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Reformed Identity

Eberhard Busch

Reformed churches often have a problem to say what is typically Reformed. This embarrassment is the starting point of this article. But against this background Eberhard Busch wants to find an answer to the question what is Reformed identity.

1. Reformed embarrassment

Since a couple of years the question of “Reformed Identity” has gained more importance for the Reformed churches. Nowadays this is especially the result of bilateral talks or discussions with representatives of other denominations. In those meetings they were asked: “You know who we are - but what is typical for you, the *Reformed*?” They felt really embarrassed... Some answered, for instance, that Reformed identity is not characterised by any specific concept, but rather by its openness to ecumenical issues. Others answered that the different Reformed churches in the world are influenced by the different contexts in which they exist. But why are they *Reformed*? What is characteristic for them compared to Roman Catholics and Lutherans? They too are influenced in different places of the world by their different contexts, but at the same time, it is clear that they are Roman Catholics or Lutherans! In this situation I would hope that it is not the context that determines what it means to be *Reformed*, but that they belong - in their different contexts - to one of the Reformed churches.

Mostly the matter of identity becomes a topic when people are unsure about their identity. It seems that this matter is typical especially for the members of Reformed churches. There is no real problem for the Roman Catholic brothers and sisters who listen to the voice of the Vatican. And our Lutheran siblings look in their Book of Confessions of 1581 to know who they are. But for the Reformed there is a problem here, and maybe they are not longer Reformed, if the question of their Reformed identity is not an embarrassment for them. It is clear, however, that the Reformed Christians do not have such a visible head of the church as do the Roman Catholics, nor such a dominating Church Father as do the Lutherans, who have really received their name from him. Perhaps some Reformed churches in the different regions use old confessions like the Heidelberg Catechism or the Westminster Confession, but there is no Reformed confession with global validity nor such a collection of confessions which defines for all Reformed churches in the world what it means to be “Reformed”, nor does the 16th century have for them the same decisive importance as it has

for the Lutherans. In the Reformed world more new confessions were formulated in the last fifty years than in the 16th century.

This does not mean a weakness in confessing. On the contrary, as it is shown by the many new confessions in the worldwide Reformed family. But it means a denominational weakness of the Reformed churches. It signals that you do not necessarily have to be a Reformed Christian to be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore it was possible that in some places Reformed churches had no problem in joining with other churches, without fear of losing their traditional profile. And often Reformed people who move into a Lutheran region quickly become active members of the other church. Certainly, in our times other reasons exist why Christians lose their denominational origins. But this does not change the impression one gets: there is a specific Reformed opinion about the relativity of their own denomination.

In Germany, a strong movement emerged in the first decades of the 20th century among the Reformed churches which rediscovered enthusiastically its own tradition. It regretfully acknowledged the weakness of the Reformed church and valiantly tried to resist this weakness. I quote from articles in the Reformed Journal: The leaders are alarmed by the question: "Where can we still find Reformed churches and congregations?" Then the question is discussed: "Why is there a need for a Reformed presence in Germany?" But these great concerns are connected to a self-satisfied comfort: "A new Reformed spirit awakens in our country." In an odd parallel to the Luther Renaissance some Reformed people wanted to restore "Calvin". In 1926 their magazine wanted to ensure, "that the Reformed heritage of our fathers especially in Protestant Germany does not simply disappear, but shows its value beneath the great Lutheran heritage." What does it mean that "the heritage of our fathers" should not "*simply*" disappear? And the effort is strange to be the Lutheran "brothers" equal in how they relate to their heritage. So it seems that they wanted to fight for their tradition, too. But at the same time they always complained about the 'Lutheranisation' as being one of the main dangers for the Reformed, so that they found it necessary to fight against it. Their motto was "the Reformed interests" (reformierte Belange), which should be safeguarded. The movement was supported by noteworthy heads of the Reformed Church. But it needs to be noted that there were a lot of nice Reformed letters, but only a little Reformed spirit.

This became visible in the time of Hitler. Then representatives of that movement were still fighting for the "Reformed interests", but together with many adherents of Hitler in the Protestant Church. This happened at a time, when it was necessary to counter the *Christian* confession with the brown-shirt ideology, which forced its power also on Christian heads. In this way they would have shown Reformed *spirit*. They fought for the rebirth of the Heidelberg

Catechism, but they did not take seriously the tenet that the church does not gather, defend, and preserve itself, because this all is done by Christ (question 54). It was a mistake that they did not put the question of the ecclesial survival in the hands of God, but took it into their own hands, and so the word of Jesus Christ was forgotten (Matthew 6:25): “Take no thought for your life.” It was a mistake that they dedicated their Christian life to care of their heritage, instead of being Reformed witnesses of the gospel.

