

THE RELEVANCY TO THE BLACK PEOPLES OF AFRICA OF A CALVINIST COSMOSCOPE

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“The relevancy to the African of a Calvinist cosmoscope (or life- and world-view)” is not an easy topic. However difficult it may be, it is nevertheless a subject of the utmost importance today for Christianity in Africa. I have two particular problems in mind: *Africanization* and *Calvinism*. Basically the question before us is this: Can the Calvinist (or Reformed) view of life advance the indigenization or Africanization of the Gospel? Can the Reformed approach help bring about a real Biblical, but at the same time fully African, Christianity? Many, I know, will immediately answer the question with a denial. We, however, shall take a closer view.

Africanization

The topic brings us to the much-debated, explosive question of the Africanization, indigenization or contextualization of the Gospel. The situation at present is that, while many Africans are trying to adapt the Bible to their traditional religion, others openly reject this attitude, propagating a return to traditional African beliefs and customs. Very few Africans adhere to the third possibility — which I consider to be the correct one — viz. a real Biblical Christianity relevant to the specific needs of the Black man without compromising to traditional beliefs.

This third viewpoint stresses the fact that where there is no indigenization of the Gospel, the danger of syncretism is usually the greatest. Without indigenization there is no meaningful confrontation between the Bible and the African’s traditional religion and consequently no intelligent acceptance or rejection of the claims of the Word of God. Imported Christianity (so-called “white Christianity”) will never satisfy the spiritual needs of the African peoples. As a white man I would not presume to tell you how this can be attained. I can merely give you the norms that should not be violated in trying to reach this goal.

Calvinism

Apart from the problem of genuine African Christianity, the topic presents a second problem. The title as stated above speaks of the relevance to the African of a Calvinist life- and world-view.* But, you may immediately ask, can this life and world-view, which originated in 16th century Western Europe, have any message for the African of today? Is the

difference in time and space not too great? Have the church denominations in Africa not suffered from the fact that they inherited the conflicts of the European and American churches?

I hope it will become clear in what follows why I am convinced that the Reformed, Calvinist view of life is the type of Christianity closest to the Bible. Considering that (the greatest part of) the Bible had its origin in the Middle East, it is obvious that Christianity is not the monopoly of the white European. Accordingly there is no reason why the Calvinist tradition with its strong emphasis on the encompassing nature and total character of religion should not find a natural home in Africa.

One last remark: If I had the time at my disposal, I would have included more references to the Bible. Exegesis of certain parts of God's word would have greatly enhanced my argument. It could have made it clearer that the Calvinist world view is founded on the Gospel and have explained the way in which this occurs. Perhaps the reader could improve upon this weakness by asking themselves the question: which parts of the Bible could be used to prove the validity of a Calvinist cosmoscope?

The essential characteristics of a Calvinist cosmoscope

We will not discuss the character of a life- and world-view as such. It is sufficient to say that *every* normal human being — whether he/she is aware of it or not — has a certain vision of reality. A life- and world-view is not the monopoly of educated men and women. It is pre-scientific. Therefore it is also not equivalent to theology. You imbibe it, so to say, with your mother's milk. From the time of your birth your parents, family, environment, teachers at school, the church etc. play an important rôle in its formation.

Everyone of us views life through spectacles coloured differently from those of another person or of a group. Our fundamental convictions determine the way we regard life or the way we act.

In which way does the Calvinist or Reformed Christian look at life? What kind of spectacles does he use?

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Basically the reformed way of life in accordance with Calvinistic tradition is *very simple*. At the same time it is *absolutely radical*. It will become evident from the fourfold *Sola* (the Latin word for *solely* or *only*) with which I wish to capture the essence of this view of life.

1. "Soli Deo gloria": to God alone the glory

Every view of life contains a centre around which it worships or

idolises. Humanism, for instance, focuses on autonomous man. Liberalism regards human freedom as the absolute norm. Communism, again, strives for possession of everything by everyone — usually with the result that no one possesses anything.

You will see that all these viewpoints about reality are called -“isms”. An “-ism” arises when one over-emphasizes anything. Man is important, but his well-being is not the absolute norm such as Humanism believes. Freedom is marvellous, but not to be emphasized at the cost of everything else. In the same way there is nothing wrong in striving for the material welfare of all, but man cannot live by bread alone. He has spiritual needs as well.

