

# "Discerning the Signs of the Times!" Culture and the Triune God <sup>[1]</sup>

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## 1. "Looking"

It is our privilege and task to ask how we as Christians can responsibly live our faith in Christ in a culture where we are confronted with ethnic conflict, as well as suspicion and animosity against foreigners. Since faith does not derive from ourselves, but is a gift of God, we have to inter-relate our Christian understanding of God with our respective culture.

**1.1 Beauty.** Culture like all of creation has the imprint of God. Looking at what God had created, God said it was "very beautiful" (Gen 1:31). Christians affirm the essential goodness of creation by confessing *Christ* as "mediator of creation". And the *Spirit of God* is not only the Spirit of shalom, but also the Spirit of life: "... you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his work!" (Psalm 104:29-31)

We have good reason, therefore, to seek and see God's goodness reflected in the beauty of dancing waves, in the colours of Chagall and Monet, and in the symphonies of Beethoven and Mozart.

At the same time we are daily confronted with the aberrations of life: rape as an instrument of war, child abuse, torture and ethnic hatred, and the destruction of our environment.

How can we as believers and church leaders respond to life - to its glory and its aberration? What is our place and our responsibility in the network of nature and history? Does God have a mission for God's people - and can we *know* and *fulfil* such a mission?

**1.2. Kairos.** While theologians have speculated about the imminent return of Christ, they have overlooked the fact that God is *always* "near", impinging upon us with grace and judgment. It *is not enough* to look back and take our stand with Amos and Jeremiah, against Amaziah and Micaiah; with Jesus, Peter and Paul, against their religious and political opponents; with the Anabaptists, Baptists and Dissidents through the ages, against their political and ecclesiastical opponents. It is not enough to criticise the "Deutschen Christen" and praise the Confessing Church in the Germany of the 1930's. It is not enough to remember with reverence and pride Martin Luther King Jr.'s struggle for civil rights and his prophetic protest against the Vietnam war (at a time when this protest was unpopular in his own circles. His friends wanted him to concentrate on the civil rights movement and not "touch" Vietnam; but King believed that the moral conscience cannot be divided!). It is not enough to say that God was on the side of the Anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, that the prayers of Christians helped to bring down the wall and open the Gate in 1989, and that God is on the side of the struggle for freedom and justice in Burma.

We must also discern and decide - *here and now!* We must correspond to the "nearness" of God by taking a stand - today! We must speak. We must act. With our trinitarian doctrines we confess that God continues to accompany God's creation, that God is involved in God's world, that God's Spirit is present here and now, and that it belongs to God's passion, for grace to become event. It is up to us to hear the word of the Lord, to discern the signs of the times, to be obedient to God's will, and to muster the courage to pray, to speak, and to act.

This presupposes, of course, that God's grace does not disempower us, or consign us to passivity, but that we learn to accept and appreciate that we are we *are* συνεργοὶ θεοῦ = ("fellow workers with God" - 1 Cor 3:9), "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matth 5:13-16). Through faith and baptism, we are drawn into God's passion for the world. Many biblical texts

reflect, as Karl Barth says, that God's activity can only be recognised if we are prepared to join in.  
[2]

**1.3. Authority.** We have no choice! We must try to discern the signs of the times and to act accordingly. Indeed, our commitment, our life before God and our credibility in the world is at stake.

Our commitment to *biblical authority* reminds us that to know God means to do justice (explicit in Jeremiah 22); and whatever Christology we adopt, we cannot overlook the fact, that Jesus did not die of a heart attack or of old age or as the result of a judicial error, but that he was "executed as a political subversive and crucified between two social bandits. It appears that Jerusalem elites collaborating with their Roman overlords executed Jesus because he was a threat to their economic and political interests."<sup>[3]</sup>

Our respect for *our spiritual heritage* reminds us that there are many situations in which radical commitment to Christ in an estranged and violent world calls for dissent and the subsequent willingness to *suffer*. During the Reformation thousands of Anabaptists were persecuted, tortured and banned, because they were unwilling to compromise their voice of conscience. 5.000 of them were killed, often in barbaric fashion. The baptist tradition of dissent and suffering has lived on into modern times, as Baptist testimonies from Bulgaria, Spain, Brazil, Israel and Indonesia will readily demonstrate. And, lest we are immediately pushed into the sectarian corner, let us not forget that neither the patriarchs, the prophets, Jesus, and the leaders of the earliest Christian churches (Stephen, Paul, Peter, James) can be understood apart from their leaning into the promises of God and thereby paying the price of loneliness, persecution, torture and death. The Christian faith does not glorify martyrdom, nor does it seek suffering. But if God is God, and if human sin as selfishness, rebellion and sloth is real, then faith cannot be had apart from dissent and suffering. Being *in* the world is not the same as being *of* the world. One can be part of culture, and yet march to a different tune.

The credibility of our confession to Christ as *Kυριος* is at stake. Will we be the ship that dares the storms of life, that knows its builder and steers a clear course through the waves, or will we seek the safe harbour of comfort and compromise when things get rough out there? The very fact that, in retrospect, we realise, that Baptists in America's South, in the Germany of the 1930's, and in South Africa in more recent times, should have seen more clearly, spoken more boldly, and acted more courageously, provides a challenge to us: will our faith be stronger, will we see more clearly, will our courage be bolder?

## 2. "Reflecting"

Our topic is controversial. The literature is legion. Without being able to go into great detail, I need to sketch my use of terms and disclose the theological grammar that underlies my suggestions.

**2.1 Culture.** This is not the place to present a theory of culture. Yet it is very important that we recognise and admit the shaping influence of culture on all of us. We are born into a culture and we become deeply embedded in it. Space, soil, trees, bushes, landscape, language, songs, music, stories, traditions, food, smells, family, friends have so deeply and fundamentally shaped us that they become part of us and determine our identity.

Living in a different culture to the one into which I was born, I experience the enduring power of culture in my own life. I also try to minister to people who have lived for 40, 50, 60 years, all their creative professional and marriage and family years, in another culture. They have children and grandchildren in their adopted culture. But they themselves never feel at home. "My body is here, but my soul is in Serbia/Germany/Greece/Italy/Spain" - a lady said to me the other day. If one has no appreciation of the attractive power of culture, one will never understand ethnic animosity or what people will do to defend their space.