It seems that denominational weakness belongs to the characteristics of the Reformed denomination. This weakness does not mean that there is a deficiency, nor that its members are weary of it when they become aware of this matter. On the other hand, when they feel ashamed of it and when they want a religious system in which they only have to look into a book from the 16th century to know what to do today, then their concern becomes a very rigid matter, and then they themselves are not happy with their Reformed theology. It is my thesis that freedom belongs indispensably to Reformed Christianity, also in relation to its own form of Christianity. So they like to live in it, but only for the time being. Of course, there is also the danger of falling or of sliding off onto one or another side. But this danger does not necessarily belong to the Reformed character. That freedom is rather a well-considered form of an ecclesial denomination, and the members of the Reformed churches may be a little proud of it as a hopeful light amidst the other denominations. I will try to explain this further.

2. About the freedom of the Reformed denomination

It is true that a kind of religious stubbornness sometimes existed in Reformed churches, resulting in thoughts and acts being measured by yardsticks not only according to holy scripture, but more in accordance with the holy traditions of the church. These churches tried to exist in the present time by preserving the memory of a nice past. They thought of themselves as superior to others, while in fact they only knew themselves, and the others only in a caricatured way. A variant of having such a high opinion of itself is the unnecessary pursuit of a profile, in which the Reformed as a minority try to outdo the majority with radical positions. But after all, such an exaggerated opinion of their own denomination was not so much the problem of the Reformed churches. From the beginning the Reformed theologians were too well trained in humanistic thought, and the Reformed churches were so international and decentralised, that the external conditions for the development of a monolithic church were not given. In this we see already a little bit of that special Reformed liberty in relation to its own denomination. I think that this liberty has three *theological* reasons.

First: The unconditional subordination of the own tradition and doctrine to the holy scripture

Often the Reformed confessions are criticised because they like to substantiate their message with verses from the bible. But why criticise this? The confession does not want to put a new truth on the candelabra. It wants to help us reading the scripture again, often in times when important passages are forgotten or even disputed. Thus it does so by opening the scripture for us to learn from it. Besides, it is characteristic of the Reformed confessions to frequently add the “reservation of a better instruction [by the holy scripture] in the future”. This was already written in the first Reformed Confession of 1523, written by Huldrych Zwingli.¹ In the so-called “Synod of Berne” of 1532 we read in a fine formulation that: “If a pastor or someone else would propose something to us which leads us nearer to Christ, or which according to the Word of God is more conducive to general friendship and Christian love than the opinion written here, then we will like to accept it and do not want to stop the movement of the Holy Spirit.”²

Certainly the confession is subordinated to the scripture for the Lutherans, too. But it is valid for them in a different way: the confession is normative, already and forever, by and through the norm of the scripture, because it includes the decision taken about its own compatibility with the bible. Compared to this, the Reformed confession lays claim to more liability to the scripture, and to the confession only *as long* as it agrees with the scripture. It wishes itself to be proved - basically by every mature Christian. Therefore, references to the bible are written in the margin. This is giving an advice to people to go and check. This means that the bible is understood as the only judge in case a confession is criticised or corrected. The holy scripture has such an importance because it is fundamentally ahead of all ecclesial texts. For it is the decisive testimony of the speaking and acting of the God of Israel and the Father of Jesus Christ.

From the beginning the Reformed style of discourse is characterised by aloofness which reflects the desire not to monopolise the rule decreed by the Word of God by the church. One form of such monopolising is the identification of the biblical witness with some pithy saying, maybe printed *in large letters*. There is the danger that the horizon of faith will be reduced and that other sayings of the bible are neglected or disregarded. It is a maxim of Reformed theology that we cannot separate the witness of *the* Word of God from the fullness of the very different testimonies in scripture. Reducing the biblical texts to some series of pericopes for the sermons is another form of such a monopolising method. In the Reformed

¹H. Zwingli, *Schriften*, Vol. 2, Zürich 1995, p. 498.

²*Der Berner Synodus von 1532*, Vol. 1, edited by G.W. Locher, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1984, p. 26.

view it is a good use to have sermons along entire biblical books. It is a sign indicating that the church does not walk in a circle, but on a path that leads from the first beginnings of the people of Israel to the last destination in the Kingdom of God.

