



## **The Reformed church and its witness today**

### **A tentative survey**

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#### ● **Introductory**

What does the family of Reformed churches represent today? What is really meant by the adjective "reformed"? As we have come together here in Geneva to reflect on the mission and witness of the Reformed churches in the contemporary world, we cannot evade these questions. Only if we know where we come from and who we are, shall we be able to envisage more clearly our future way together.

Admittedly, when these questions are raised in a group of Reformed theologians today the result is usually a certain embarrassment. Most Reformed Christians have only the vaguest notions of the Reformed tradition. At most they will be familiar with the state of the Reformed churches in the contemporary world only in the broadest outlines and, if they are asked what being "Reformed" means, they will for the most part find it extremely difficult to give a precise answer. As someone recently remarked: "It is typically Reformed not to know what is typically Reformed". How are we to explain this ignorance and uncertainty?

A good many reasons could be advanced but the most important of them is probably the reluctance of Reformed Christians even to ask the question of what is "typical" in the Reformed tradition. For surely this question inevitably sets us off on the wrong track. Surely the question the church should be asking instead is how it is to proclaim the gospel in the contemporary world.

Undoubtedly there is some justification for this caution. To ask what it means to be "Reformed" is in fact a dangerous question. It can tempt us to dwell fondly on our own tradition instead of listening for God's living Word. Yet the question has to be asked. Not to ask it would be no less dangerous. For only as we are well-informed about the tradition and present state of our own church are we really free to listen for God's living Word and to advance together under its guidance. An adequate answer to the question what it means to be "Reformed" is only possible if our starting point is the present state and witness of the Reformed churches.

The reference back to the 16th century Reformation is also indispensable, of course. The origins of the Reformation tradition in Wittenberg, Zurich and Geneva have to be remembered.

It is in that period that the fundamental dynamics are to be found. But the reference to the past alone is not enough. What the Reformed churches are today has been determined also by other factors. The Reformed tradition was not frozen in the 16th and 17th centuries but has moved on since then. It has lived through the experiences of Reformed orthodoxy, pietism, rationalism, revivalism, the missionary movement and secularization. All this has also to be taken into account. But the question to which we must address ourselves above all is what moves the Reformed churches today. What do they see as their mission and task today?

One important characteristic of the Reformed family is its great diversity. The roots of this diversity lie in different historical developments but still more in the distinctive cultural, social and political situations in which the Reformed family has had to bear its witness. To answer the question what it means to be "Reformed" we have first to establish some picture of how the Reformed churches are facing up to this task.

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### ● **Who are the Reformed churches today?**

Churches of the Reformed family are found today in almost every part of the world. The number of Reformed Christians in the world today is usually estimated at about seventy million. Figures of this kind are an uncertain business, of course. The final estimate depends largely on the criteria employed. Most of the Reformed churches are members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) (about 160 in all). It is important to note the following points:

#### **a) The World Alliance of Reformed Churches includes different traditions**

The common origin of all the Reformed churches is the Reformation. The "Reformed" tradition grew out of the reform carried out in the Swiss cities - Zurich (1519), Basel (1528) and Geneva (1535/36). The outstanding figure of John Calvin in Geneva left a decisive imprint on this Reformed tradition. His theology, as embodied in his constantly revised work, the *Institutio religionis christianae*, has continued to be of fundamental importance for all Reformed churches right down to the present time. The term "reformed" was for a long time employed to describe all the churches which went over to the reform movement, including those which adhered to Luther and his teaching.

As the estrangement between the Lutheran and the Swiss churches hardened, however, the term "reformed" came to be used exclusively of the churches taking their lead from Zwingli, Bullinger and Calvin.

**Three types** can be distinguished within the Reformed family of churches.

Firstly, there are the Reformed churches of continental Europe: in Switzerland, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary and Romania. Also included in this first type are the pre-reformation movements, the Waldensians in Italy and the Bohemian Brethren in Czechoslovakia. The Waldensians identified themselves officially with the Reformation at the Synod of Chanforan

(1532). The confessions of faith which came to play a special role in the territories of these churches were the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) .

The second type are the Presbyterian churches. These have their roots in the Anglo-Saxon world. Calvin's teaching early made its way to England and via John Knox to Scotland. The powerful emphasis on the presbyterian order (collegial leadership) in the controversy with the episcopally ordered church led to the use of the term "presbyterian" to define these churches. Most of the Presbyterian churches recognized the Westminster Confession (1647) as the basis of their doctrine and preaching.