One can say that all these different “-isms” indicate what is regarded as the highest goal, the essence of a god according to a specific view of life.

In accordance with the First Commandment (“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me”, Exodus 20:3), Calvinism believes that there is only one true, real God. He is the Creator of the universe and the *Absolute Sovereign*, the *Supreme Kuler* over *all* things created. *Everything* is subjected to His laws. He is the Writer of history. He inserts the commas and full stops according to His sovereign will.

Our first duty therefore is to obey the commandments of God Tri-une (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). We should love and glorify Him: *Soli Deo gloria* — to God alone the honour (Revelations 7:12 and many other texts). Humanists are of the opinion that if this principle is obeyed, human life is neglected. However, the infallible Word of God teaches the opposite: if we really obey and serve God we shall have life in abundance.

Christ Himself has exemplified this attitude by His life: “I have glorified thee on earth ...” (John 17:4). Our primary and fundamental duty is the same. This we can do by praising Him, doing His will, suffering with Him, bearing the fruits of good works, loving one another, and in many more ways.

These basic principles of the Reformed life- and world-view assure its broadmindedness, its wideness of scope. It is a real cosmoscope, a view on the whole reality — not a narrow-minded ideology or theology. Its purpose is to bring *every* aspect of life to subservience to the Sovereign God. It is not only concerned with worshipping and serving God on Sundays, in church, in private Bible reading and prayers. Life itself is worship. God should be served *always* and *everywhere* with one’s *whole* being i.e. with heart, intellect, hands, feet, mouth. (Compare 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God”. Cf. also Colossians 3:17).

Christ is not merely the saviour of the souls of individuals. He is interested in the whole human being. The so-called “winning of souls” for Christ is not a Biblical idea in any sense of the word.

Radical Calvinism also denies the sacred-secular distinction which implies that human life is divided into two realms (soul and body, church and world, clergy and laymen, faith and reason etc.). According to this theory of two realms it is only possible to serve God in sacred or holy matters. It is not possible in secular or profane life (bodily life, intellectual life, economics, politics etc.). For instance, it is affirmed that the clergy (priests, ministers, elders, deacons) are in the direct service of God as opposed to the ordinary church members. Calvinism, however, teaches the priesthood, kingship and duty to proclaim the gospel of every Christian.

Calvinism is *simple*: it has only one principle — the glory of God alone. Calvinism is *radical*: this fundamental viewpoint should be applied consistently to the whole of human life.

This brings us to the second *sola*:

2. “*Sola Scriptura*”: *from the Word of God alone*

This *sola* tells us about the source of the first *sola* (the *Soli Deo gloria*). At the same time this *sola* reminds us again of the radical character of Calvinism, viz. not the Bible *plus* our own wisdom, and not the Bible *plus* traditional beliefs. The Bible alone is the absolute source of truth. It is the only Word with absolute authority.

That the radicality of Calvinism does not imply narrow-mindedness has already been indicated under the *sola Deo*. It also applies to the *sola Scriptura*. “The *whole* Word for our *entire* life” is the Calvinist slogan. Not only in some facets of life, but in every area of human activity should we ask for this Light on our path.

The Scriptures are a revelation given by God, His letter to us revealing His purpose, His will, His works and His kingdom. They also throw light on man: not only his creation, fall and ruin, but also the way of his salvation, his duty of thankfulness and his destiny.

God Himself gave us the Bible to serve as spectacles in our blindness to see what the purpose of life as a whole constitutes: worship of the only true God. If we have doubts as to the validity of the Bible as the real and only Word of God, viewing it merely as a product of man’s own thinking, guessing and speculating about the essential questions of life and death, then we are like a drifting ship at sea with no rudder and no safe port.

3. “*Sola fide*”: in faith alone.

This sola indicates the way in which we become sure of the truth of the Scriptures. It is not possible to verify that the Bible is the Word of God with rational arguments. We have either to believe it, or reject it. Rejection, however, is also based on belief, for nobody can prove the Bible not to be the Word of God!