Here are some aspects of culture that we need to be aware of for our reflection.<sup>[4]</sup>

- Culture is the product of *human* activity and creativity. It is *in flux*. It *changes*. It is *not fated*. Within certain parameters (language, tradition), it can be influenced and changed for good or evil.
- Culture covers the *entire way of life* of a certain group of people, their habits, customs, rituals, values and institutions.
- Human cultures are very diverse. Culture is different in Germany, Brasil, Mongolia and Indonesia. Even in one country there can be a variety of cultures, which overlap and influence each other. A much debated question is, in how far the church as a distinct sociological entity needs to develop its own culture, with the possibility of serving as a model for the "world".
- At the same time, there is an emerging *trans-national culture*. It affirms national and cultural particularities, but at the same time, it recognises a "European", "Latin American", "Asian" or even "global" awareness, responsibility and identity. The *human rights tradition* reminds us that within cultural diversity there are values that are universal. Torture, racism, child abuse, rape, genital mutilation and slavery are and should not be acceptable in any culture. Religious tolerance is and should be affirmed against any cultural pressure to the contrary.

As intentional Christians we confess Christ as *Ku'rioj*, not only of the world, but of our life. But I propose to you that our primary *existential* identity is cultural. Only if we realise and admit that, can we do something about it. Historical and sociological evidence says that more often than not we functionalise the word "God" to serve our cultural interests. Wars and conflicts in our life time have shown that we are quite willing to de-humanise and kill brothers and sisters in Christ in order to protect our *natural* family and our *cultural* identity.

**2.2 Trinity.** "Trinity" is the Christian identity symbol for God. It implies God's togetherness with God's creation. This togetherness entails several dimensions.

**2.2.1 Creator.** God *creates* and sustains the world. Although human sin, rebellion, pride, selfishness and sloth have distorted God's creation, Christians affirm that God remains patiently committed to God's creation. Christian faith is intimately linked to the hope that *ultimately*, at its depth and at the end, it is not sin, death and the devil, but God and God's Christ who rule.

Culture therefore, whatever its corruption and perversity, injustice and oppression, is not damned or fated. It is graced with the promise of renewal to become what it was created to be: to reflect what God called "very beautiful".

**2.2.2 Redeemer.** God displayed God's sovereignty and patience by gifting what humanity needed, but could not provide by and for itself: in Christ, God not only loved the world, but in fact *reconciled* the world with God's self. Whatever picture we may use, or however we may understand "reconciliation" or "atonement", I suggest that we must resist the modern tendency to reduce Jesus Christ to an example or hero. Christ is the "saviour" who can and does free us from sin and its consequences.

**2.2.3 Presence.** When we refer to the *Holy Spirit*, we speak of God's presence in our life, in the church, in the world, and in the cosmos. The "identity" of the Spirit, i.e. that aspect of the work of the Spirit, which complements the Father and the Son, is that the Spirit makes God effectively present as creator and redeemer. As such, the Spirit is the Spirit of life (Ps 104:29f.) and at the same time, with the added input of the atoning work of Christ, the Spirit of healing, liberation, and shalom (Luke 4:14-30).

Nevertheless, within a trinitarian understanding of God, the biblical message invites us to measure the Spirit whether it affirms the *humanity* and the cross of the risen Christ (1 Cor 12:1-3, 10; 1 John

4). The references are, of course, not to abstract theological affirmations, but they want to insist that in our praxis it must become evident that God is on the side of making human life human.

**2.2.4 Promise and Fulfilment.** In a broken and estranged world the journey of faith will always be accompanied by the question of whether it was and is *worthwhile* to follow Christ. In the same chapter where Paul confidently says that the day will come when the death of death will be manifest and when God will be all in all, he adds the encouragement: "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know *that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.*" (1 Cor 15:58)

**2.2.5 The Community of Faith.** The church as the community in which Christ is heard, believed and obeyed, echoes the communitarian nature of God. The difference between the world and the church is not that one is sinless and the other is sinful. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Both, the world and the church are sinful. The difference between the world and the church is, that the church *knows* it and tries to do something about it. As salt of the earth, as light of the world, the people of God know the resources of *love and hope*, which, if exercised, can actually make a difference by transforming society in the direction of what is true and what is just.

**2.3 Identity.** Although I have emphasised the strong influence that culture has on our identity - for reality's sake we need to be honest at that point - we must remind ourselves continually (as we do in the Lord's Supper) that through faith and baptism, Christ has become our *ultimate* concern. He has ushered us into a *new* sphere of reality.

We believe in Christ and are baptised into Christ. Christ is "in us". Christ has freed our conscience from sin and selfishness, and as such has become the determining foundation, centre and focus of our life. We agree with the apostle Paul when he defines his *identity*: "... to me, *living is Christ* and dying is gain" (Phil 1:21); "... through the law I died to the law, so that *I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ*; and it is no longer I who live, but it is *Christ who lives in me*. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by *faith* in the Son of God, who *loved me and gave himself for me*" (Gal 2:19f.). The believer's identity is in Christ. That is an *ultimate* concern. It is a matter of life and death, as the martyrs in the early church, the dissidents of the Middle Ages, the 5000 Anabaptists in the 16th century, and Bonhoeffer, King and Romero in modern times, have manifested. All other concerns are pen-ultimate.<sup>[5]</sup>

As Christians we belong both to culture and to Christ. Our life in culture is recognised and affirmed. At the same time, we are given a responsibility. Our responsibility is to make known by word and deed, "to all in the house", to the "world", that "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it."<sup>[6]</sup>

### 3. "Listening"

Our topic has been and still is a matter of vigorous theological debate. We do not think and discuss in a vacuum. We need to listen to those who have faced similar challenges. At the same time, the literature is legion. A selection must be made. I have limited myself to those visions that have actually been shaped in situations of conflict and that have stood the test of time.