The third type are the Congregationalist churches. These, too, emerged in the Anglo-Saxon world in the conflict with the established church. They emphasized the independence and authority of the gathered congregation in each place. Originating in England, they spread to America through groups of refugees and emigrants and as a result of the missionary movement established a footing in many other countries as well. They have strong reservations about formal confessions of faith as such. The Savoy Declaration (1658), a slightly revised version of the Westminster Confession, may be regarded as their confession of faith, in this qualified sense.

WARC was founded by Presbyterian and Reformed churches in 1875. The International Congregational Council was founded a few years later in 1879. The two world confessional bodies united in 1970 to form the present WARC. This union of two world confessional bodies was an important event. For the first time in the history of the ecumenical movement, two confessional traditions were able to abandon their separate existence and to make their way together into the future.

The union imposed on the new World Reformed Alliance the responsibility of combining the different emphases and concerns of the two traditions in a creative reciprocal relationship. Even today, this task has still only been partly fulfilled. Broad-ranging though the fellowship within WARC undoubtedly is, it is essential to remember that on the other hand not all churches of the Reformed ethos are embraced within the Alliance. Two groups in particular call for mention here: the churches of the fundamentalist type and the churches which still regard the confessions of the 16th and 17th centuries as unqualifiedly binding for today. A number of churches of the second type founded the "Reformed Ecumenical Synod" in 1946. The churches forming part of this international organization are mostly of Dutch origin (they number about 30 in all) . The presence of a separate organization of Reformed churches at the world level represents a special challenge to WARC. The Reformed churches are not entitled to accept this situation as final. They have an obligation to do all they can to overcome this division as quickly as possible.

### **b) Two thirds of all Reformed Christians today are to be found in Asia, Africa and Latin America**

The Reformed tradition originated in Europe and subsequently put down roots in America. But the vast majority of Reformed churches today are found in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Over two thirds of the 160 member churches of WARC are in three continents. The proportions are likely to intensify in this direction in the future. The churches which have shown the most rapid growth in recent times are those in Indonesia, Korea, Taiwan, as well as in many African countries.

This new picture is the result of the missionary movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. An active part was played in this movement by the various Reformed, Presbyterian and Congregational churches of Europe. Emigration waves also led to the founding of new churches. Churches came into existence which were shaped, on the one hand, by the tradition of the "mother church" and, on the other, by the particular context in which they lived. Today all these churches are independent. This raises the question of how "old" and "young" churches are to live together in a universal fellowship. We are only in the very early stages in the achievement of this vision.

Until quite recently, responsibility for the work of WARC lay almost exclusively with the churches of Europe and North America. Repeated attempts have been made, of course, to deepen the sense of the worldwide character of the Reformed family. Since the fifties of this century, the general councils of WARC have no longer been held exclusively in the western world (São Paulo 1959, Nairobi 1970). But efforts in this direction have had only limited success.

The sense of belonging to a universal fellowship remains all too underdeveloped within the Reformed churches down to the present time. The Ottawa general council of 1982 brought about a change in this respect. Representatives of the churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America acquired then much more influence in the leadership of the World Alliance.

### **c) The tendency to division in the Reformed churches**

A glance at the world map of the Reformed churches shows that in many countries there is more than one Reformed church. This fact illustrates the deeply divided character of the Reformed family. There are various reasons for this. One important reason is the existence within it of the various types already mentioned. The missionary work of Reformed, Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches often resulted in the formation of different churches in one and the same country. But the main reason for this division lies in the tendency of Reformed churches to divide.

Time and time again in the course of their history, conflicts over doctrine and church order have been "solved" by division into separate churches. Divisions of this kind have even taken place in quite recent times (e.g. in Holland and Korea). Over against this tendency to division, we find in the 20th century a movement in the direction of greater unity. Some Reformed churches have united or at least have begun negotiations with unity as their goal. After over a century of division, two Presbyterian churches in the USA have united to form one church, and a similar union is planned in Holland. In some countries a transconfessional union has been achieved: Reformed churches have united with churches of a different tradition and live on in united churches (Czechoslovakia 1918, Canada 1925, Thailand 1934, Philippines 1948, Zambia 1965, North India 1970, Australia 1977 and England 1981). These United churches constitute a fourth type in the Reformed family, alongside the Reformed, Presbyterian and Congregationalist types.