Belief in God’s Word is not a result of human brilliance of intellect or of inherent goodness. Its acceptance is due to the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man.

Does the *sola fide* then imply that the Reformed Christian has to believe blindly? Not at all! But the Christian mind is different from that of the non-Christian: it is an intellect illuminated by the Word and the Holy Spirit: it is not an autonomous mind, but one subordinated to the Scriptures, bound by obedience to God. That is why a Christian school, college or university differs from a secular one. Science is practised in such institutions in the spirit of *In lumine Tuo* (in Thy light), i.e. in the light given by God in His Word. We do not have the dilemma of a choice between Christian faith or science. (Some people are inclined to think that if you are a Christian it precludes your being a scientist, and if you attend university you can no longer be a Christian.) We believe in a science directed and inspired by our faith — which also holds good for all scientific activity in spite of the fact that so-called neutral scientists deny it. As is the case in every field, science is also practised either to the glory of God or aimed at the glorification of man. A definite choice has to be made here. There is no middle way.

Once again we discern the radical character of the Reformed point of view in the principle of faith *alone*. It brings us to the root (*radix*) of the differences between one man and another. The only living, true root that will bear fruit to the honour of God, is the Christian faith grounded on Scripture, a gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is not necessary for me to verify and illustrate the *sola fide* from the Bible. I mention only one chapter from Scripture: chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews. The words “by faith” echo through this whole chapter.

Now let us deal with the last of the four solisms:

4. “*Sola gratia*”: through grace alone

This principle of Reformed Christianity explains how we have the power to believe God’s Word and how to glorify Him.

In ourselves it is impossible to serve the kingdom of God. We are slaves of the devil, unable to do any good. Radical Calvinists, basing their beliefs on

Scripture, believe in man's *radical* fall into sin. Nothing good, nothing pleasing to God can be found in unregenerated man. Through the redemptive work of Christ *alone* man can be restored into love towards God and render obedient service to God and his fellowmen.

As opposed to a variety of ideas about the inherent goodness of man and his so-called free will, we have to make a clear case for the *sola gratia* of the Scriptures.

This *sola*, again, indicates the simplicity and radicality of Calvinism: there is only one Biblical way: grace irrespective of natural capabilities, grace irrespective of meritorious works. Some Christians believe that man can practically attain God as a natural, unregenerated being and that divine grace is merely a means of scaling the last steep hill on his way towards God.

In recapitulation of the foregoing:

- *Soli Deo gloria*, the honour of God Tri-une in a life of worship, is our basic motive;
- *Sola Scriptura*, the Word of our Father is our only truth.
- *Sola fide*: faith implanted by the Holy Spirit alone is our light.
- *Sola gratia*: divine grace through Christ Jesus is our only power.

You will not fail to notice the theocentric, God-centred character of Calvinism: through the Word of the *Father*, through faith given by the *Holy Spirit* and through grace in *Christ Jesus*, human life is directed towards God Tri-une.

The relevancy to the African situation of the Calvinist cosmocosmoscope

We have now arrived at the main part of the problem: the Biblical life-and worldview in an African setting. How should we express our reformed insights in terms of African situations?

It is not correct to say that we must render the Gospel relevant, or more relevant to a certain situation. It is already most relevant — also to the Black people of Africa. It is not necessary to change the Bible or to have a Black Christ, a Jesus of our own fabrication, to be relevant. There is also a vast difference between advocating a return to African traditional religions and expressing Biblical truths in a way meaningful to the African.

In any effort to express Christianity in the context of Africa, the Bible must remain the absolute source. Only with the proviso that it is accepted as God's Word can it have an authoritative and relevant message for Black Africa — and for any other part of the globe.

It is not a question of *whether* the Reformed view of life is relevant but *in what respect* it is relevant. How to be fully Biblical and yet truly relevant —

that is the question.

I think there are many factors in African culture which can be *reformed* according to Biblical principles. Let me mention two examples only: Firstly the integral religious approach of the African. They do not accept the Western idea of the existence of religiously neutral areas in life. Therefore the converted African should not have problems with the radical, integral and total approach of the Reformed life- and world-view. Secondly they have strong social feelings and a natural friendliness which will enable them to understand the communion of the faithful more readily.