Since we meet in Germany, I want to retrieve briefly *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's* and *Karl Barth's* theological response to the situation in Germany during the 1930's. Their response has stood the test of time and their influence continues amongst discerning Christian circles in many parts of the world. To widen our horizon, I want to make a brief reference to the *Kairos Document: Challenge to the Churches* (1985)<sup>[7]</sup> that originated in South Africa's struggle against apartheid, and *The Road to Damascus Document: Kairos and Conversion* (1989)<sup>[8]</sup>, originating from the African, Asian and Latin American struggle against poverty, humiliation and oppression. And finally a reference to the "baptist" vision, mainly developed in the United States, where Baptists are most numerous, and associated with names such as James Wm. McClendon, John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, Glen H. Stassen and Miroslav Volf, will round up the picture for our orientation.<sup>[9]</sup>

**3.1 Karl Barth.** It was an existential shock for Karl Barth, and subsequently a significant factor in his break with liberalism, when in 1914 he read that his theological teachers were among German intellectuals who supported the war policies of the German emperor.<sup>[10]</sup> History repeated itself a few years later. We all know that a great number of sophisticated and world famous theologians lived in the Germany of the 1930's. And we continue to be surprised that many of them failed to meet the challenge of the day. They actively or passively supported what the *Kairos* theologians call "State theology".<sup>[11]</sup> It abuses the name "God" by using it to validate nationalism, racism, genocide, and war.

Theologians had failed to *problematise* culture. They were not clear about the ambiguity of culture and how the cross centred message of Christian faith relates to it. Many of those who failed to read the signs of the times, and therefore failed to meet the challenge of the day, by omission or commission, gave theological relevance to cultural values that negated the content of faith in Christ. The words "God" and "Christ" were used to baptise nationalistic, cultural and racial ideas; and the Spirit of God was seen to have been actively engaged in a history of nationalism, racism, genocide and a bloody war. Besides the one word of God that we are to hear, trust and obey in life and in death, other images, truths and powers had claimed and were given theological dignity, and thus became sources for the faith of Christians and the ministry of the church.<sup>[12]</sup>

Karl Barth is helpful because he allows us to appreciate cultural, political and economic phenomena without ascribing divine dignity to them.<sup>[13]</sup> Barth invites us to presume that the Spirit of God may be active "out there". On the one hand, human sin has caused *estrangement* - not separation<sup>[14]</sup> - between God and God's creation; therefore we can never identify human and historical phenomena with manifestations of the βασιλεια/α του= Θεου. On the other hand, however, God has not only created the world, but through Christ has reconciled it with God. Therefore, there can be no human and historical manifestation that is outside the realm of God's sovereignty.<sup>[15]</sup>

Barth therefore suggests that human and historical phenomena can become "analogies", "parables" ("Gleichnisse"), "correspondences" ("Entsprechungen"), "witnesses" ("Bezeugungen") to the βασιλεια/α του= Θεου<sup>[16]</sup>. This means that existing cultural, political or economic phenomena, since they are part of the realm of God's redemption, can become "*parables of the kingdom*": they are "*gleichnisföhig*".<sup>[17]</sup> Yet, since at the same time they are also human and historical products, and as such are part of a world that is estranged from God, they cannot be identified directly with the kingdom of God, *they must be measured against God's revelation in Jesus Christ*: they are "*gleichnisbedürftig*".<sup>[18]</sup> *Jesus Christ* as he has been revealed in the Scriptures is therefore the measure by which the church evaluates cultural phenomena.<sup>[19]</sup>

**3.2 Dietrich Bonhoeffer.** *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* adds further helpful dimensions, not only with the prophetic witness of his life, but also with his theological insights.

He affirms, first of all, that reality cannot be divided into two spheres, into "the one divine, holy, supernatural and Christian, and the other worldly, profane, natural and un-Christian."<sup>[20]</sup> In Jesus Christ these two spheres have become fused to constitute one reality.<sup>[22]</sup> "In Jesus Christ the reality of God entered into the reality of the world."<sup>[21]</sup> Therefore any attempt to either absolutise one or the other should be resisted.

Consequently, Bonhoeffer rejects *two alternatives*, we may call them the *sectarian* and the *liberal* alternatives.<sup>[23]</sup> The *sectarian* alternative argues that Christ is the fulfilment and end of the world; that there is a radical break between faith and the world; that the world is damned and that the Christian will therefore not need to accept responsibility for the world. The world must be "hated" and the church must withdraw from the world. The other, the *liberal* alternative, which has been the great temptation of all established churches, is to assign theological dignity to culture as such, which, by implication, means, that the world does not really need the gospel. The only function of the gospel would be, to bring to light, what is already there.

Within the one reality, which God has established through the incarnation, Bonhoeffer distinguishes between the *ultimate* and the *penultimate*<sup>[24]</sup> He leaves no doubt that the "justification of the sinner by grace alone" is the "origin and essence of all Christian life".<sup>[25]</sup> Faith as God's gift of salvation, and not human achievements or human morality, constitutes our ultimate concern.<sup>[26]</sup> But what does that mean for the matters of time and space, for the things and structures and institutions of this world, for our human activities, achievements and morality? In Bonhoeffer's words: how is the *penultimate* related to the *ultimate*?<sup>[27]</sup>

In Jesus Christ - incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection<sup>[28]</sup> - God neither divinises nor destroys the penultimate, but God wants to heal, to liberate and to save it. The penultimate is graced to become the preparing of the way of the Lord,<sup>[29]</sup> and the Christian life "is the dawning of the ultimate in me; it is the life of Jesus Christ in me."<sup>[30]</sup>

This means concretely:

The hungry man needs bread and the homeless man needs a roof; the dispossessed need justice and the lonely need fellowship; the undisciplined need order and the slave needs freedom. To allow the hungry man to remain hungry would be blasphemy against God and one's neighbour .... It is for the love of Christ, which belongs as much to the hungry man as to myself, that I share my bread with him and that I share my dwelling with the homeless. .... To provide the hungry man with bread is to prepare the way for the coming of grace.<sup>[31]</sup>

**3.3 The Kairos (1986) and The Road to Damascus (1989) documents.** The *Kairos* and *The Road to Damascus* documents add further important dimensions for developing a constructive relationship between culture and God. These pamphlets from the two-thirds world help us to look beyond our "Western" borders to gain a "global" perspective. They are authentic illustrations of theologians and church leaders who have discerned the signs of the times, and who in situations of injustice, poverty, humiliation, and oppression have dared to speak the word of the Lord.