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### **● Three important characteristics of the Reformed tradition.**

Before we can answer the question of what we mean by "Reformed" in a positive and substantial sense, three preliminary points need to be made:

## **a) No new church**

The Reformers did not set out to found a new church but rather to renew the one church of Jesus Christ. The founding of a new church with a tradition of its own happened in spite of the purpose of the Reformers. It happened because the Reformation message was not heard and accepted by the whole church. I quote some words of Calvin:

"As to the charge they usually level against me forsaking the church, my conscience here is clear, unless of course someone who, seeing the soldiers routed and scattered and abandoning their ranks, raises the leader's standard and recalls them to their posts is to be branded a deserter To bring them together when thus scattered, I raised no foreign standard but that noble banner, O Lord, which is thine and which we must follow if we would be counted among thy people. Then I was attacked by those who, when they should have kept others to their ranks, instead led them astray... Whereupon grievous tumults arose and the contest flared up into disruption. Who was to blame for this, Lord, it is for thee to decide. For my own part, I have always protested my zeal for unity. Mine, however, was a unity of the church which should begin with thee and end with thee..." (John Calvin, Reply to Sadolet, 1539).

What conclusion is to be drawn from this point? Simply this, that the Reformed church must keep that original purpose in mind today. It must always bear its witness within the horizon of Christianity as a whole. If it were to lose this perspective, it would become a sect. No one who keeps this original dynamic of the Reformation steadily in view will ever succumb again to the temptation to define the Reformed tradition in negative terms. How often are Reformed Christians found defining themselves by explaining that they are not Catholics. How often they identify what is "typically Reformed" as the departure from the Catholic tradition. But the essence of the Reformed tradition lies not in its contradiction of the Catholic church but its passionate concern to give the gospel its rightful place.

## **b) Permanent reformation**

The Reformed churches soon came to realize that the reformation was not something that had been completed once and for all. On the contrary, the church is a pilgrim people which must constantly be listening anew to God's voice. It has to be prepared for the danger of distortions and apostasy. It is not immune to error simply in virtue of being "Reformed". Out of this insight came the well-known dictum of the *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, which succinct phrase embodies the truth that the church must always be ready for fresh departures. The dictum does indeed become a dangerous one, of course, when it is distorted into a mere battle cry to be trotted out on every conceivable and inconceivable occasion. But no new reformation has ever yet been produced merely by the invocation of this principle as such. A too ready use of this dictum can even make us blind to the steps which are required of us today.

## **c) Confession and confessing**

The principle of permanent reformation is especially important in respect of the church's creed or confession. The Reformed churches embodied their convictions in credal statements, confessions of faith. But these confessions of faith are meant to assist the church in the confessing of its faith in each new situation as it arises. The church's creeds and confessions

are a tool designed to assist us in delivering the liberating message today.

The first thing to strike us in this connection is that the Reformed churches (unlike the Lutheran churches) did not establish just one specific confession of faith. The "Reformed" version of reformation found expression in a multiplicity of confessional statements which were left to stand side by side. Some Reformed churches expressly state that a number of such confessional documents are simultaneously binding for them.

The next point to strike us is that certain Reformed confessions (especially in the early days) refer explicitly to the need to remain receptive to new insights as we listen to what the Spirit says to us through Holy Scripture. The most important example of this is found in the preface to the Synod of Berne (1532) in which it is stated:

"But if something is forthcoming from our pastors or from any other quarter which leads us closer to Christ and which, in the light of God's Word, is more conducive to general concord and Christian love than the opinion here set down, we will gladly accept it and not obstruct the movement of the Holy Spirit, who drives us not backwards but always forwards towards the likeness of Jesus Christ our Lord. May he keep us all ever in his grace"

It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find that the Reformed churches today display this readiness to go beyond the confessions of faith formulated in the 16th and 17th centuries. While greatly respecting these confessions of faith and recognizing them as a source of indispensable insights, they also know that these same confessions have by no means said the last word.