There are, however, also facets of the traditional African culture of the incorporation of which must be rejected. Human sacrifices, polygamy, ancestor worship, initiation rites etc. are not Christian practices, however authentically African they may be. *Black must be Biblical before it can be beautiful.*

In what follows I shall concentrate on the modifying influence of the Calvinist lifeview on the traditional African lifeview, in other words on certain prominent aspects which prove unacceptable stumbling blocks in the way of the Gospel. My object is not to be unkind or to humiliate anyone. I could have mentioned just as many unbiblical traits on the White side!

We shall apply the norm of the four solas as a test to the traditional African viewpoint. (Of course "African viewpoint" is a gross generalization!)

- * Worshipping a personal God alone instead of using absent divinities
- * Obedience to God's Word alone instead of adapting to traditional religion
- * Living by faith in God alone instead of resorting to materialism
- * Relying on God's grace alone instead of depending on vital force.

Let us glance at each one of these propositions.

Worshipping a personal God instead of using absent divinities

According to the Reformed view of life founded on the Bible, God created man in a personal, responsible relationship to Himself. He is our Father; He became flesh in Jesus Christ; His Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of His children; He governs and sustains the whole universe from moment to moment — not a single hair will be lost without His will. *God is not a distant being: a person on holiday six days of the week and only present on Sundays in the gathering of the church members.*

What is more, we are His vice-regents on earth. In His name we have to cultivate, develop creation and keep guard. We do not own anything here

on earth — we are merely stewards and therefore responsible to the Sovereign God for the way in which we fulfil our calling.

Our daily task, from the most important to the simplest piece of work, everything we do or leave undone, is performed in the spirit of *coram Deo*, in the presence of God. The entire Christian life constitutes religion, i.e. service in His kingdom. In this way nothing is done in vain.

Most African tribes and nations believe in a god. The interesting fact is that, in spite of the differences in the details of their conception about their gods, they generally agree that god is a being not very much interested in what he has brought forth. He is a concealed, absent, distant being. (In Western terminology we may call the Black man's concept of the divine deistic.) God acts as an absentee landlord. Man finds himself more or less alone in the world. There is no personal relationship between God and man, and man is not responsible to his god for what he is doing. Neither is there a final fudge in the life hereafter.

The difference is clear. According to the reformed view, life is theocentric, focussed on God, His service, honour and glory. The Bible clearly counts as the highest norm in life: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

In the African life- and world-view God stands at the periphery and not in the centre. There is no religious motivation for Africans to *serve* their god(s) in everything. At the most he is made use of or exploited in very critical situations where even the ancestors can not be of any avail.

Let me mention another example to illustrate the significance of one's conception of God and religion as a guiding principle for practical life. If the one true God is central then there can be real unity and deep fellowship amongst human beings — in spite of great diversities of colour, tribe, language, age, sex and denomination. It is only in Christ that we can attain real unity. If we find the Lord Jesus we can find each other and our barriers will be broken. God is greater than a so-called theological box! If man or a human community has the central position in life (personally I think the original Black philosophy of life is strongly anthropocentric, directed to man, his importance, his needs), then you get divergence, even hostility — as we clearly see today, especially so when the different groups also worship different gods.

Our second point of comparison:

Obediende to God's word alone instead of adapting to traditional religion

A few prominent features of African thought are the fact that African

society is strongly bound by heritage, that there is great emphasis on the social dimension of life as well as an authoritarian orientation. Lack of space does not allow me to go into the details. I am only mentioning these characteristics of the traditional African cosmoscope as contributing factors to the widespread phenomenon of syncretism amongst Black Christians. Because society, the authority of the elders and tradition have such a strong grip on the African Christian, he finds it extremely difficult to keep a distance between himself and his past. The thousands of sects among Black Christians in South Africa give ample evidence of how easily our Black brothers and sisters revert back to a traditional Black religion.

Against the Reformed claim of *Sola Scriptura* (the Bible alone) we want to delve a little more deeply into the details of African syncretism.