**3.3.1 Justice and reconciliation.** They have sharpened our minds with regard to the relationship between *justice* and *reconciliation*. Some Christian leaders have argued, that since every situation is ambiguous, since right and wrong are on all sides of a conflict, therefore the best Christians can do, is *not* to take sides, but *instead* work for reconciliation. The answer of Kairos is clear.

Nowhere in the Bible or in Christian tradition has it ever been suggested that we ought to try to reconcile good and evil, God and the devil.<sup>[32]</sup>

Therefore:

To be truly biblical our Church leaders must adopt a theology ... of direct confrontation with the forces of evil rather than a theology of reconciliation with sin and the devil.<sup>[33]</sup>

There cannot be reconciliation, these theologians insist, apart from justice and repentance.

**3.3.2 The church divided.** "The Church is divided against itself and its day of judgment has come."<sup>[34]</sup> Wherever you look, whether you look at Germany in the 1930's, South Africa under Apartheid, USA, Australia and Latin America today, baptised believers who gather around the Lord's Supper table are on both sides of the conflict. Both oppressor and oppressed, torturer and tortured are taking the bread, drinking from the cup, and pray to the same God.

There we sit in the same church while outside Christian police men and soldiers are beating up and killing Christian children or torturing Christian prisoners to death while yet other Christians stand by and weakly plead for peace.<sup>[35]</sup>

Since "God" has interpreted God's being in Jesus Christ, therefore for Christians "God" cannot be an empty symbol into which every one can read her or his self interest; if truth is not just relative, then the church must face the challenge of truth in her own midst. Theologians at all times and in each situation have used and are still using biblical-theological arguments to validate injustice, whether it was and is white supremacy, Anti-Semitism, Apartheid or male superiority.

We are a divided Church precisely because not all the members of our churches have taken sides against oppression. In other words, not all Christians have united themselves with God, "who is always on the side of the oppressed" (Ps 103:6).[36]

**3.3.3 Sin and conversion.** Neither sin, nor conversion should be reduced to the personal and individual level. In situations of injustice, the "problem that we are dealing with ... is not merely a problem of personal guilt, it is a problem of structural injustice. People are suffering, people are being maimed and killed and tortured every day."<sup>[37]</sup> I recall the Baptist World Alliance General Council issuing resolutions, in which apartheid in South Africa was named "sin", "crime" and "heresy", which "it is our duty in the name of God to denounce."<sup>[38]</sup>

In a divided church we may need to appreciate afresh that the biblical call to conversion is not addressed to the outsider, to the unbeliever, to the world in general. It is addressed to the people of God. "All of us who profess to be followers of Jesus of Nazareth are in continuous need of conversion."<sup>[39]</sup>

**3.3.4 Salvation and hope.** The radicality of sin can only be met with a deep and wide understanding of salvation. Such salvation is rooted in Christ's atoning work of reconciliation, but it also includes liberating people from passivity and fear, and freeing people from a view of history that instils in them the idea that they are fated and that they can do nothing to change the world in the direction of truth and justice. Salvation includes the imperative "to act hopefully, to act with full confidence and trust in God."<sup>[40]</sup>

The disciple cannot be greater than the master, and we are following the path of a crucified Christ. Whatever twists and turns the road might take, be firm and steadfast. The pain we undergo is part of the birth pangs of a new creation.[41]

**3.3.5 Christian Spirituality.** While traditional spirituality tended to be "otherworldly", "purely private and individualistic", leaving things to God, rather than accepting responsibility for the affairs in the world, a

... truly biblical spirituality would penetrate into every aspect of human existence and would exclude nothing from God's redemptive will. Biblical faith is prophetically relevant to everything that happens in the world.<sup>[42]</sup>

**3.3.6 God takes sides.** "God is not neutral!"<sup>[43]</sup> Karl Barth influenced the various streams of liberation theology by retrieving the biblical insistence that when we speak of the incarnation or of the cross or of the humanity of Christ, we are not simply making important theological utterances, but we are confessing to belong to a God *who takes sides*. Jesus manifested the partiality of God in that "He ignored all those who are high and mighty and wealthy in the world in favour of the weak and meek and lowly."<sup>[44]</sup>

**3.3.7 Praxis.** "Christians ... must quite simply participate in the struggle for liberation and for a just society."<sup>[45]</sup> Divine grace is not thrown at us, it does not ignore or by-pass the believer, but it empowers the believer and the believing community to active obedience.<sup>[46]</sup> The content of that discipleship is given by Jesus' journey of passion, which could appreciate the beauty of nature and culture by drawing on their resources to gather into language the most sublime insights into love, joy and grace, and at the same time those very cultures opposed and destroyed him.

**3.4 The "baptist" vision.** There is no intention, of course, to claim anyone for the "baptist" (small "b") tradition who does not want to be identified with it. But there is a small "b" baptist

tradition, reaching back to the non-violent Anabaptists in the 16th century, which contains elements of promise for our investigation.<sup>[47]</sup> Their input is important because it reminds us that the church is not primarily an organisation with offices, laws, liturgies and dogmas, but a voluntary association of intentional believers who are committed to Christ and therefore to freedom, truth, equality, peace and justice. Feeding on the "Word" and gathered around the "table", they clearly confess to whom they belong and as such they provide an alternative way of life to a world that tries to survive without God. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon have coined the phrase "resident aliens", describing a community of believers who have voluntarily but clearly come to grips with the fact that their citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20),<sup>[48]</sup> that the church is a distinct entity, which is different from the culture surrounding it and has a distinct mission in and to the culture.<sup>[49]</sup>

Only if we know where we stand and to whom we belong, can we discern the signs of the times and endeavour to speak the word of the Lord.

