deadly routine.” See CEVAA, *Séminaire entre les facultés de théologie des pays du Sud et des pays latins d’Europe*, septembre 2001, p.5.

Breaking down walls and building bridges in Uganda

Jet den Hollander

There is an amazing search going on among the Reformed churches in Uganda for new expressions of mission in unity (MIU). Begun in the 1990s, the process took full force in 2001 when a broad-based MIU consultation took place with representatives from all seven Reformed groupings. Then in March 2002 a follow-up consultation was organized to concretize the decisions taken in 2001. Integrally linked to this meeting were a one-day women's workshop and a mission action-reflection weekend with selected congregations.

This article draws in particular on the discussions of the action-reflection weekend as they speak to the central questions of this issue of *Reformed World*:

- What are the walls of hostility that need to be broken down?
- How do we identify and address that which separates people from each other, from God and from creation? What is our mission, and with whom do we cooperate?

The context: cradle of humanity

East Africa. It was here in this region that our ancestors first walked the earth; from here that the rest of Africa and the other continents eventually were populated. From footprints preserved in the petrified surface of a mud-pan it has been established that three individuals – two adults and a youth – walked across the pan more than 3 million years ago!

But recent history has left its marks too. In Uganda the thirty years of civil war under Amin and Obote have left much poverty and destruction, and for many the struggle for survival continues, notwithstanding the considerable developments said to have taken place over the past 15 years under the Museveni government.

This is the context in which seven small Reformed churches, all grown out of and working amidst relatively poor communities, are involved in pastoral care, social action and evangelism in Uganda.

The Reformed family in Uganda

The Reformed family is a newcomer among the Christian denominations in Uganda. It was only in the 1970s that Reformed teaching was introduced, mainly by Ugandans who had studied abroad and returned to their country with a strong commitment to evangelism. The first Presbyterian church was founded in 1979. Since then several other Reformed and Presbyterian churches have come into existence. Today there are seven relatively small churches, with a membership ranging from 150 to 5,000 people. They are:

1. Presbyterian Church in Uganda, 1979
2. Evangelical Free Church in Uganda, 1986
3. Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Uganda, 1986
4. Reformed Presbyterian Church in Uganda, 1990
5. Christian Reformed Church in East Africa, 1992
6. Reformed Baptist Church in Uganda, 1998
7. Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Uganda, 1962.¹

Some of the churches have their origins in the Presbyterian Church in Uganda, including the Evangelical Free Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Others have roots in Kenya, such as the Christian Reformed Church of East Africa (based around Mbale in the East) and the three Ugandan congregations of the Presbyterian Church in East Africa, which are at present still legally part of the PCEA in Kenya.

Testing out the MIU vision

At the beginning of March, sixteen elders, youth leaders, educators and pastors from four different Reformed churches came together in Kampala for a mission action-reflection weekend.²

The purpose of the weekend was first of all to test out and deepen the vision of mission in unity that had emerged in the MIU consultations thus far. Can we work together? What happens when we engage in joint outreach to the community, share in Bible study and pray together?

Second, the weekend group had agreed to develop a Bible study for the 24th general council (Accra, 2004), in order to share with the wider Reformed family insights and questions that have emerged in the Ugandan context. For this purpose the story of Naaman – or should we say the story of a slave girl? – in 2 Kings 5 was interpreted in role play and then discussed in relation to the life and witness of the churches. Here are some extracts from the role play, followed by four issues that the study raised.

Naaman's wife: Appearances are deceptive! Women all over the country used to envy me because of my rich and famous husband. They saw how much the King of Aram favoured him! But what did they know of my fear, of his shame? Naaman, his name means "loveliness", but his life had become loneliness, loathing, leprosy.

Slave girl: For a long time I hated him! He stole me from my country. Sometimes I cannot even remember my mother's face. And yet, when I saw him so afflicted, I heard my father's voice, telling us stories about how we were slaves in Egypt; how God knew our suffering and heard our cry and brought us forth with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. And I remembered the stories about life and blessings if we keep the law, and about our prophets who can do anything in the name of the Lord. Anything! So I wondered if perhaps...

Naaman: *I thought I had everything, till I fell sick and realized I had nothing. I never wasted a thought on my slaves, yet this slave girl thought of me. I was ready to do anything to get better, yet it was the simple task I despised that brought me healing. And I wanted to give the prophet silver and gold, but I was the one who received gifts: healing, two mule-loads of earth and peace. Everything is upside down and I've never been so happy!*

Naaman's servants: *Our role was minor. We loaded the chariots, prepared the horses and made Naaman comfortable. We were not sure that washing in the Jordan would make a difference, but not even trying made no sense. Well, you know the result. After his seventh dip in the river, his flesh was like that of a young boy! The rest of the trip was easy.*