It is not easy to define what syncretism is. You may call it (like John Scott) “a fruit cocktail of religions” or (like the Webster Dictionary) “the reconciliation or union of divergent beliefs”. In this way, however, the danger of this phenomenon is not clearly stated.

Beyerhaus (in an article in *Christianity today*) brings the dangers out more clearly: “Syncretism is an unconscious tendency or conscious attempt to undermine the uniqueness of a religion by equating its elements with those of other belief systems. Syncretism equates heterogeneous religious elements and thereby changes their original meaning without admitting such a change.”

In this definition you can clearly see the dangers of syncretism:

1. It usually takes place unconsciously, spontaneously — people are mostly not aware of the fact that they are on the wrong road.
2. When the Gospel is merely incorporated into traditional pagan beliefs it is no longer the true Gospel. It has to be changed, twisted, watered down (even if the people doing it don't realize it) and in this way, adulterated, and deprived of its real power. The uniqueness, the real meaning of Christianity, is undermined.
3. Syncretism is an effort of heathendom to defend and uphold itself by taking Christianity and the Bible into its service. The Word of God is transformed to an instrument of propaganda for paganism! Syncretism lives like a parasite on Christianity — its greatest enemy!

Van den Berg in his book, *Syncretisme als uitdaging*, distinguishes between two types of syncretism: a passive and a more active form. The first is encountered where the Bible and the claims of the Lord are understood in a very superficial, imperfect way and therefore not viewed as a danger for the old life- and world-view. The second type, active syncretism, occurs where

the Revelation of God is recognised as a threat to traditional belief and where there is a deliberate attempt to render it harmless. I think we encounter both types of syncretism in Africa today.

It is very important for us to have a look at the causes of syncretism. To mention only a few:

1. *Poor knowledge of the Bible*

Christians with a feeble knowledge of the Bible are on easy prey to syncretism. Any kind of veneer of teaching, if it is not followed up continuously, will quickly be mixed up with previous beliefs. You immediately realize the important rôle serious Bible study can play in counteracting syncretism in this respect.

2. *Denying the absolute and sole authority of the Scriptures*

African Christianity is not as isolated from the Western world as one may think. The influence of different Western theological trends is also experienced on our continent. I shall mention only a few of those which I consider especially to promote syncretism. They are pluralism, universalism, dialoguism and ecumenism. Let me explain these terms in brief:

- * Pluralism recognises not only the existence of various religions, but furthermore regards one as being as valid as another.
- * Universalism is closely connected to pluralism. It is the doctrine which maintains that God shall redeem all men without any exception. No man can be evil enough to deserve hell!
- * *Dialoguism* tries to attain universal truth, a religion acceptable to all human beings by so-called open, round table discussions between Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Moslems, Confucians, Africans adhering to various forms of primitive religion and even atheists like the Marxists. International conferences are no rarity today. Many church leaders suffer from the illness I would like to call "conferencitis". They travel from the one conference and continent to the other with barely enough time to think in between!
- * *Ecumenism*, in its bad sense, encourages the formation of a visible, organic union of the various Christian denominations, even if they represent opposing and contradictory differences. (Compare in this connection the World Council of Churches where the Word of God is definitely no longer the final authority). It is not necessary for me to draw your attention to the fact that the principle of *sola Scriptura* is violated as well as the uniqueness of Christianity, paving the way for syncretism. What is even worse: total,

unconditional and exclusive commitment to God Himself (*sola Deo*) is no longer possible. Christians who remain firm in their convictions, not willing to compromise, true to the Lord and to the Scriptures are accused of arrogance and impertinence. We shall, however, not bow before worldly authorities, thus betraying our Lord. The following assumptions are ridiculous viz. that

- there is no unique Revelation;
- all religions (also Christian) are inadequate expressions of truth;
- Christianity is only qualitatively, and not radically, different from other religions; and
- Christ is not the only way to God, but that there are many ways.

3. *A burning desire to defend African personality*

I have nothing against an African experience of the Gospel. This, however, is not what I have in mind here as a third cause of syncretism. Many today believe that Christianity has come to *fulfil, enrich, crown* and not to *destroy* traditional, pagan African religion. Christianity, however, stands to judge every culture, *destroying* elements that are incompatible with the Word of God, *employing* compatible modes of expression for its advance. I have stated already: Black has to be Biblical to be beautiful.