#### 4. "Deciding"

We have posed the question, we have set the stage, we have listened to relevant input from the community of faith. It is now time to gather our thoughts into a model that may help us to discern the signs of the times in order to speak the word of the Lord.

**4.1. Faith and Baptism.** Although we are related to both, God and culture, and indeed, to God through culture, in the event of faith and baptism a radical change of allegiance takes place. Our conscience, the integrative centre of our personal self, is freed and focussed. Christ becomes our ultimate concern to which all other concerns are voluntarily subjected. The earliest Christian confessions "Κυ/ριωφ Ιησους=φ" ("Jesus is Lord") and "God raised Jesus from the dead" are *foundational* for our life (Christ as *sacramentum*), and at the same time, they point to the content and measure for our life and ministry (Christ as *exemplum*).

Turning to God includes not merely an inner personal and private experience of repentance, faith and prayer, but it also includes a commitment to justice and truth. The branch that does not bear the fruits of love has become useless and is cut off and cast away (John 15). Faith becomes visible in love (Gal 5:6). Faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26). Conversion to Christ as *Κυ/ριωφ* includes the affirmation that "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me" (Matth 11:5f.). For a Christian, it is not possible to worship God and by-pass the stranger and disadvantaged in our midst.

**4.2 The Community of Faith.** Although faith and baptism come to each individual, they do not individualise believers, but place them into a *community of faith*, the church. The church is *necessary* for our being in the world. We are relational beings, created to find our identity not apart from, but together with each other. Christian freedom is not an individualistic but a communal reality. The individualism that so strongly determines "Western" culture and unfortunately also much of church culture, needs to be criticised and resisted.

Church is the *συνερχομε/νων* ("coming together") of the people of God (1 Cor 11:18, 20) with the declared intention and commitment to recognise and celebrate the presence of the *crucified* Christ. And that is only possible, as the apostle says in his letter to the church in Corinth, if the "late comers" are not forgotten. It is not possible to celebrate the Eucharist and fail to wait for the "late comers". Relationship to Christ and concern for the disadvantaged belong together.<sup>[50]</sup>

**4.3 Knowing God's will.** Can God's will be known, not only in Corinth, but here and now? Being aware of our own fallibility and knowing that the history of the church is replete with injustice, make us hesitant at this point. We want to be modest and we don't want to tell others what to do.

And yet, our modesty and our tolerance can be false. They can be subtle and convenient ways to escape the claim of the Lordship of Christ over our lives.

Is there not a cognitive dimension to our faith in Christ? Do we not confess with the first Christians that in and with the story of Jesus, God has not only reconciled the world with himself, but God has actually made known who God is and what God wants us to do? It would therefore be a sign of disobedience if we claim, even if it is under the umbrella of modesty, humility and tolerance, that we cannot know God's will. In and with the story of Jesus, God's will can be known. Even a naive reading of the story of Jesus as it comes to us with colourful variations from the Bible makes it absolutely clear that faith in Christ implies and includes:

- Announcing and demonstrating that "God" is a good word that wants to bring meaning, joy and freedom to people. God wants to set people in a "broad place" (Psalms 18:19, 31:8).
- That by sharing God's rich life with the humanity of Jesus, God has graced human culture with the promise of appreciation, renewal, and transformation.
- The indicative of the salvation of *sinner*s implies the imperative of loving one's *enemy*. As God in Christ created space to include us sinners in God's being, so we gratefully respond to God by creating space to include the "other" in our own being: the foreigner, the refugee, the asylum seeker, the orphan, the widow, the single mother, the drug addict. Indeed, our relation to the "other" is the test case of whether we want to follow the *crucified* Christ (Mark 8:34-38).
- Resisting claims of religious and political establishments that do not bring healing and liberation. In shaping our attitude to social, political and economic structures, we must always remember that Jesus did not die of a heart attack or of old age, but that he was pursued, captured, sentenced and killed by the religious and political authorities of his day. The New Testament does not only include Romans 13, but also Revelation 13. It belongs to the prophetic task of the church to critically measure, unmask and denounce when profit is placed before people, when the focus on the self tends to exclude the "other", and when human institution arrogate divinity to themselves.
- In a world of violence, where "pay back", "an eye for an eye", and the institution of war, are the accepted structures of dealing with human conflicts, the church knows the power of forgiveness and the prophetic witness of the peace churches and of Martin Luther King's opposition to evil with the waging of non-violence. By repudiating violence, the church refuses to let the "world" define reality and instead decides to follow the *crucified* Christ.
- The church knows the power of repentance<sup>[51]</sup> as the only way to redeem history and avoid letting the future becoming captive to the sins of the past. By word and deed the church can therefore encourage social, political and economic institutions to admit mistakes, say "sorry", and offer compensation.
- Witnessing in word and deed to the new reality that God has established by breaking the estranging power of death. By raising Jesus from death, the results of sin are suspended and new reality is ushered in. This new reality excludes the association of power and privilege with gender, class, or ethnicity (Gal 3:28).

I think, that even our own experience shows us that in whatever situation we find ourselves, it is not too difficult to know God's will. As a Christian World Communion we should be able to create an institute in which the great challenges of our time are studied and analysed in order to help our unions and churches to reach responsible decisions. But it seems to me, that the greater difficulty is, whether we want to know God's will, and whether we have the courage to accept responsibility for what we know.

**4.4 Human Rights.** Besides Bible and tradition, culture also offers help to discern the will of God. Our spiritual forebears, with their emphasis on freedom of conscience, have actually helped

to shape the tradition of *universal human rights*.<sup>[52]</sup> Human Rights are not divine law and they do not have revelatory status. They can and need to be interpreted theologically. We may presume that they are part of God's providential activity in the world to make and keep human life human. Attention to human rights can help us to locate the important issues that we need to address, and at the same time they show us what universal human morality thinks about them.