Gehazi: *If only these foreigners hadn't come! It is Naaman who brought this curse on me! And if only Elisha hadn't refused his gifts; weren't they well deserved? But then again, if only I hadn't run after Naaman and spun such a tale. If only I hadn't lied to my master. If only...!*

God's mission instruments

Prossy: *I think that in this story the slave girl is the missionary.*

George: *We should stop despising other people and listen to everybody. Unexpected people, like the slave girl, might have a message from God.*

Peter: *It is difficult to know who in Ugandan society is God's messenger. Some say our local councils are an instrument of God's mission, because they work for justice and peace in the community. But can a secular body be "in mission"? Perhaps God's mission is wider than the mission of the church. In any case, it is important to work together as Reformed churches, but also with other people.*

The participants of the mission action-reflection weekend did not speak for their churches, nor did they try to reach a consensus on vital questions like: "Who might be God's partners in mission in Uganda?", "Are we God's partners?", and "How do we look at and relate to other Christians and groups who seem to pursue justice, peace and wholeness?" The discussions were meant as explorations of faith in action, and the idea that local councils might be considered "partners in mission" evoked a hot debate. Yet the openness to the idea articulated by George that a message from God may be found in unexpected places is noteworthy, for too often church discussions on mission begin and end with the church's own role. Such openness is especially important in today's world, with its unprecedented levels of disconnectedness, conflict, fragmentation, "them and us" thinking and withdrawal into closed, exclusivist identities.

Recent analyses of these dynamics are many and varied. But to put the Ugandan discussions in context, a brief reference to one of them may be worthwhile. The Indian missiologist Christopher Duraisingh recently spoke of two opposite forces at work in the world today.³ On the one hand, a centrifugal

force of alienation and fragmentation, already described in the archetypal story of Cain and Abel: Cain can develop his identity only in terms of what he is not, in binary opposition to what his “other”, Abel is. He constructs his “other” as an enemy to be silenced and eliminated. Recent history shows the terrifying extremes to which such conflicting and exclusivist identities can lead: ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda or Osama Bin Laden’s jihad versus George W Bush’s war on terrorism. At the same time there is, Duraisingh suggests, the opposite, centripetal force of assimilation and homogenization: the attempt to tame and manage the plural particulars, destroy differences and integrate all into a single worldview, as typified in the story of Babel with its desire for just one story, one language, one truth, one religion. Manifestations of this can be seen as much in the drive for Christendom and the internationalization of Islam as in the dynamics of the global economy and the McDonaldisation of societies. Ultimately both the centripetal and the centrifugal forces lead to exclusion, fragmentation and conflict.

Duraisingh’s analysis of what, given these dynamics, contemporary mission should entail is comprehensive and we cannot do justice to it here. But in the light of the Uganda discussions two aspects may be highlighted. First, Duraisingh points to the need to learn to live constructively with differences. Instead of seeing the “other”, the one who is different from me, as someone who either must become just like me or is an enemy to be ignored or destroyed, we need to learn to take the other seriously as “other”, whose differences complement me and through whom I become authentically myself. Second, and closely related to this, Duraisingh highlights mission as reconciliation as a central paradigm for today, emphasizing that in order to move beyond fragmentation and conflict, a central aspect of the church’s mission should be our witnessing to a God who brings into being a reconciled human community across all that divides us. In other words, thinking about mission begins from an eschatological starting point rather than a distinction between “us in the church” and “them outside it”. The vision of humanity, in all its diversity, being reconciled to God in Christ opens the way to acknowledging the “other” as fellow traveller on the way to that new future, with both partners complementing each other and thus needing each other to move forward toward the vision.⁴

For the Reformed churches in Uganda, relations with one another, other denominations and people of other faiths are not without complexity. For more on relations within the Reformed family, see below. With regard to the other confessional and faith traditions, it may be noted that the Reformed churches form a very small minority in Uganda. Many of their members used to belong to one of these other traditions, but for varying reasons have become Reformed. At times there are strong feelings against the churches they left, which are often regarded as churches of the privileged, while memories of the religious warfare

under Idi Amin still sour relations with Muslims. Regarding the latter, conservative partners overseas often reinforce “them and us” thinking and even promote forms of “enemy thinking” that are truly frightening.⁵ At the same time, many Reformed pastors and members have friends and relatives in the Muslim community, as in the other denominations, and this too is a determining, but more positive, factor in how the Christian “other” and the Muslim “other” are seen. Uganda is a multireligious country and, as a small minority, the Reformed churches cannot but learn to live with the “others” in complementary relationships, if they want to live in peace.

In view of this, two things may be noted. First, while at present none of the Reformed churches participates in the Uganda Joint Christian Council, the hope is that these ecumenical links will be established through the projected Alliance of Reformed Churches in Uganda, which would participate in the Christian Council on behalf of all seven churches. Second, in a discussion following the MIU consultation, Rev Hosea Nelson Kyasooka, who coordinates the mission in unity process in Uganda, had an initial discussion with Dr Johnson Mbillah, director of the Project for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA). As a result, the latter has offered to teach in the projected theological summer school of the Ugandan churches, in order to explore further what Ugandan Christians and Ugandan Muslims might share and could do together towards *shalom* and fullness of life for all Uganda.