The call to Africanize or indigenize Christianity is an extremely complex issue and merits a separate study. I can only make a few more remarks about this so-called contextualization of the Gospel.

Africa has lost its own soul because of Westernization. Many people are uprooted, unsteady and in search of identity and authenticity — often in an extremely reactive way. “Our noble past has been forgotten” they say. The mistake many Christians then make is to dig up their *whole* past and incorporate it wholesale into the church. Everybody can and should be proud of some aspects of his past when he becomes a Christian. However, there are also certain ignoble matters in our past which we should rather shake off.

There is nothing wrong with the contextualization of the Gospel. (Simple translation of the Bible is an example thereof!) I believe in African church music, African songs and other forms of worship, even a *Confessio Africa* (African confession), an African (but Biblical) Theology and all such African ways of communicating the Gospel. Contextualization should, however, not be misinterpreted to imply that we have to mix Christianity with pagan rites in order to make the Gospel more indigenous. No, we should not adulterate biblical faith in order to be able to express it in Africa for the Africans.

To try to rewrite the Bible or give a new African name to replace the one of Jesus, to search for an African, Latin American or Asian Christ will never make His Gospel relevant. The result will be the opposite: the total irrelevance of the true Gospel. How can anything still be relevant (i.e. the Gospel) if it is degenerated?

I hope you are not thinking that I am somewhat one-sided or unfair. I have already emphasized that Calvinism is radical: If we have to be careful that African traditional practices which are incompatible with the Gospel do not infiltrate into our message, we must assure ourselves equally that Western ideologies, habits and traditional attitudes are not assimilated into the Truth, confounding and disguising the message.

There are many more causes of syncretism. I shall mention only a few:

4. *Political and social pressures*

Anyone attempting to convert the African to Christianity is suspected of sinister motives against society or the government. The new national consciousness of the African does not often favour Christianity which it considers a divisive factor. Fellow citizens should bury their differences in order to work together for the establishment of a united, strong and prosperous nation.

5. *The friendliness of the African*

The African with his strong social feelings often needs more courage than a Westerner to contradict a false idea. He is dominated by the crowd. In addition to his already-mentioned authoritarian orientation, the high respect for elders and superiors is a stumbling block in this respect.

6. *Poor training*

The leaders of most African churches are not highly educated. The average pastors possesses only a little primary education — and his parishioners are even less trained than he is. He is not capable of forming a strong personal opinion and can easily fall prey to the confusion caused by the contradictory voices of so many Christian denominations and thousands of so-called sects.

There are many causes but, I think, only one cure for syncretism! We must, more than ever, individually and together, reaffirm total, unconditional and exclusive commitment to the authority of the Holy Scriptures. A lack of firmness in this respect destroys our message and our hope for the future of the church in Africa.

It is not necessary for me to say that a mere formal recognition of the Scriptures bears no fruit. Everyone of us — not only the minister — has to

study the Bible day and night in order to understand what God's claims are.

I repeat: syncretism is THE danger to the churches in Africa, because it is a heresy from *within* the churches. It develops mostly where the Gospel is not understood and experienced.

The third point of comparison:

Living by faith in God alone instead of resorting to materialism

The Black people of Africa prefer direct experience and they have a concrete, practical attitude towards life. This feature is also noticed in their religious practices. How will they react to the call towards faith, a faith in the invisible God, His kingdom which is not of this earth? Of course, this is a universal problem and not something peculiarly African. Every human being cannot believe in God of his own accord. But perhaps this concrete approach to life is more strongly developed in the African mind. In the Book of Hebrews (11:1) we are told, however, that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

It will be necessary to make clear to the African that in spite of the fact that faith is not something concrete in the sense of being material, it is nevertheless real!

Life in Christ does not change a human being into something else. Members of the body of Christ do not have either more or fewer toes on their feet than do other people; they do not ride their bicycles differently; they too are likely to peel their prickly pears before eating them; they have friends and people they don't like so much, wear mod clothes, enjoy sexual life, buy and sell, etc.