Second: The assignment of their own denomination to the one, ecumenical church

Already we find this idea in Calvin's thoughts, and this has remained typical of Reformed thinking. On the one hand Calvin stressed what he wrote to Cardinal Sadolet: "The only true bond of ecclesial unity would exist if Christ the Lord, who has reconciled us to God the Father, were to gather us out of our present dispersion into the fellowship of his body, that so, through his one Word and Spirit, we might join together with one heart and one soul."³ On the other hand, Calvin wrote in 1552 these words to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, that laid out the future way for the Reformed churches: "the chief evils of our time, viz., that the churches are so divided... thus it is that the members of the Church being severed, the body lies bleeding... could I be of any service, I should with pleasure cross ten seas, if necessary to accomplish that object..."⁴ In a similar sense the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 declares already in its preface that it is published "to search and to find peace and concord in mutual love with the German and other foreign churches."

This is the speech of a church which does not confess itself to its special denominational form, but does confess itself at its place and with its knowledge to the one Church of Jesus Christ. It counts itself to the Church, but feels free to agree that other churches may also belong to the Church of Jesus Christ. This understanding is accepted and even strengthened in the modern confessions of Reformed churches throughout the world. A typical phrase is the sentence that we believe "the one holy, worldwide Christian church", gathered out of all peoples in the world.⁵ This is underlined in a North-Indian Church Order, where it is written: "The Church of North India is a part of the body of Christ, which is the one, holy, general, and apostolic church, and it is built by Him out of all human generations and races."⁶

We can see a helpful commentary on this point in a little known fact: In the time of the Reformation the dean of the Reformed Church in East-Frisia (Northern part of Germany),

³ German translation in Calvin, *Um Gottes Ehre*, Vier kleinere Schriften, übers. u. hrsg. von M. Simon, München 1924, p. 92.

⁴ German translation in *Calvins Lebenswerk in seinen Briefen*, übers. von R. Schwarz, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1962, p. 596.

⁵ So Confessions in Southafrica, Indonesia, Canada, USA, cf. ed. by Lukas Vischer, *Reformiertes Zeugnis heute*. Eine Sammlung neuerer Bekenntnistexte aus der reformierten Tradition, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1988 (transl. from the German Version), p. 7, 18, 143; ed. by Lukas Vischer, *Reformed Witness Today*: A Collection of Confessions and Statements of Faith. Issues by the Reformed Churches, Bern 1982, p. 210.

⁶ In Vischer, *Reformiertes Zeugnis heute*, p. 252.

Johannes a Lasco, brought Reformed and Lutheran churches together in one Protestant Church. This was based on the Articles of Marburg of 1529. Those articles are mostly known for giving the reason for the separation of Luther and Zwingli, though they disagreed only in their understanding of the Eucharist. But a Lasco understood this the other way round - in *this* sense: "In most other articles we are in agreement, and this is reason enough to remain together. Let us understand the agreement as the grounds for further discussions about our disagreement!" This was really an idea which points to the future of an ecumenical method.

Third: The arrangement of their own denomination in the travel of God's people

It is important to be aware that the Church, and this applies even more to a denomination, is not the goal of the ways of God. In every shape the Church is only on its way, - following the aim which is determined and brought about by Him alone. Therefore the life of the congregations and their members is essentially a pilgrimage, not fleeting life on earth, and not being obsessed by it. It is like the way of Israel through the desert. It is being on the way, in restlessness, in uneasiness, in fights, in sighs, and in thirst, but always with the motto: let's go! Calvin indicated this direction: "After we have accepted the testimony of the gospel about the free-gracious love of God, we are waiting, till God will show that, what is still hidden below the hope."⁷ For the Confessio Belgica (1561) or the Confessio Scotica (1560) this goal is clearer in the visible appearance of the rule and the realm of *Christ*, which had already begun when He rose to heaven.⁸ And the Heidelberg Catechism formulates that the coming judge is no one else than the already appeared redeemer. Therefore, we walk towards him "in all [our] sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head"⁹.

The same is stressed in the new Reformed confessions. Let us look now especially at texts which Reformed churches in the USA have accepted in the last decades. In 1974 there was a new confession published with the title: "Our Song of Hope" which starts with the words: "We are a people of hope, and we are waiting for the return of our Lord." The waiting happens while His community is sent "to preach good news to the poor, and righteousness to the nations, and peace among mankind."¹⁰ And in the Declaration of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in 1976 we hear that Christ calls us to the pilgrimage with the aim of

⁷ Calvin, *Institutio III* 2,43.