Women as God’s messengers

Helen: I am very sure that...all churches represented here can organize women’s groups in community-based approaches to help...women and children around us, and united, we will effect changes in our society.

That, as George recognized, God’s messages might come from unexpected directions had already found concrete expression during the days leading up to the mission weekend. At the MIU consultation the women of the seven churches had been represented but had not contributed to the discussions as much as their church involvement generally would warrant. At the one-day women’s workshop on mission in unity and gender, however, an additional mission issue for the churches had emerged, i.e., that of sexual abuse. Many of the restrictions imposed on women by Ugandan society were found to be also present in the church, and the perceptions which women and men have of themselves and each other are, it was realized, not unrelated to the widespread problem of sexual abuse.

Hence the women’s workshop placed “resistance to sexual abuse” as an additional item on the common mission agenda of the churches, as an issue that needs priority attention of both women and men in the churches. Moreover, the women established the “Reformed Women in Unity” movement to coordinate this programme on behalf of the seven churches.

Open doors or ticket barriers

Francis: *I am thinking about Naaman's question in verse 18: can he still go with his master into the temple of Rimmon? Once I shared my faith with someone. He wanted to commit his life to Jesus and come to church, but he worked in a brewery and my church is against alcohol. So he asked if he had to quit his job, but how then could he support his family? I told him he should stay where he was and after a while God might help him to find another job. Was I right?*

Sarah: *The prophet said to Naaman: Go in peace. We shouldn't put conditions on people accepting Christ. Christ accepts us as we are, and then he changes us into what he wants us to become.*

Hosea Nelson: *It's a process.*

The question of churches erecting walls around themselves, as dealt with in more detail by Peter Cruchley-Jones elsewhere in this issue, is an urgent one for the churches. For in the process of seeking to determine "what does the Lord require of us", modes of behaviour may develop which over time tend to fossilize and become laws written in stone. Identities then develop less on the basis of what unites us with Christ than of what distinguishes us from others, and church doors easily become ticket barriers where one is checked before admittance rather than doors through which members and others go freely in and out. Especially for churches in a minority situation, the temptation of withdrawing into a closed identity, with strict rules as to who can belong and who can't, is real.

In Uganda, the Reformed churches are both in a minority situation and in relationship with conservative churches overseas who propagate clear positions on issues like the use of alcohol, partaking in the eucharist, women's ordination and homosexuality. On the other hand, the churches are less than 30 years old and are not weighed down by centuries of Reformed dogma to the extent that some others in the family are. They are reinventing the Reformed heritage for their situation, where evangelical and pentecostal influences play an important part. Something of this contextual reinventing sounded through in the discussion of the "brewery dilemma" above.

This kind of theologizing from below is not only important for the Ugandans themselves, but will also benefit the wider Reformed family as WARC engages in its worldwide process of mission reflection. What does being "Reformed" mean today? What in our heritage, which (as CS Song put it) began as "a stupendous effort on the part of the Reformers, our Calvin included, to construct local theologies in Europe in the 16th century",⁶ can guide us to construct and reconstruct local theologies in six continents and a thousand places for the 21st century? What does the Lord require of us today? The prophet said, "Go in peace", Sarah reminds us. No ticket is required, the door is open, as it is Christ who invites us in and sends us out and changes us, and our churches, in the process. *Ecclesia reformata, sed semper reformanda.*

Working together as different Reformed churches

Jackson: *I found it simple. Simon from the Reformed Presbyterian Church and I went to visit a family and we worked well as a team. We are not really different. And I discovered from our joint study that not only the New Testament but also the Old Testament teaches us about mission.*

Francis: *Being together this weekend has taught me a lot. It made us more open and you end up feeling that you need one another.*

George: *When Nelson from the Evangelical Free Church and I went into the community together we shared different experiences of how we normally work, and it taught me some new things. I liked it.*

Partnership is one of those skills in life that can only be learned by doing it. It is like walking, which can only be learned by walking and falling down and getting up again, or loving, which cannot be learned from a book but only by loving and being loved. So too working together – be it as people of different faiths, denominations or branches of Reformed – needs to be experienced in order to discover that indeed we complement one another; that it is in interaction with the other that we become more and more the one we are meant to be. Of course, to open oneself to the other and to overcome one's fear of the unfamiliar, takes courage. Likewise, to recognize that the other complements oneself is easier for individual participants during an intense weekend together than for entire churches complete with structures and legacies from the past. Yet it is as individual members and pastors become convinced that none of our churches and traditions is complete without the others, that mission in unity processes of churches begin. And it is as members and pastors begin to interact, that they can become convinced that they are not complete without the others.