At the same time life in Christ makes the newborn Christian a different being. The difference is not necessarily to be sought in outward appearance, but in the new *direction* which the Christian's life takes. Because it is a difference of religious direction (for or against God, for or against His glorification) this difference necessarily evades the notice of the outsider. This new life in the Spirit cannot be seen by those who are not spiritually reborn (John 3:3).

The fact that the new birth is a spiritual one, and the kingdom of God a spiritual kingdom does not imply that a difference will not be observed. Eating and drinking to the glory of God is still eating but definitely (spiritually) different from the same act done to the glory of some other party. We should not look for the differences in the food, the preparation, utensils or eating habits (Luke 17:20-21). The fact that a Christian says

grace before having his meal is not the only contributory factor to this real difference.

Africans need to see this spiritual difference more clearly, viz. the antithesis between what the Christian and the pagan does. It is a mistaken idea that there is nothing very concrete about spiritual rebirth. What is spiritual is not material or concrete but *just as real* as something capable of being weighed, seen or measured.

People perform all kinds of ordinary and concrete human things when they are Christians, but the real difference lies in the fact that their activities are done for Christ's sake, out of love for God.

This is why Christ said that our faith should be like salt or leaven. However small or insignificant, the salt and leaven change the whole substance with which they are mixed. It is this fermentation through our faith in all areas of life that the African has to experience, and then not only the African!

Relying on God's grace instead of depending on vital force

When discussing the African view of life it is important to pay attention to the central idea of vital force. The main aim for the Black man, according to authorities, is to be richly filled with this mysterious vital force. It is of the utmost importance to fit into his appropriate place in this hierarchy of forces. Linked to this is the idea of a limited cosmic good: the vital force is not available to all to the same extent.

I cannot discuss all the consequences of this idea now. The main point is that the Gospel has a different, liberating message to the African craving for vital power. The Word of God tells us of *real* power through the Holy Spirit, unlimited power. The power of the Spirit is not bestowed according to a certain position in a cosmic hierarchy, but *abundantly* in each and everyone who firmly believes in God, in Salvation in Christ and who prays to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Witchcraft, magic, ancestor worship — so important in the life of the African to protect himself against the evils and perils of life — are no longer necessary. God is more powerful than Satan. He can also empower his children to withstand all the powers of darkness and hell.

As is the case with the other three principles, so also the principle of *sola gratia* is most relevant to the African situation.

Conclusion

I hope that you agree that Christianity, especially reformed Christianity, is not foreign to Africa. It is possible to bake an African bread with Calvinist

leaven and be sure that it will not be sour! It is not a danger to Africa. On the contrary: it is his liberator. Of course the prerequisite is that it should not be a vague, syncretized Christianity, but a Biblical, Reformed one. This ensures its being dynamic, powerful, strong.

A third of all the Christians in the world today live in the Third World (Africa, Asia, South America). Of them the greatest number is in Africa. Plus minus 150 million of the ± 360 million people in Africa call themselves Christians. It is not far-fetched that, *Deo volente*, by the end of this century, Africa may be the leading Christian continent because of the rapid growth of Christianity. Africa is the major contributing factor why there will soon be more non-white Christians in the world, as well as causing the shift of Christianity from north of the equator to the South.

To be reformed or Calvinist in one's approach is no easy task. It means to be consistently Biblical, absolutely radical. It stands for a strong single-mindedness of purpose, viz. only God, only the Bible, only faith, only grace. At the same time it implies a surprising broad-mindedness: no part-time Christianity — always, everywhere in the service of God, a life of worship. To be Reformed, does not merely indicate that you adhere to a Reformed basis or confession. It signifies that you will *never* stop reforming what has been misformed, what has developed against God's will and His glory. As Reformed Christians every day we are called to assess the situation: not to *accept* it (the traditional stance) or to *blast* it (the revolutionary approach) but to *redirect* it.

My last reminder is that this high and difficult calling, viz. to be Reformed can only be realized through the grace of our Holy Father: *sola gratia*.

VOETNOTA

* Note that I prefer to speak of the Calvinist instead of the Reformed view of life. The concept "reformed" is too broad, including, for instance, also the Lutheran approach. When I do use the word *reformed* therefore, I have a special kind of reformed vision of life in mind.