A large number of Reformed churches have formulated new confessions of faith in fairly recent times. The following points are important here: affirmations which once seemed important recede into the background in these new confessions; one example here is the theme of predestination to which they make hardly any reference at all. On the other hand, questions which were formerly not the focus of attention now come to the forefront. Recent confessions of faith give much greater attention to the theme of the church and its commitment in society. For many Reformed churches today the rejection of apartheid and clear opposition to nuclear weapons have become credal issues calling for the clear confession of faith. They speak of a *status confessionis* having arisen. What do they mean by this?

Again and again it turns out that, at certain times and in certain situations, issues on which people could at first legitimately hold differing positions in good faith call here and now for a clear and unambiguous stance. Neutrality in respect of these issues would amount to the betrayal of the gospel. In this sense, black Christians in South Africa have described theological support of the system of apartheid to constitute a *status confessionis* and WARC at its general council in Ottawa in 1982 adopted the same position:

"This situation (sc. in South Africa) constitutes a *status confessionis* for our churches, which means that we regard this as an issue on which it is not possible to differ without seriously jeopardizing the integrity of our common confession as Reformed churches".

In the same year, leaders of the Reformed Alliance in the Federal Republic of Germany spoke in similar terms of nuclear weapons. According to the Reformed tradition, church authorities cannot decide for the churches; they

cannot therefore impose a *status confessionis* on the churches but can only declare it and summon them to it; it then remains to be seen whether or not the churches are ready to respond accordingly. This process is still continuing in respect both to apartheid and nuclear weapons.

The attitude to be adopted towards the classic confessions of faith has, of course, been an object of renewed controversy throughout history. Some of the divisions which have occurred were occasioned by this controversy. Some churches (for example, the Reformed churches of Switzerland) have completely abolished any obligation to accept the classic confessions of faith while at the same time making no effort to replace them by a new confession.

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### ● **What it means to be "Reformed": an attempt at a positive answer**

Against that background, let me now try to answer the question what it means to be "Reformed". A complete answer is ruled out from the outset, of course. All we can do is to select a few particularly important aspects. I confine myself here to six themes. Insights which are correct in themselves can easily be misunderstood. Nor has the Reformed tradition escaped this danger. There have been frequent examples of bias and distortion. In each of the six points, therefore, I shall also mention possible misunderstandings. The Reformed tradition can only be maintained in its purity if we remain alert to the dangers to which its positive emphases are exposed.

#### **a) Solus Christus**

Our salvation as human beings is found in Christ and in Christ alone. The Reformers insisted passionately on this truth. Here is the true core of the Christian message: God's will is to guide humanity, his creation, back to fellowship with himself. Two quotations, one long and one short, will serve to illustrate this emphasis:

"We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are contained in Christ (Acts 4.12) .We must take care, then, not to derive even the least part of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, the very name of Jesus teaches us it is "of Him" (1 Cor 1.30) .If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, it is in his sovereignty; if purity, it is in his conception; if grace, it is found in his nativity whereby he became in all points like as we are (Heb 2.17) that he might learn to feel our pain (Heb 4.15-5.2). If we seek redemption, it is in his sufferings; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if cancellation of the curse, in his cross (Gal 3.13); if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if cleansing, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of the kingdom of heaven, in his entrance into heaven; if defence, security, abundant supply of all blessings, we find them in his kingdom; if confident expectation of the judgement, in the authority given to Him to judge. In short, in Him is the plenitude of all blessings and it is from this fountain, therefore, that we are to drink our fill and from no other. For anyone not content with Him alone but driven hither and thither by all sorts of other hopes, even if looking especially to Him, nevertheless strays from the right path by letting some of his thoughts stray in a different direction. Unbelief of this kind can find no entrance into us whatever, of course, if once we have really known the unrivalled abundance of his blessings." (John Calvin 1509-1564, Institutes II, 16, 19)

The second quote is from the first question and answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647): "Q. What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever."

This strong emphasis on salvation in Christ can, of course, be misunderstood and has, in fact, been misunderstood. It can lead people to focus attention too exclusively on the human individual and his or her personal salvation and to lose sight of the dimension of the kingdom of God and his all-embracing justice.