Peace: *I have experienced the oneness of the body of Christ. When on Saturday we invited someone to come to church, I didn't point them to my church but to this church, and I'm happy if they'll find a home here, and Jesus.*

Discovering our vocation on the way

The Uganda mission in unity process is in some ways an extraordinary story. A church history of less than three decades; charismatic leaders who discovered something important in the Reformed heritage and began to share and develop it; an engagement in society fuelled by a theology from the bottom-up; scattered Reformed communities which gradually discover one another, or rediscover one another as the issues over which they split are no longer there; and a commitment to now give further expression to the unity and mission of the one Body. The road ahead is long, of course, and as everywhere where unity processes are taking shape, the danger of focusing more on a structure for common mission than on that common mission itself is not imaginary. But it would appear that, as with the Israelites of old, it is in living their vocation that the Ugandan churches are discovering what their vocation really is. Or, to

paraphrase Calvin, it is in the process of doing God's will, of concretely engaging in mission, that we will gradually find out more what God's will is, what our mission and our church and our unity should look like, what are the walls to break down and what are the bridges to build.⁷ Mission in unity requires learning by doing. The mission action-reflection weekend group discovered that, to the benefit of us all.

Notes

1. In 1962, Kenyans established a congregation of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in the north of Uganda, but legally this is not yet a Ugandan church, even though in practice they participate fully in the MIU process.
2. The participants were: James Yiga (Presbyterian Church in Uganda); Charles Busiingye, Simon Kajjimu, Peace Kiconco, Hosea Nelson Kyasooka, Sarah Kyasooka, Edward Musinguzi, George Mulindwa (Reformed Presbyterian Church of Uganda); Francis Amitu, Peter Muwonge, Prossy Nankye, Jennifer Nalimu, Jackson Serunkuma, Nelson Wangwabi, Helen Wamala (Kampala Evangelical Free Church); and Beatrice Nengoni (Christian Reformed Church in East Africa).
3. As developed, for example, at the United Theological College in Kingston, Jamaica in March 2002 and the WCC/CWM/CEVAA/UEM missiology consultation in London, UK in May 2002.
4. See in this respect also Jung Young Lee, "The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking. A possible Method for Ecumenical Theology", in *International Review of Mission*, Volume 60, July 1971, pp.363-370. Lee argued for a more inclusive way of thinking about polarities than is possible within the often absolutist and exclusivist framework of western Christian thought. While written 30 years ago, Lee's point still seems very relevant for today.
5. For example, during the 2002 MIU consultation, two visiting evangelists from the United Kingdom were invited to bring a greeting but instead launched into a sermon which stereotyped all Muslims as the "enemy" of God and the church, and consequently called upon all Christians to "fight the enemy".
6. Choan-Seng Song, "Do This in Memory of Jesus. The Root of the Reformed Heritage", in *Gospel and Cultures. Reformed Perspectives*. Studies from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches 35, 1996, p.23.
7. Calvin, *Institutes* I, 6.2: "Omnis recta cognitio Dei ab oboedientia nascitur" (all true knowledge of God comes from obedience).

Living without walls Mission in the rupture

Peter Cruchley-Jones

Opening reflections

Imagine you were a minister with a new church building, and you turned to the holy book of a holy people to discover God leaving the temple. Ezekiel writes:

Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. And the glory of the Lord ascended from the middle of the city, and stopped on the mountain east of the city. The spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen left me. And I told the exiles all the things that the Lord had shown me.

(Ezek 11.22-25)

Imagine too if that new building had no boundary wall separating it from neighbour and street, but the congregation wanted very much to have a boundary wall to keep litter and loiterers out. And in that situation imagine you were to turn to the sacred texts of an elect faith and go on to read in Ezekiel 12:

The word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, you are living in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, who have ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house. Therefore, mortal, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight; you shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile; and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who go into exile. Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry the baggage through it. In their sight you shall lift the baggage on your shoulder, and carry it out in the dark; you shall cover your face, so that you may not see the land; for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel.

I did just as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day, as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands; I brought it out in the dark, carrying it on my shoulder in their sight. (Ezek 12.1-7)

Ezekiel stirred up trouble for me, as did many of the exile stories (though they did not prevent the building of a boundary wall that was decorative, costly and ineffective at keeping out litter and loiterers). This article comes out of the trouble the Old Testament exile material has caused me and the churches

amongst whom I was working. It also comes out of the new and far-reaching perspective of these stories and those churches.