Nevertheless, since Christ is our ultimate concern, therefore we would have to interpret human rights and inter-relate them with our faith in Christ. In light of that we may even want to modify or deepen a merely popular and secular understanding of certain rights. But as universally accepted "common standard(s) of achievement for all peoples and all nations",<sup>[53]</sup> it is very helpful to know that refugees and asylum seekers have rights, that torture and rape and the denial of religious liberty is universally shunned, that people in all parts of the world affirm that human beings have an "*inherent dignity and ... equal and inalienable rights*"; indeed that

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.[54]

**4.5 Welcoming the stranger in our midst.** An illustration may help to undergird the last two points. Ethnic animosity is obviously the source of major tensions and conflicts around the world. People jealously protect their space and their race. The words "God" or "Allah" are freely used to justify torture, murder, forced conversions, brutality and civil war.

Christians understand racism as the result of sin, the manifestation of estrangement from God. When in Christ, God dealt with the estranging power of sin, a new reality was born, a reality which relativised the traditional divisions of race, class, and sex, and ushered in a community of equals (Gal 3:28). The God of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures does not only lean to ease the burdens of the slave, the widow, the orphan and the stranger, but it is God's declared will to welcome the stranger in our midst. According to Matthew 25:31-46, our attitude of acceptance and rejection of the stranger mirrors out attitude of rejection and acceptance to Christ. The imperative results:

Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:16-19)

The protection of "strangers" - asylum seekers, refugees, ethnic minorities - has become international law. There is a whole host of human right instruments and structures that protect the rights of ethnic minorities, refugees, asylum seekers, and migrant workers.

Having thus recognised the will of God, what hinders us from accepting responsibility for what we know and do it?

## 5. "Acting"

**5.1 Courage.** The challenge is to accept responsibility for what we know, to "be doers of the word": "Anyone ... who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin" (James 1:22 and 4:17).

I think that with our conscience focussed on a biblical understanding of Christ, with an empathetic reading of the situation in which we find ourselves, with the moral guidance that we receive from the human rights tradition, and with a healthy suspicion of our human and ecclesiastical self-interests, we can discern the will of God. The difficulty is less with our intellect than with our will. Given the story of Jesus, which includes, of course, God's togetherness with God's people in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is fairly easy to know where our stand should be with regard to nationalism, racism, apartheid, militarism, rape, torture, child abuse, poverty, forced conversions, ethnic and

religious hatred. The question is, whether as individuals and as churches we have the courage to be who we are.

**5.2 Options.** In trying to bring together the resources of our faith with the challenges from our culture, we may want to be aware of different options for our thinking and doing..

**5.2.1 Creative.** There is, first of all, the creative and productive option that is part of the holistic mission of the church. We joyously witness to the fact that God loves everybody, that people can believe in Christ, and experience the empowering and guiding presence of the Spirit of God.

It also belongs to the Christian tradition in general and to our baptist tradition in particular that we have encouraged and intensified the human rights tradition; that we have built and staffed hospitals, schools, seminaries and universities; that we have opposed slavery, and be part of peace and civil rights movements. In various countries we have encouraged the trade union movement, worked for reconciliation, opposed racism and apartheid.

As Christians we must also shape our own community culture in which it becomes manifest to whom we belong. We must show by example that reconciliation of differences, that saying "sorry" for sins of the past, that loving ones enemy, that telling the truth, that being faithful, is possible, and that equality can actually be lived. The fact that many Baptist churches still refuse to ordain women, that segregation is still an ostensible fact in many of our churches, that Baptists often belong to the most conservative and militaristic sectors of their society, shows that we have a long way to go before our actions match our words.

**5.2.2 Critical anticipation.** Remembering that *God* is the *creator* of the world, that in Christ, *God* has *reconciled* the world with himself, and that through the *Spirit*, *God is present* and active in the world, we may *presume God's providential and sustaining and liberating activity in the world*. But *whether* it is God who is active in the world, and *where* God is active, we will have to *measure and evaluate*. I would therefore suggest that we adopt an attitude of *critical anticipation* to our culture.

**5.2.3 "No"!** There are situations in which we must say a clear and serious "no". In a culture where human life is evaluated in terms of usefulness, where human beings tend to become a commodity, where freedom is interpreted as protection from the "other" rather than living with the "other", I would suggest that the church needs to publicly oppose euthanasia, capital punishment, militarism, and ethnic hatred.

Such a clear and radical "no" has its parallel in the human rights tradition. The *International Bill of Human Rights* in its *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* lists a number of human rights which are valid in all circumstances (§4:2): the inherent right to life (§6), the prohibition of slavery and servitude (§8:1,2), the prohibition of imprisonment merely on the ground of failing to fulfil a contractual obligation (§11), the right that "no one shall be held guilty of any criminal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a criminal offence, under national or international law at the time it was committed" (§15), the right that everyone must be recognised as a person before the law (§16), and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion (§18).

We live in an era of post-modernism where moral absolutes are suspect. The results of imperialism have made us sensitive to the Asian and African claims to respect their cultural values. We affirm that tolerance is one of humanity's great cultural achievements. But we also know that tolerance can be used as an excuse to escape moral responsibility, just as convenience and sloth can easily stifle our moral sensitivity. We must certainly appreciate and affirm regional, national and cultural differences, but at the same time we must affirm that not all morality is situational and relative. There are certain absolutes that need to be unmasked and named, whether we are in Kenya, Afghanistan, France, Chile, Canada, Sweden, America or Australia. Torture, child abuse, rape, genital mutilation, racism, sexism, ethnic cleansing, slavery, poverty, hunger, and oppression can never be right.

**5.3 Challenge to Church leaders.** It belongs to the role of church leaders to discern the signs of the times, to speak the word of the Lord, to challenge and empower the churches, and give credibility to their words by appropriate actions, programs and structures.

Since all of us attending this conference are in one way or other church leaders, I want to invite you to consider whether the following elements should not be part of shaping our self-understanding as church leaders.