### **b) The living Word**

Christ is God's living Word. In Him and through Him, God speaks to humanity. In the power of the Holy Spirit, he speaks to us still today. The church must do its utmost to secure recognition of the authority of this Word today. The Reformed church has always stressed the injunction: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col 3.16). Every individual person owes his or her life to the living Word of God: "*thy* sins are forgiven *thee*; rise up and follow me". The church in its entirety lives by this same Word.

Significantly enough, a favourite description of the church in the Reformed tradition is *creatura Verbi*, "creature of the Word".

"When, therefore, this Word of God (Scripture) is proclaimed by duly called preachers in the church today, we believe that God's Word itself is proclaimed and received by the faithful, but also that no other Word of God is to be invented, or expected from heaven; and now too we must heed the Word that is preached as such and not the minister who preaches it..." (from chapter I of the Second Helvetic Confession, 1566). "The holy Christian church, of which Christ alone is the head, is born of the Word of God and heeds not the voice of a stranger" (1st Berne Thesis of 1528) .

This liberating perspective can, of course, also lead to a narrowing of vision; the emphasis on the living Word can dwindle to an emphasis on words. Is it not the case, indeed, that the Reformed church has tended to become a lopsided church dominated by the sermon and verbal communication? In fact, the sacraments have been pushed into the background. Though it was Calvin's wish to introduce the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper, in many Reformed churches the celebration of the Lord's Supper is still infrequent even today. The fullness of life in God's presence is in danger of becoming truncated.

### **c) Sola scriptura**

Holy Scripture is the one reliable source which gives the church access to the message of salvation. The church must constantly orbit around Holy Scripture, therefore. Its whole life must be so ordered as to ensure that the Bible is read, studied, interpreted and, above all, heard and heeded. All new insights must be tested against this plumbline. The church must resist any temptation to rely on sources other than this source.

The Reformers emphatically resisted the view that the tradition of the church was such an additional source. The word of Scripture attests the living Word of God. But the word of Scripture is not identical with the living Word of God. The clear insistence on the *sola scriptura* in the Reformed tradition has often led to the mistaken idea that the word of Scripture and the living Word of God are identical. Fundamentalism accompanies the Reformed tradition as its shadow.

## **d) Congregation and ministries**

The church is present where God's Word is proclaimed, the sacraments administered and the congregation established in Christian discipleship under the Word. In this definition of the church, two things alike are stressed: the necessity of the ministry and the importance of the congregation. The Reformed tradition emphasizes the need of the church for the preaching ministry: in each congregation, preachers *verbi divini ministri* are needed to ensure that the Word may "richly dwell" in the congregation. Their task is to bring us back repeatedly to the living Word.

But there is also another emphasis in the Reformed tradition in respect of the ministry: the responsibility for proclamation and leadership is never exclusive to one individual but must always be exercised collegially. Calvin stressed the importance not only of the preacher but also of the ministry of elders (presbyters) and deacons. In the Reformed tradition, ministry is always in the plural. At the same time, the Reformed tradition also emphasizes the congregation. The church is primarily the congregation and its members. Every individual is to bring his or her gifts into the life of the congregation. Those who hold an office are the servants of the congregation. Their task is to help to ensure the fruition of the gifts of the congregation and all its individual members. They are not priests mediating God's presence. The New Testament uses the term "priest" only for Christ and for the congregation but not for those who hold an office. The Reformed tradition sets great store by the priesthood of *all* believers.

Let me quote here a statement, produced recently under the auspices of the "Swiss Evangelical Synod", which seeks to develop and define the idea of the priesthood of all believers in a typically Reformed way:

"We consider it most important in the present situation to reflect afresh on the concept of the "priesthood of all believers". What is this concept really affirming? It is insisting that for the visible emergence of the congregation everyone of its members with his or her gifts is indispensable. Each member with his or her gifts is a priest in a congregation of priests: a priest

- who makes intercession for neighbours and the world,
- who is a witness for Christ in his or her appointed place,
- who is available for those around him or her,
- for whom the miseries of the world are misery and who will not let them rest so long as human beings are starving and oppressed,
- who is willing to say No in Christ's name to the forces destructive of life,
- who sets trust in God over against a world dominated by fear,
- who accepts personal responsibility for the defense of God's good creation and for recognition of the bounds he has established for us".