⁸ Art. 11. resp. Art. 37.

⁹ Question and answer 52.

¹⁰ Vischer, *Reformed Witness*, 222.226.

his realm: "We believe Christ gives us and demands of us lives in pilgrimage toward God's kingdom." In waiting for it we are called "to serve as He has served us."¹¹

In this context it becomes clear that the Reformed are not so much interested in the possession of a confession, but more in the determination to confess. The Reformed acknowledge - in line with the ancestors - that we do not always have to say and do the same as they said and did. It is possible that we will be asked new questions, to which we will have to give new answers. It is possible that other insights become the focus of attention, inviting us to decide whether we confess or deny Jesus Christ. Certain biblical sentences speak particularly at different times. In 1942 the long forgotten words "Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22) began to be heard in the Swiss churches in favour of the Jews. Monopolisation of biblical words is beyond such an experience. The Reformed denomination reminds us that we have to reckon with the Holy Spirit who wants to lead us in all truths. We have to be open to His concrete, new instructions. It is the Spirit, who allows us to think, say and do what is necessary now. The same Spirit urges us to get on the way from our own denomination to what is more than our and all other denominations. - So far concerning the subject of Reformed freedom in and over against the own denomination. But this view is to be completed by another consideration.

3. About the gratitude of the Reformed Church

When such freedom does not exist in a denomination, then it becomes inflexible. But this danger is no longer an issue for the Reformed churches today. There is another danger which is far more of a menace. That is the threat of a certain kind of liberalism: the danger that they gamble away the talent of a church, Reformed according to the Word of God, which has been handed over to them for safekeeping and for passing on to their neighbours. It is the danger of selling this talent for a small profit. Maybe they seem to be "Reformed", but they have the title without the "Word of God". That is the danger of wrongly interpreting the formula "The Reformed Church is always to be reformed", so that they think they are Reformed because they are doing their work in a different way than the Reformers. They do not understand the true sense of that formula that we have to turn again and again to the fountain of faith, love, and hope. It is dangerous for the Reformed to store their legacy in a museum, which is visited occasionally, but not used in the daily life. In short, there is the danger that present-day Reformed Christians live in the church, as if it were not true that God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Therefore, our ancestors can not really join in our conversation today and are not allowed to have a say in our decisions. There is no

¹¹ Ibd. p. 262.

space for their questioning whether we still really are Reformed Christians. When we think in this way, an unspiritual arbitrariness will appear in the church.

In contrast to this attitude we have to stress a clear gratitude in the relation to their own denomination. In this context the word “gratitude” is understood in an analogy to its use in the Heidelberg Catechism. This does not mean the gratitude which we have to show indeed in relation to God. This means the gratitude to humans, especially to those who were called to be witnesses, teachers and preachers of God and His good deeds. Certainly, this gratitude is something we can only do with *pleasure*. But at the same time it is a task which we must *do*. It is a task of obedience to our spiritual parents. For the explanation of this gratitude, which is expected from us, it is useful, also for the parents themselves, to bear in mind article 104 of the Heidelberg Catechism about the fifth commandment: To everyone who precedes us, I have to “submit myself with due obedience”, and I have even to “patiently bear with their weaknesses”.

In spite of such “weaknesses” the Reformed Christians may regard themselves quite positively. They are allowed to learn a certain practical knowledge from their ancestors. And they have to want this knowledge to be a light that never fades away. Alexander Schweizer, a Reformed theologian in Zurich in the 19th century said: The Lutheran denomination is formed more “anti-judaistic”, and the Reformed is formed more “anti-paganistic”.¹² This means that for the Lutherans the centre of their theology is salvation by faith alone in the grace of God, in contrast to justification by good works. And the Reformed theologians stress more the reign of Christ the Lord, and therefore, they are concerned more about the demarcation with paganism. These catchwords seem like a caricature. The Reformed certainly also praise God in His pure grace as opposed to justification by human works. But as they understand the holy scripture, as did Paul, *good* works, done in honour of God, are not excluded. And therefore, they do not like anti-Judaism. They take the abuse of Calvin as a “judaistic theologian” by a Lutheran theologian in the 16th century¹³ as an honorary title. Indeed, we should accept the idea that we have gone from paganism to living under the head of Jesus Christ in the service of God. This sentence will be underlined by three assertions.