How do we read these exilic texts in a discussion about crossing boundaries? Can we in the West still address mission and unity from a settled ecclesiology of the elect? Walter Eichrodt comments on the grim irony of God's choice of the Babylonians as the ones to cleanse the temple Yahweh abandons: "Yahweh chooses precisely those men who are most infected with guilt as the executioners who carry out his sentence, so as to repay thoroughly the human profanation of his jewel [the temple] and to strike at Israel's overweening pride in its very tenderest spot."¹

If Yahweh can adopt the Babylonians as he rejects the Israelite remnant, what point is there in our safe and settled boundaries? Can we trust in the ancient cosmology of the elect in which there is God, his chosen people, and a sinful world? Thus the exile stories alert us to a history of rupture between God and his people, where God breaks out of (and is driven out by) ecclesiology. Is there some indication in the symbolic act of Ezekiel that we are to break out of our own boundaries and live as exiles, as homeless people in new dependence on a relocated Spirit of God?

This is to introduce major missiological questions. In missiology we have become accustomed to talk of the *missio Dei* (the mission of God), to saying that God is fundamentally missionary.² Through the work of Karl Barth and others, mission began to be seen primarily as an activity of God himself asserting that the kingdom of God will come (is coming) through the action of God alone. Thus was revisited the classical Trinitarian doctrine of the *missio Dei*, the idea of God the Father sending the Son into the world, and the Son sending the Spirit. This was expanded by the missionary conferences of the 1950s and since to include the Spirit sending the church into the world.

Mission is primarily the activity of God in the world; the church is an instrument in that work, a participant in God's initiative, a partner in God's mission. "To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love."³ The idea of the *missio Dei* has taken root in virtually all the Christian traditions and allowed an ecumenical platform for mission to be explored and even practised.

It seems to me that if God is present, he is present in mission. In other words, if God's around here, he's up to something. Furthermore, if God is absent, then he's definitely up to something somewhere else, and we might ask, "What are we doing here?"

This helps us to remember that mission is not something we just stumble over, it is something into which we are sent. As Jürgen Moltmann says, "mission is the all embracing term for the sending of Christ and for the sending of the people who have entered into his discipleship, and thus Christianity is in its essence a missionary religion".⁴

Here immediately is the missiological significance of exile, for, like mission, it too is a sent experience.

Ely and exile

This exile critique emerges out of the experiences and insights of the Ely pastorate churches with whom I worked from 1992 to 2001.⁵ The pastorate comprises three churches, two Reformed and one Methodist, and came into being in 1981. Its purpose is to share ministry and be in mission together in Ely, a large, socio-economically deprived housing estate in Cardiff, the capital city of Wales.

In the 1996 local-government-sponsored report on poverty in Wales, Ely was placed in the top five poorest areas on five out of six indicators, and scored the highest for family poverty. It is a community with a longstanding poor reputation in the city of Cardiff, a reputation that does not accurately portray many of the people living on the estate. I grew tired of the shocked and sympathetic looks I would get from church members elsewhere in Cardiff when they heard I ministered in Ely. There are powerful and destructive forces at work in Ely and there are people who seek to resist and transform those forces. However, it is a difficult environment in which to be a declining church.

Indeed it has always been a difficult environment. Sociologists of religion point out that communities of the urban poor have long been communities that very few UK churches (except perhaps the Catholics) relate well to. Indeed, most traditions have been deserting them for some time.⁶ So, for example, within the South Wales district of the United Reformed Church, the smallest church is Saintwell URC, one of the Ely pastorate churches, with a membership of 14. The largest is Beulah URC, in an affluent professional village-suburb of Cardiff, with a membership of 260. (Ironically, this is the church I moved to in 2001.)

In the years I served the pastorate churches in Ely, it became clear that we felt very disoriented and no longer “at home”. This was partly due to experiences within the estate, being victims of crime and vandalism, but also to the wider sense of loss spawned by the declining significance of the church in British society. As one lady put it, “Now you’re the odd one out if you go to church”. We feel odd and exposed, coupled with a tendency to disengage from the present, to lament it. As one elderly lady told me, “The world is a terrible place, it was much better during the war.”

We recognized this sense of loss, disengagement and lament, and wondered how we might explore it from a biblical perspective. The stories that named our pain, our loss, but also challenged us and shook us up, were the Old Testament stories of exile. On the surface, these stories may seem to comfort us, to encourage us to maintain ever clearer boundaries against the Babylonian world. They may move us to root out the traitors within, the ones who are not “like us” – be they the liberals, or the evangelicals, or the young ones, or the old ones. But is exile only about purifying God’s people, making them a smaller and smaller

elect? One can read it in this way, but self-preferential reading is not a good approach. It presumes to place boundaries around the mission of God.

In Ely, Hosea reminded us we could not choose a self-preferential reading of the text, and especially of the notion and identity of God's people. Nor should we preclude the possibility of God acting in provocative and unexpected ways.

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord." So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. And the Lord said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the Lord said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God; I will not save them by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horses, or by horsemen." When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said, "Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people and I am not your God." (Hos 1. 2-9.)

