



Foreword special collection: Impact of reformed theology



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In celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Theological School of the Reformed Churches in South Africa, the Theological School Potchefstroom in collaboration with the Faculty of Theology of the North-West University (NWU) hosted an academic conference on 18–20 September 2019. The theme of the conference was 'The impact of reformed theology'. In line with the overall theme, the sub-themes of the conference were:

- A review of 150 years of reformed theology in South Africa and/or the rest of Africa.
- The impact of reformed theology worldwide, or in a specific part of the world.
- The future of theological training at state-subsidised universities.
- The impact of the reformed worldview on different disciplines and fields of research.

Although the conference was held as a commemoration of the last 150 years, each theme effectively offered the opportunity not only to look back, but also to focus on the present and the future.

The majority of papers that were read during this conference was prepared for publication for this special issue of *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*.

In this issue, readers will find a total of 22 articles on a number of themes and topics related to the impact of reformed theology. Broadly speaking, these articles can be grouped together under the following six headings:

1. Articles related to the history of reformed theology in South Africa
 - Wim Vergeer explores the historical origins and characteristics of Reformed Hermeneutics. He indicates how the theological views of Dirk Postma lay at the heart of Reformed Hermeneutics. Postma's views can further be traced to those of Aegidius Francken, a product of the 'Nadere Reformatie'. Vergeer demonstrates how the same hermeneutical principles that Dirk Postma upheld, still hold sway in reformed theology today. These principles are outlined and are put forward as standard for the future development of reformed theology.
 - Mottie Tamarkin labels Christian-nationalism as an oxymoron. The 'Christian' represents universal values whereas 'nationalism' focuses on the particular identity and interests of a particular group. Consequently, there is a built in tension in this identity. Tamarkin demonstrates that whilst some 'Dopper' intellectuals initially were in the forefront of the Afrikaner struggle for national self-assertion, the balance between the two began to weigh too heavily on the side of nationalism for them. As Afrikaner nationalism in power became increasingly tainted by Apartheid, 'Dopper' intellectuals began to distance themselves from it. Consequently, their criticism against both mounted. During the 1980s, young 'Dopper' intellectuals divorced themselves altogether from Christian-nationalism, identifying themselves merely as Christians.
 - Koos (Jacobus) Vorster challenges the perception that Calvinist social ethics was responsible for apartheid, and is therefore perceived as immoral and unacceptable. He argues that the social-ethical reasoning of Calvin and his followers founded and defended republicanism and fundamental human rights. The traditional idea of the Calvinist Reformation, such as the political covenant, sovereignty in own sphere in bodies of authority, religious freedom and the justice of the kingdom of God, developed in the 20th century in the ethos of human rights which became apparent in the South African constitutional democracy. He proposes that the real tradition of the Calvinist Reformation and social ethics of this tradition should be refined and developed in order to promote constitutionalism for the benefit of emerging democracies.
 - Amie (Jan) van Wyk pleads for the appreciation of the ecclesiological contribution of the late Prof. Willie Snyman. Although Snyman was not an active publisher and while criticism can be brought against his views at some points, his contribution on synodical level makes him one

Note: Special Collection: Impact of Reformed Theology.