First: The continuing importance of the first commandment

In this commandment the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus Christ, says to us that we should have no other gods before Him – Jesus has sharpened this with the sentence: “You *cannot*

¹² A. Schweizer, *Die Christliche Glaubenslehre nach protestantischen Grundsätzen*, Bd. 1, Leipzig 1863, p. 8.

¹³ Aegidius Hunnius, *Calvinus Judaizans*, 1595.

serve God *and* mammon” (Matthew 6:24). According to the Heidelberg Catechism this means to “trust in God alone, with humility and patience submit to Him, expect all good things from Him only; love, fear, and glorify Him with my whole heart.”¹⁴ God has the unceasing priority over all others. At first anti-paganism has to prove itself. The pagan in the Christian has to convert *himself*, and this is especially the gentiles’ duty, according to the Jewish theologian Franz Rosenzweig.¹⁵ Surely the gentiles do not appreciate this, especially today. Maybe they prefer to be gentiles, or they are against ‘absolutism’. But does the first commandment mean that Israel has made its accidental tribal deity into an absolute one? We can make relative only such authorities which we have made absolute ones beforehand. Such figures, if absolute or relative, are always *other* gods, which we should not have before *God*. We are not those who distinguish the God of the first commandment from the other deities. It is *God* who distinguishes Himself from them. He does it by the fact that the people have not made Him to be their God, but it is an absolute miracle that He made Himself their God and made them His people. This God is not an idolised creature of a creative human, but the creator of those who are His creatures. “What is idolatry? ...instead of, or besides that one God, who has manifested himself in his word, to contrive, or have any other object, in which men place their trust.”¹⁶

We hear the same in the old and in the new Reformed confessions that this God, who has spoken and speaks according to the holy scripture, is at all costs to be worshipped according to the first commandment. Many of those confessions say first of all about God that He is one, before they explain that this one is the triune God. The confession of the oneness of God is understood here in the sense of Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29. This means the fundamental difference between God and the idols. Therefore, the creed of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (1985) starts with the sentence: “We believe in God, the only, true God”.¹⁷ What is said here, is unfolded in the Declaration of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (1976): “We believe in one true and living God... We acknowledge one God alone, whose demands on us are absolute, whose help for us is sufficient. That One is the Lord, whom we worship, serve and love... We acknowledge no other God. We must not set our ultimate reliance on any other help. We must not yield obedience unconditional to any other power. We must not love anyone or anything more than God.”¹⁸ It is clear, and it must be clear that the concern here is not for an abstract difference between a finite and infinite

¹⁴ Heidelberg Catechism, Question 95.

¹⁵ F. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, Frankfurt/Main 1993, p. 317.

¹⁶ Heidelberg Catechism, Question 95.

¹⁷ Vischer, *Reformiertes Zeugnis*, p. 61, cf. p. 132.

¹⁸ Vischer, *Reformed Witness*, p. 232sq.

being. It is the matter of the biblical God who reveals Himself for the connection with His humans. It is this God about whom Calvin said: “Where God is honoured, there also is care for humanity.”¹⁹

Second: The powerful claim of God to our whole life

This is a further aspect of the Reformed anti-paganism. Calvin was so bold that he stressed the doctrine of sanctification by treating it in the “Institutes” before he dealt with the doctrine of justification. But he did not want this to be interpreted as a form of legalistic justice through human works. Rather he dealt with it under the title of the comforting and also imperative principle: “We belong not to ourselves, rather we belong to God.”²⁰ The Heidelberg Catechism seems to go in another direction, as its first question inquires about the comfort in life and dying. But in its reply it agrees with Calvin’s answer that we belong with our body and soul, in life and dying not to ourselves, but to the Lord. It is (according to question 37) this Lord who as the saviour gave Himself with His body and soul for us. Certainly, God wants to give humans all the help that they need. But He gives them this help, while at the same time removing egoists from their position of thinking they are the centre of the world; and the Lord puts Himself in the hub of the universe. Therefore “I” do not belong to “myself”, but to someone else; and this other is not a master of arbitrariness, but He is the saviour who gave Himself as much for “me” as for others. This has the consequence for us to live as His followers. To say it with a biblical model: they see the difference between the laws under which Israel suffered in Egypt and the laws given to this people on Mount Sinai, to “honour its liberator in happy readiness obediently”.²¹

The new Reformed confessions are coined by a similar thinking as the old. The Reformed kind of theological thinking differs in two points from the Lutheran tradition with regard to the understanding of the law. First, though it is also clear in Reformed theology that no one can save himself by fulfilling the law, this theology does not do away with the law. The Declaration of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the USA (1976) says: “We declare Christ has freed us from trying to save ourselves by obeying the law. He restores to us God’s law as a gift and delight. The law describes concretely the shape of our freedom.”²² Second, we see already in that quotation that Reformed theology distinguishes between *God’s* law and *human* laws. Although Christians normally have to observe human laws, in certain extreme

¹⁹ J. Calvin, CO 38,388.