There are different voices raised in the Old Testament exile. Some see its causes in Israel's idolatry, some see it in terms of Israel's oppression of the poor. All seem to recognize and expose a covenantal complacency. This complacency had two strands. Firstly, an assumption that to be God's people is to inherit a frozen ethnicity, a condition that is once and for all, unshakeable and immovable, blessed forever as God's people. Secondly, there is the presumption that the praxis of God's people is primarily ecclesiological. It focuses on the agenda and institution of the religious machine. Thus the internal structures and mechanisms of the People take pre-eminence – especially, in Israel's case, the temple, and in ours the church. But Jeremiah in his temple sermon strips this complacency bare:

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." (Jer 7.3-4)

Amos and Isaiah also participate in dismantling Israel's self-preferential reading. "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? says the Lord. Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" (Amos 9.7) Amos seems to accept the high claims of Yahweh, only to turn them against Israel. Thus in the oracles (1.3-2.16), Amos speaks Yahweh's harsh judgement against the nations, only to deliver the harshest judgement on Judah (2.4-5) and Israel (2.6-16). "Amos

seeks to undermine the assured mono-ideology of Israel (mono-Yahweh, mono-Israel, perhaps mono-Jerusalem) by introducing a radical pluralism into the character of Yahweh, a pluralism that subverts Israel's self-confident mono-faith."⁷

The rhetoric of the questions in Amos 9.7 is to suggest that the Ethiopians, Philistines and the Arameans are like Israel, but the whole ideological development of Israel is to say they are not like us at all. Amos does not deny Israel's self-identity as a people of the exodus. He denies only the monopolistic claim made as the only exodus subject of the only exodus event by the only exodus God.⁸

Isaiah sees the same grounds for ultimate plurality when he foresees the day of the Lord: "On that day Israel will be *the third* with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, '*Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage*.'" (Is 19.24-25.)⁹

We too have a safe and settled cosmology, in which the church is inserted between God and world.¹⁰ Thus we too have presumed to have a lasting place, a preferential role in the story of God's grace, we are in Newbigin's complacent view the locus for God's mission.¹¹ But, exile irrupts into this. Ezekiel points to the dynamic locus for God, situated in part in the temple, but then removed from the temple and heading to the East. It seems to me engagement with the world is the locus for God's mission; as with the exile material it is a locus that will place God in opposition to "his people" (*sic*).

This led us in Ely to reconsider ourselves as church, to offer a more honest view that would not allow us to hide behind self-preferential ecclesiology in the face of God's subversive missiology. This resulted in the writing of three 'creeds', and I offer one here for reflection on an honest ecclesiology for mission in unity, not just with other churches but with God and with God's other partners.

1. **Leader:**

God knows what it's like to live in Ely...

He knows what it's like to live in a divided society,

but he also knows that "belonging" can overcome division,
and that variety can create colourful lives.

He knows what it's like to be rejected

because of where you live,

to be seen as different,

an outcast,

but he also knows ...

how strong are those who have to cope with rejection.

And how special.

2. All:

We believe you live in Ely,
that you are found here in us,
and in our community,
in our struggle with poverty
and our determination to keep our dignity.

3. We believe Ely lives in you:
the source of life, the light of the world.

4. We believe you cared enough to come yourself,
but we also believe you require
something of us in return.
You call us to show compassion and kindness,
unselfishness and to be humble.
You emptied yourself and ask us to empty ourselves.

5. We believe that as churches we are meant to treat
all men and women the same,
but we still need to abandon our prejudices.
We believe we are called to tackle
the problems of our time and place,
but all too often we don't know where to start
and we're put off by their enormous scale.

6. We believe that as churches we are meant to be signs of hope,
but are often signs of hopelessness.
We believe that as churches we are here to
touch the lonely, the hurting, and the weak,
but we let lesser priorities get in the way.

7. But we also believe that all things are possible,
for you and your people
because we are not alone,
we live in your world.

This creed begins with an alternative vision of difference, even as it recognizes the pain of being different. Where others would see weakness and shame in a place like Ely, this creed seeks to see strength and value. The poor are not to be despised, but to be admired for how they cope with poverty.¹² This is further underlined by clearly asserting Ely as a place of God's presence (even if we

don't assert that for the church) and asserting Ely people's struggle with poverty as a signifier of God's presence.¹³ This creed comes the closest to the liberation theologian's conception of the communities of the poor being privileged places of epistemology.¹⁴ It suggests a mutual indwelling of God and Ely: as God lives in Ely, so Ely lives in God.¹⁵

This paradigm of indwelling is developed in a section exploring the incarnation, and the consequent responsibility that falls on God's people.¹⁶ This is the ideal, the expectation that God has, as it were. But the creed goes on to face a less ideal reality.¹⁷ There is a dialectic at work, a recognition of the struggle faith represents. God's people are called to be signs of hope but are found to be living as signs of hopelessness. But the failure this represents is not the end. The creed closes with the assertion that this is God's world.¹⁸ God still lives in it and does not leave us alone. In this way our lives and history are still open to the initiative of the subversive presence of God. But it does not reimpose the church, and certainly not the agenda of the church, missionary or otherwise. This irrupted ecclesiology cannot make grand claims for itself. We cannot assume a once-for-all stance, but instead require a dynamic that keeps us close to our subversive sense of what God is doing in our world. Thus we need to be open to the unexpected partners through whom God may choose to work, because we cannot presume to say that God works only through the church.