(5th Lausanne Thesis: "Living Congregations: First Steps", 1984)

## **e) Synodal structures**

In view of the foregoing it is not surprising that the Reformed tradition attaches great importance to the local congregation and its authority. The church achieves visibility primarily "in each place",

wherever the Word is proclaimed and the sacraments administered and the congregation lives in deed and in truth. We do not first of all see the

church as a universal entity and then, secondly, its individual parts. On the contrary, the starting point is the local community. The universal church is understood as the community of the congregations.

The unity and solidarity of the congregations finds expression in synodical meetings of their representatives to decide matters of common concern. This synodical structure is typical of the Reformed churches. But is it a living reality? Do synods really deal with spiritual questions or do they confine themselves to the administrative supervision of the church's life? Above all, for all their grand talk of universal range and breadth, are not the Reformed churches in constant danger of remaining captives of an utterly parochial vision of the church's life?

### **f) The gospel applies to all areas of life**

Typical of the Reformed tradition is the determination to take the gospel message into the life of society and the world. Calvin saw that the gospel also had implications for the ordering of society and the city of Geneva in particular. He frequently made his views known to the city fathers on matters affecting justice and the interests of the poor and disadvantaged. If we are not afraid of the anachronism of the phrase, we could describe Calvin unhesitatingly as a "religious socialist".

A good account of how the Reformed tradition envisages the relationship between the gospel, church and society is found in the Barmen Theological Declaration of the Confessing Church in Germany in 1934. Important as the distinction between a "spiritual" and a "secular" realm may be in certain respects, it should not mislead us into confining the significance of the gospel to some purely "spiritual" sphere.

"Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor 1.30)

"As Jesus Christ is God's declaration of the forgiveness of all our sins, so, in the same way and with the same seriousness, he is God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through Him we obtain joyful deliverance from the godless bondage of this world to the free, grateful service of his creatures. We reject the false doctrine that there are areas of our life in which we belong not to Jesus Christ but to other masters, realms where we do not need to be justified and sanctified by Him."

In the course of history the Reformed churches have been beset by two temptations. On the one hand, they have been tempted to interpret the church's task in society as a messianic mission. One thinks for example of the influence of Reformed thinking on the sense of national mission in the USA, or of the devastating results of the messianic outlook of the Reformed whites in South Africa in the shape of the policy of apartheid in that country today. On the other hand, despite all the diametrically opposite impulses deriving from Calvin and his teaching, Reformed churches have also in certain circumstances succumbed to the temptation to become non-political.

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### **● How do the Reformed churches envisage their role in the ecumenical movement ?**

As we have seen, it was not the intention of the Reformers to establish a new church. What they strove for was reform within the one church. Seen in this light, the church must be ready and eager for dialogue and

cooperation with other churches. In one sense, the ecumenical movement is the continuation of the discussion which had been prematurely broken off in the 16th century. Certainly there is a certain hesitation on the part of some Reformed churches. While Reformed Christians were among the pioneers of the ecumenical movement, Reformed Christians are also to be found among those who stubbornly resist the ecumenical movement.

As we have seen, the Reformed tradition attaches supreme importance to the confession of faith in Christ and his message for the contemporary world.

Reformed churches have been and are ready for new acts of confession. The Reformed churches must therefore seek fellowship with other churches and the common confession of the faith together with them. To be sure, the controversies of earlier days also need to be thrashed out, but the central concern of the Reformed churches in the ecumenical movement today is our common *confessing* of Christ in the contemporary world. For this reason, the Reformed churches are also ready here and now to celebrate the Lord's Supper together with Christians of other confession. WARC expressly stated this position at the Princeton general council of 1954:

"The table of the Lord is his, not ours. We believe that we dare not refuse the sacrament to any baptized person who loves and confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour" (*The Reformed churches and the ecumenical movement*, 1954).

The church as the pilgrim people of God is still on its journey. It has not yet reached journey's end. It knows that God himself is guiding it and again and again reassembles it. In the memorable words of the Heidelberg Catechism, we believe "that out of the whole human race from the beginning of the world to its end, the Son of God by his Spirit and Word gathers, protects and preserves for himself in the unity of the truth and unto everlasting life a chosen community..."

We must allow God room to gather his people. He will not confine himself to confessional loyalties; we must therefore hold ourselves in readiness for his gathering of his people in unexpected ways. Just because the Reformed churches seek to be faithful to their heritage, they will therefore play their part in the ecumenical movement with this same readiness and expectation.

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