- Developing a *holistic evangelical theology*, which is true to the Word of God, attributes relevance to our tradition, and seeks to name and address the challenges of our time. Such a theology will be trinitarian, it acknowledges Jesus Christ as *sacramentum* and as *exemplum*, it recognises the Holy Spirit as empowering believers to discipleship, and it recognises that the God of the Bible is love and as such "works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed" (Psalm 103:6). God leans to save that which is lost, heal that which is broken, and liberate that which is oppressed.
- As a ship is designed to leave the harbour and brave the storms and the waves, so the church must be encouraged and empowered to leave the comfort of non-involvement and risk *participation* in the challenges of society. To know God means to do justice. The way of faith is to seek and find Jesus in the word and in the sacraments and in the gathered community, but according to Matthew 25, we are also to seek him in the stranger and prisoner and others in need.
- Commit ourselves to a holistic ministry by being *evangelists*, declaring the good news, *servants*, bringing help where it is needed, *priests* who are willing to reconcile in situations of conflict, and *prophets* who dare to unmask, denounce and oppose injustice.
- The churches can expect and should demand *moral and theological guidance* from their leaders. Not popularity, but obedience, not money, but faith, not numbers, but faithfulness, not unity, but truth, should guide church leaders. It is a sad fact that too often leaders tend to please the conservative majority in their churches and thereby fail to empower their churches to fulfil their prophetic task. How much have we contributed to dividing the church (see above §3.3.2) by living and preaching cheap grace, which according to Bonhoeffer "is the deadly enemy of our Church ... (and) has been the ruin of more Christians than any commandment of works"?<sup>[55]</sup>
- *Suffering and civil disobedience* are important parts of our baptist tradition. It is therefore sad when baptist leaders are often more willing to encourage evangelism and numerical church growth, than clearly and demonstratively name the demons of our time and help to unmask and disempower them.
- We must not use our view of the autonomy of the local church as an escape to accept the moral responsibility that is inherent to our faith. Leaders must lead. They must pray hard to find the delicate balance of being part of the people, but at the same time not merely impersonate the faith and morality of the people. There must be a critical and prophetic edge to leadership. As a pastor of a local church I expect my denominational leaders not only to write to me about budgets, finances and evangelism conferences - however important they may be - but I also expect a clear and public "No!" to racism, ethnic hatred, militarism, torture, violence, child abuse, and a clear and public "Yes" to religious liberty, women's ordination and social responsibility.

Give counsel, grant justice; ...  
hide the outcasts,  
do not betray the fugitive;  
let the outcasts of Moab settle among you;  
be a refuge to them from the destroyer."  
When the oppressor is no more,

and destruction has ceased,  
and marauders have vanished from the land,  
then a throne shall be established in steadfast love in the tent of David,  
and on it shall sit in faithfulness a ruler who seeks justice  
and is swift to do what is right.  
(Isaiah 16:3-5)

Rev Dr Thorwald Lorenzen  
09/06/03

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[1] This essay formed the bases for a lecture given at a Seminar organised by the Baptist World Alliance and the German Baptist Union under the title: "Baptist Identity and National Culture". It was held May 26-29, 2001 at the house of the Diakoniegemeinschaft Bethel in Berlin.

[2] Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik IV/1* (1953), p. 111, says that God's activity "kann ja als vollzogen gar nicht anders als in seinem tätigen Nachvollzug erkannt werden." (Emphasis partly mine); the English translation is inadequate at this point: "But this coming together of God and man cannot be known to be fulfilled except as it is actually worked out." (*Church Dogmatics IV/1* [1956], p. 103). The same idea is contained in the subsequent sentences: "God is not idle but active. ... therefore, man must be active too." (*Ibid.*)

[3] William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech. Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), p. 9.

[4] For this brief portrayal of culture, I have drawn heavily on Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture. A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), especially pp. 25-29.

[5] Miroslav Volf says it well: "... Christians can never be first of all Asians or Americans, Croations, Russians, or Tutsis, and then Christians. At the very core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty, from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures. A response to a call from that God entails rearrangement of a whole network of allegiances. As the call of Jesus' first disciples illustrates, 'the nets' (economy) and 'the father' (family) must be left behind (Mark 1:16-20). Departure is part and parcel of Christian identity. Since Abraham is our ancestor, our faith is 'at odds with place' ...." (*Exclusion and Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), p. 40.

[6] Matthew 5:13-16; Psalm 24:1.

[7] *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Churches. A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa* (2nd ed. 1986), in: Robert McAfee Brown, ed., *Kairos: Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 15-66.

[8] *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion. A document signed by Third World Christians from El Salvador, Guatemala, Korea, Namibia, Nicaragua, Philippines, South Africa* (1989), in: *ibid.*, pp. 109-138.

[9] I am not saying that these theologians are Baptists in a denominational sense. In fact, most of them are not. What I am suggesting, is that their perception of "God and culture" reflects what Baptists have traditionally affirmed.

[10] Here are Barth's own words, penned in 1957: "One day in early August 1914 stands out in my personal memory as a black day. Ninety-three German intellectuals impressed public opinion by their proclamation in support of the war policy of Wilhelm II and his counsellors. Among these intellectuals I discovered to my horror almost all of my theological teachers whom I had greatly venerated. In despair over what this indicated about the signs of the time I suddenly realized that I could not any longer follow either their ethics and dogmatics or their understanding of the Bible and of history. For me at least, 19th-century theology no longer held any future." (Cited from Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology. Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997], p. 78).

[11] *Kairos* (2nd ed. 1986), p. 29.

[12] This is a reference to the Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934, §1. The Barmen Theological Declaration (1934) is reproduced in many books and liturgical resources, for instance, in: Robert McAfee Brown, ed., *Kairos: Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 156-158; J.H. Leith, ed., *Creeeds of the Churches* (Richmond: Knox, rev. ed. 1973), pp. 517-522; a more recent translation in *JTSA* 47 (June 1984), pp. 78-81.

[13] His decisive ideas in this regard were shaped during the rise of National Socialism in Germany and during World War II. They are clearly expressed in the Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934 (see footnote 12) and in his essay "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," (1946) in: *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), pp. 149-189; also in *Against the Stream. Shorter Post-War Writings 1946-52* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), pp. 13-50. Compare also Barth's teaching about the "parables of the Kingdom" in: *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3,1 (1961), pp. 110-135.