In the rupture

This creed seems to take its place in the rupture we felt in Ely between ecclesiology and God, while still seeing it as a place for mission. In Ely, this mission in the rupture meant accepting the margins; seeking new ecumenical partnerships; fresh and lay-led theological expression; and actively destabilizing ecclesiological structures and presumptions.

Accepting the margins

Our ecclesiological boundaries seem to be bound up with locating ourselves at the centre. This may be a cosmological centre, the church as the locus for God, as Newbigin sees it. It may be an ethical/ontological centre, the church as the people of God, the elect, the leaven in the lump. It may be a geographical centre, the church as a community centre, or parish centre. We inhabit a space to which we expect people to come. So the irruption of exile invites us to make ourselves not at home: to find our vocation outside the gate in places no one wants to come.

The story of churches in marginal places like Ely is that western Christianity seems tenuous and uncomfortable at the margins.¹⁹ But Orlando E Costas argues that this is the place to be the church.²⁰ Drawing from the letter to the Hebrews, Costas suggests that Christ's death outside the gate established a new place of

salvation.²¹ In the Old Testament the temple was the place of sacrifice and sanctification, of salvation. It was the mercy seat, the place of God's presence. But Jesus moves the centre to the periphery. Jesus' death on Golgotha moves the place of sacrifice, sanctification and salvation outside the gate among the outcast and disenfranchised, precisely in the rupture the church has experienced between itself and the seats of comfort and power. Yet from this new and admittedly uncomfortable place, new perspectives and partnerships can grow.

*New ecumenical partnerships*²²

This meant seeking out and sharing in partnership with agencies beyond the church in Ely. These partnerships ranged between grassroots community groups, social services, adult education providers and community arts organizations.²³ It meant crossing our boundaries and, interestingly, theirs, as they asked us: "Why are you interested in this then? Churches don't get involved in this." "You're not like other churches/ministers I've met." However, it gave us a new opportunity to be involved in God's transforming mission as it seeks to break out on an economically impoverished council estate in the UK. The partnerships were eclectic and sometimes we came as guests, sometimes as initiators. But all were focused on ecumenical notions of life in all its fullness for an estate thought by some to be a dump and a dangerous place.

Fresh and lay-led theological reflection

In the first year of my involvement in Ely we spent a lot of time talking about where we were going and what issues we faced. It became clear we faced a missiological crisis: what should we do in Ely? A liturgical crisis: what shall we sing about in Ely? And a theological crisis: where is God in Ely? Despite some people having attended church for sixty or seventy years and in that time heard nearly one hundred sermons a year, nearly everyone felt unable to respond to these questions, people felt inarticulate when it came to theology and faith and belief. It seems that this "inarticulacy" has emerged because of the barriers of ecclesiology. Firstly, theology is the minister's job. You preach, we listen (perhaps). Secondly, ecclesiology has almost rubbed out the contemporary horizon of biblical and theological hermeneutics. No one feels equipped, in any but the most personal of terms, to apply the biblical story to our contemporary story. The world out there is so alien to our preferential cosmology that this cosmology only makes sense behind the walls. Ecclesiology has accommodated people to a bifocal world: faith on the one hand, life on the other, light in here, dark out there.

As the creed above shows, we took a decision to cross those boundaries. It became our practice to write prayers and reflections to use in worship or at home for Advent and Holy Week. All entirely or extensively lay-led and produced. Bible study grew. Every week during the eighteen-month ministerial

vacancy of my colleague, Bible study produced the questions we would ask people to address in worship on Sunday. The worship I could not lead was led by lay preachers or lay worship groups, and people became used to participating rather than passively hearing. This approach led to thoughtful discussions that dismantled important ecclesiological barriers at communion. Each church decided that the Lord's table should be open to all, children included. It became a sign of our constant need to remember Jesus and convert again to our neighbour. It was also a sign to us that the fellowship is never complete, the door cannot be closed, we should leave room for more to come and share. And in ways that cannot be explored here, communion offered us a more sophisticated way to talk about God's presence with us and absence from us.²⁴

Destabilizing ecclesiology

Ecclesiology often becomes how we learn to live in a church cage and think it better than the world outside. If mission is about crossing boundaries, ecclesiology is then about extending them and enforcing them, even if they are boundaries seemingly redesigned and modernized to look less stark. By this I mean we can fool ourselves into doing ecclesiology instead of mission, there is a form of "mission" that is really "acquisitive ecclesiology". By which I mean, we dedicate ourselves to making the church more attractive, nicer, more user-friendly. In this way, the church grows, rather than the kingdom. This continual re-branding of the way of the cross as the way of the church is "flattering to deceive", but mostly it is self-deception. Thus, I find the way between ecclesiology and mission an almost impossible path to plot, so insidious is ecclesiology. But clergy finances notwithstanding, ecclesiology is to be destabilized. It is also to be named, and not dressed up as mission. Ecclesiology is the active self-interest of the church, mission is the active self-giving of God: they are not to be confused, let alone equated. Ecclesiology is always at risk of feeding our self-importance, be it in God's plan or in the life of the institution.