²⁰ J. Calvin, *Institutio* III 7,1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, II, 8,15.

²² Vischer, *Reformed Witness*, p. 260.

situations, Christians have to obey God more than humans, in the sense that in obeying God, they may be disobedient to human laws. The use of the word in the plural form shows that the Reformed are more interested in the (good) *content* of the law than the Lutherans who understood “the” law more as a category of contradiction against the sinners.

There exists in the Lutheran tradition the inclination to connect divine and human law. Thus the external use of *divine* law means obedience to *civil* law. This leads to a division between gospel and law. The Christian religion takes place in the heart, and the external life has to be organised according to the orders of the State, or of a general custom, or of the professional occupation. On the contrary, the Reformed differentiation between the law of God and human law leads to resistance against the separation between the inner and the external life. This does not mean that Christians have to throw the civil laws overboard. But it means that we are ruled by the same Lord and master in both domains of our life.

Third: The common character of the Christian life under the one Head

We may know that any ‘private’ form of Christianity is something like a wooden iron. But this becomes a very expensive truth in a time of individualism, specialisation, and of religious self-determination in the ‘department store of competing supplies’. Our Reformed ancestors had already pointed out a central idea: to be a Christian means to be a member of the body of Christ. And a Christian life means a *common* life. This has an anti-pagan accent, too. According to the Heidelberg Catechism²³, Christian life means being a member of the community which the Son of God has elected out of the whole human race. He did this by transplanting them out of their former surroundings into this new connection. *He* does this, and not a natural human quality of being sociable. He is the head of His community and makes them His sisters and brothers; and He needs no substitutes to do this. He gathers, defends, and preserves His congregation. Therefore, for example, the holy Sunday services should not become a playing field for arbitrary acts, because the service does not belong to the office-bearers nor to the other members of the congregation, but the service is subject to the rule and work of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, everything that happens during the service should happen in a strong responsibility towards the Lord.

We read similar sentences in the new Reformed confessions. The Statement about the Christian Faith of the Presbyterian Church in England (1956) reads: “The Church is one, because Christ lives in her through the Holy Spirit, and in consequence of the union with Christ her members are one among each other.”²⁴ This is even more strongly emphasised in

²³ Question 54.

²⁴ Vischer, *Reformiertes Zeugnis*, p. 69.

the Statement of Christian Belief of the Presbyterian Church of Canada (1984): “The church is Christ together with his people called both to worship and serve him in all of life”. “To live in Christ takes shape in the community of faith.”²⁵ In the Confession of the Torajan Church in Indonesia (1981) we read that “God has called and chosen one People.” It is called “to come out from not being His People and to become the holy People of God”, as “a new fellowship, the possession of Jesus Christ.”²⁶

Today this is stressed even more in the new Reformed confessions than in the old. What does it mean to become a member of the people of God? It means to give a faithful “answer” to God’s grace, and “to enter the federation with God and with others expressly” - so the Confession of Faith of the two Cumberland-Presbyterian Churches (1984).²⁷ We hear far more in the new confessions the idea that the congregation is gathered with the intention of sending them to the others. The New Confession of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (1972) declares that “mission is the command of Christ to the church”²⁸, and according to the Statement of the Presbyterian Church of England (1956) “each member is called to a service, according to his or her gifts of Christ, given to them.”²⁹ The Confession of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA (1967) speaks radically first about the mission of the church as its true sense, and then about its gatherings as the equipment for the mission.³⁰ - In short, anti-paganism does not mean that faith, hope, and love have to stop at the frontiers of the Christian congregation. Not at all! Mature and responsible Christians are needed to bear witness to the gospel and to the law of God in our endangered world.

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²⁵ Ibid., p. 143, 148.

²⁶ Vischer, *Reformed Witness*, p. 53.

²⁷ Vischer, *Reformiertes Zeugnis*, p. 213.

²⁸ Vischer, *Reformed Witness*, p. 83.

²⁹ Vischer, *Reformiertes Zeugnis*, p. 71.

³⁰ Vischer, *Reformed Witness*, p. 210, 215.