[14] Again Barth formulates brilliantly: "Denn man vergesse nicht: Es gibt zwar eine Gottlosigkeit des Menschen, es gibt aber laut des Wortes von der Versöhnung keine Menschenlosigkeit Gottes." (*Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV/3,1 [1959], p. 133); the translation loses much of its original force: "For we must not forget that, while man may deny God, according to the Word of reconciliation God does not deny man." (*Church Dogmatics*, IV/3,1 [1961], p. 119).

[15] The theological basis for this assertion is, according to Barth, God's reconciling work in Jesus Christ: "... this means that in the world reconciled by God in Jesus Christ there is no secular sphere abandoned by Him or withdrawn from His control ...." (*Church Dogmatics*, IV/3,1 [1961], p. 119).

[16] "The Christian Community and the Civil Community" (1946), in: *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* (1960), p. 169; compare also *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3,1 (1961), p. 111 (Barth's use of "Bezeugungen" is translated there with "attesting").

[17] Compare the German text "Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde," (1946) in: *Theologische Studien* 104 (1984, pp. 49-82), p. 65 (§ 14). The English text speaks of being "capable of reflecting indirectly the truth and reality which constitute the Christian community." ("The Christian Community and the Civil Community" [1946], in: *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* [1960], p. 169).

[18] "Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde," (1946) in: *Theologische Studien* 104 (1984), p. 66 (§ 14). The English text says: "it will always be questionable whether and how far it will fulfill its just purposes. To be saved from degeneration and decay it needs to be reminded of the righteousness which is a reflection of Christian truth." ("The Christian Community and the Civil Community" [1946], in: *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* [1960], p. 169).

[19] For words that are outside of God's revelation "to be true, and therefore to be words of genuine prophecy, such words must be in the closest material and substantial conformity and agreement with the one Word of God Himself and therefore with that of His one Prophet Jesus Christ. The truth proper of the one Word of God must dwell within them. Applied to such words, 'true' must imply that they say the same thing as the one Word of God, and are true for this reason." (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3,1 [1961], p. 111).

[20] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (London: Collins, 1964), p.196.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 130-133, 188-207.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 194.

[23] Bonhoeffer calls them the "radical" and the "compromise" alternatives (*ibid.*, pp. 127-130).

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 120-143.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 120-125.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 125-133.

[28] Bonhoeffer emphasises the importance of the unity of incarnation, cross and resurrection (*ibid.*, pp. 130f.).

[29] Ibid., pp. 133-143.

[30] Ibid., p. 141.

[31] Ibid., p. 137.

[32] Kairos (2nd ed. 1986), p. 39, see pp. 38-40.

[33] Ibid., p. 40, see pp. 38-40.

[34] Ibid., p. 27.

[35] Ibid., p. 27.

[36] Ibid., p. 61.

[37] Ibid., p. 41; *The Road to Damascus* (1989), pp. 126-133. For a theologically sophisticated understanding of sin and the corresponding view of salvation, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation. History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973. Revised Edition with a New Introduction, 1988), pp. 36f., 175-178, New Introduction, pp. xxxviiiif.

[38] Resolutions of the BWA General Council from which these emphases are taken: Montreal, Canada, 1991: "opposition to apartheid as a sin against the Gospel of God's love for all people." Singapore, 1986: The BWA General Council "is convinced that the apartheid system is an affront to the Christian understanding of life and must be declared a sin against God, for Christians a heresy." Los Angeles, 1985: "we openly denounce the whole system of apartheid as practiced by the South African Government." (Emphases mine).

[39] *The Road to Damascus* (1989), pp. 135f.

[40] Kairos (2nd ed. 1986), p. 60.

[41] *The Road to Damascus* (1989), p. 138.

[42] Kairos (2nd ed. 1986), pp. 46f.

[43] Ibid., p. 58; compare *The Road to Damascus* (1989), pp. 123f.

[44] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2 (1958), §64,3; p. 168.

[45] Kairos (2nd ed. 1986), p. 62.

[46] Compare Footnote 1. "Barmen 2" may serve as a summary statement: "As Jesus Christ is God's comforting verdict (Zuspruch) of the forgiveness of all our sins, so, and with equal seriousness, he is also God's vigorous announcement of his claim (Anspruch) upon our whole life. Through him there comes to us joyful liberation from the godless ties of this world for free, grateful service to his creatures." ("The Barmen Theological Declaration," [1934], § 2 [see footnote 12]).

[47] James Wm. McClendon, Jr. summarises the essential elements of the "baptist" vision as follows: "first of all the awareness of the biblical story as our story, but also as mission as responsibility for costly witness, of liberty as the freedom to obey God without state help or hindrance, of discipleship as life transformed into obedience to Jesus' lordship, and of community as daily sharing in the vision." (*Ethics: Systematic Theology Volume I* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986], p. 35). Compare also: James Wm. McClendon, Jr., "The Believers Church in Theological Perspective," in: Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner, and Mark Thiessen Nation, eds., *The Wisdom of the Cross. Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 309-326. Compare further: John Howard Yoder, "A People in the World: Theological Interpretation," in: James Leo Garrett, Jr., ed., *The Concept of the Believer's Church. Addresses from the 1967 Louisville Conference* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1969), pp. 250-283; Miroslav Volf, *After our Likeness. The Church as the image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), Part II.

[48] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens. A provocative Christian assessment of culture and ministry for people who know that something is wrong* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Where Resident Aliens Live. Exercises for Christian Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

[49] John Howard Yoder, "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture," in: Glen H. Stassen, D. M. Yeager and John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation. A New Vision of Christ and Culture. With a Previously Unpublished Essay by H. Richard Niebuhr* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), pp. 31-89, for instance, p. 75.

[50] The reference is, of course, to 1 Corinthians 11.

[51] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), pp. 111-119.

[52] I have tried on several occasions to give a theological appreciation and interpretation of Human Rights, most recently: "Towards a Theology of Human Rights," *Review and Expositor* 97/1 (Winter 2000), pp. 49-66.

[53] This is the self-designation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in its Preamble.

[54] From the Preamble and § 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

[55] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: MacMillan, 1963 [1937]), pp. 45-47 and 59.