When we realize the exile was God's action against Zion, not Babylon, that God was rejecting the culture of Zion, temple, king, not the culture of Babylon, we cannot devote ourselves to the furtherance of the church, or see the preaching of the gospel as the extending of the church. If God can reject the culture of Zion, he can reject the culture of Zoar, Bethel, St Teilo's and so on.²⁵ In Ely, this meant that we looked for our missiological cues in our community and in our biblical story, not in our attitudes, traditions and self-interests. Ironically, it also meant new ecclesiologies, church meetings that were open to all, including meetings to discuss and vote for a new minister. It led us to experiment with worship styles that gathered people around questions and the biblical text rather than clergy-led liturgies and answers. In this way, it also meant crossing several internal boundaries that could free us to move more easily and further, like Ezekiel at our start.

But let it be clear mission in the rupture is painful. The movement away from ecclesiology as our focus and purpose is always difficult to maintain. Even as we share in mission in unity, there is still the possibility that this is just ecclesiology squared. But it seems to me from Ely that if our experience of decline and our sense of disorientation can rightly fit into the exile story there is no need or point in trying to preserve the boundaries of a place that no longer conveys God's grace. Instead, in all vulnerability, we can try, like Jeremiah, to enter the new place we inhabit, singing the Lord's song, listening for his voice, and seeking new signs of his presence in mission beyond the confines of the church. This might teach us also to live Zechariah's vision of a city without walls.²⁶

Notes

1. Walter Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1996), p.104.
2. It is to the fore in WARC's thinking, as one can see in previous issues of *Reformed World*. See Bert Hoedemaker, "Mission, unity and eschaton: a triadic relation" in *Reformed World* Vol.50, No.4 (December 2000), pp.174ff.
3. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), p.370.
4. Jürgen Moltmann, "The Mission of the Spirit, the Gospel of Life", in T Yates, ed., *Mission: an Invitation to God's Future*. (Cliff College Academic Series, 1999), pp.19ff.
5. For a more extensive version of this critique, see Peter Cruchley-Jones, *Singing the Lord's song in a strange land? Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity Series Vol.123* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001).
6. Robin Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (London: SPCK, 1993); Steve Bruce, *Religion in Modern Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 1995); Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World*(Oxford: OUP, 1996).
7. Walter Brueggemann, *Texts that Linger, Words that Explode* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 2000), p.93.
8. *Ibid.*, p.97.
9. My italics, for effect. How can a people with a theology of election be *third*?
10. We might call this a doctrine of election, we might also add to it a distinct sense of responsibility as well as privilege, but it is still a preferential cosmology. For a missiological discussion of election from a Reformed perspective, see Donald McKim, *Major themes in the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp.361f.
11. See Lesslie Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1997), pp.116-127; and my critique in T Foust, G Hunsberger, A Kirk, W Ustrof, eds., *A Scandalous Prophet* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).
12. See paragraph 1, opening leader part.
13. See paragraph 2, beginning "We believe you live in Ely..."

14. See Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987), Part III: Dialectic of Theory and Praxis, pp.159ff; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), especially chapter 1, “God’s revelation and proclamation in history”, pp.3-22; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984).
15. See paragraph 3, beginning “We believe Ely lives in you”.
16. See paragraph 4.
17. Paragraphs 5 and 6.
18. Paragraph 7.
19. They are often small churches, sustained by people who come in from suburban areas outside. But on top of the church’s longstanding experience of discomfort in areas of poverty, the church also faces marginalization from her former comfortable centres.
20. Orlando E Costas, *Christ outside the Gate: Mission beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1982), pp.188f.
21. “Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.” (Heb 13.12)
22. *Oikumene*, meaning the whole inhabited earth.
23. One might observe (after the presidential elections in France) that in 1983, when Ely was targeted as a possible constituency by the far-right British National Party, this partnership approach included anti-racist political partnerships. In the subsequent election, the BNP polled very low and lost its deposit. Poor white communities do not have to be racist and intolerant.
24. For the full treatment of this see *Singing the Lord’s Song in a strange land?*, chapters five, six and seven.
25. These are common church/chapel names in Wales.
26. See especially Jer 29.1ff. and his letter to the exiles encouraging them to look afresh at their strange new context and the postexilic vision of Zech 2.1-5. What would this do to ecclesiology?

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