- of the most influential theologians, and especially ecclesiologists in the Reformed Churches in Southern Africa (RCSA) during the 20th century. It was because of the insights of Snyman that the first multi-racial General Synod of the RCSA met in 1965. This Synod met in its initial form up to 1992 but was revived in 2009 as major assembly with full status according to the Church Polity of the RCSA representing the inter-racial Reformed Churches. Furthermore, it was on his initiative that the intermediate commission of the three Afrikaans churches started communicating. He also stimulated the origin of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES – later called Council) in 1946, because he was convinced that the unity of Reformed churches cannot be bordered by oceans.
- The Reformed Churches in South Africa held its first full status General Synod in 2009 where black and white people came together in one synod. Chaka Mathundela investigates how the churches are doing since that historical event as far as unity and reconciliation are concerned. Whilst he admits that one can't expect perfect unity in this short time, he demonstrates that despite linguistic, cultural, economic and political differences, unity is attained. Where problems do arise, it should be solved through communication and deliberation.
2. Articles related to the history and future of reformed mission
 - Flip (Phillippus) Buys investigates the Reformed roots of the term '*missio Dei*'. He argues that taking the covenant of redemption as the point of departure may provide a solid foundation for a biblical theological understanding and the use of '*missio Dei*' in reformed theology. Such an approach will, on the one hand, grasp and hold onto the valuable aspects of reformed inheritance of previous centuries, and on the other hand, ensure the equipping of ministers of churches with a passion to preserve and multiply the church.
 - Whilst the Reformed Churches in South Africa can gratefully look back over the past 150 years, Naas (Ignatius) Ferreira raises concern about developments during the past 25 years. The same reduction in numbers that degraded the Christian church within the Western culture to a post-Christendom reality has also been identified in the RCSA. He argues that the RCSA will have to reform missiologically in order to face the new post-Christendom reality of our globalising world.
 - One of the key slogans of the Reformation is '*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*'. The constant reformation and renewal of the church are key factors in the longevity of the church in changing contexts. Johannes Wessels argues that an approach where the adherence to the inspiration of the Canon is combined with Revivalism can form a strong and lasting impact amongst all nations. He assesses previous and current views on Revivalism as a phenomenon within Evangelical reformation and Pentecostalism, as well as methods to improve the availability of the Bible as the Word of God to all.
 3. Articles related to reformed theology and education
 - Hannes (Johannes) van der Walt investigates the possible impact of reformed theology on education as a scientific discipline, with a special reference to the situation in South Africa (1940–). Differentiating between theology, philosophic theology and personal theology, Van der Walt tentatively concludes that whilst theology as a discipline seems to have had only an indirect impact on education as a scholarly discipline, educators seem to have taken cognisance of the impact of their own personal theology.
 - Taking into consideration the parting of ways of the theological discipline and public universities throughout Western Europe, Gijbert van der Brink investigates the future of theology at public universities. He argues that theology can be situated in the realm of humanities, and offers a case study of how a theological faculty or department could be (re)structured in such a way that it continues to occupy a viable place within contemporary public universities.
 4. Articles related to the natural sciences and reformed theology
 - Indicating an overlap between the Reformation and the scientific revolution in terms of time, location and events that dramatically impacted world history, Frik (Frederik) van Niekerk presents an argument for a causal relationship between the two. Moreover, he argues that a mutually supportive model of interaction between science and faith in a reconciliation model best resonates with the ideas of the Reformation as well as finding authenticity in and concordance between science and views of Scripture.
 - Kobus (Izak) van der Walt contributes to the ever-present discussion on intelligent design by presenting recent scientific discoveries in biochemistry and palaeontology in support of the reformed conviction of God as Creator and the notion of creation as God's general revelation to humankind.
 - Carols Reinecke investigates the conceptual development of Christian Scholarship at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. Using the method of historiographic mapping, he indicates how both the institutional leadership and academic scholars contributed to the ideal of Christian Scholarship, and how it was accounted for over four distinctive periods in the history of the institution. Reinecke concludes that Christian Scholarship may still be a fruitful enterprise for committed Christian scholars, even at secular institutions.
 5. Articles related to the Reformed confessions
 - Albert Coetsee argues that the view of Scripture found in the book of Hebrews is echoed in Belgic Confession Articles 2–7. Endeavouring to prove this hypothesis, Articles 2–7 of the Belgic Confession are discussed successively by summarising what each article says, investigating the conviction of the writer of Hebrews concerning the specific topic and comparing the two.

- Paul Kruger reflects on the how the Canons of Dordrecht link the perseverance in faith-certainty to the 'face of God'. Attempting to reframe this link within a contemporary late-modern paradigm, Kruger stresses the enframing thereof, which includes a logic of embrace, a stress on the paradoxical 'nevertheless' structure of faith-certainty and a retrieval of the comforting insight that believers participate in Christ's own faith.
- Simon Jooste and JC (Johannes) Potgieter present a historical-theological investigation into, and retrieval of, the legacy of singing Scripture only in the Reformed Churches of South Africa (RCSA). Their study challenges the historical-theological validity of the decision by the General Synod of the RCSA in 2012 which revised Article 69 of the church order to allow for the singing of what they regard as free hymns in worship services. Jooste and Potgieter argue that the Scriptural or regulative principle of worship was overlooked by the aforementioned synod, namely the principle of doing public worship only what God commands.
- In a follow-up article, Simon Jooste and JC Potgieter continue their historical-theological inquiry into the RCSA and the doctrine behind her historic practice of essentially singing only God's inspired songs. The authors once more challenge the 2012 revision of Article 69 of the church order on historical and theological grounds, arguing that the RCSA did not reckon adequately with her pre-formation history or her rich legacy of singing predominantly Psalms only, and that the Scriptural or regulative principle of worship can help re-establish continuity with the best of her Reformed liturgical past.
- Alwyn Swanepoel contributes to the study of the doctrine of the Trinity from the reformed tradition. Giving an overview of theological studies on the Trinity in the last century, of which many can be considered as revisionist projects, Swanepoel indicates the importance of a so-called third wave of publications on the Trinity, especially how they advocate for a deeper appreciation of ressourcement theology.
- Christopher (Tshitangoni) Rabali presents a reformed biblical theological exploration of how the gospels and Acts relate the reading of Scriptures by the apostles to Jesus. Rabali argues that the central concept in the teaching of Christ was a reading of the Scriptures that

identifies him as the divine Saviour that the Old Testament speaks about, and that the gospels and Acts continue to promote such a reading of the Bible.

6. Articles related to practical theology

- Amanda du Plessis explores the contextualisation of the practical theological curriculum for students. Indicating that past theological training purely rested on 'cognitio', she argues that the contextualisation of theological training involves 'cognitio' and 'experientia fide': theological training should not only be known, understood and believed, but also felt, enjoyed and practically applied.
- Wentzel Coetzer investigates self-forgiveness within the pastorate, indicating that it is a neglected area of research within the larger scientific study of the theme of forgiveness. Focusing on four of the most prominent pastoral-psychological models of self-forgiveness, Coetzer identifies several strategic moments regarding the facilitation of self-forgiveness for the pastorate.
- Elma Cornelius argues that several of the social and societal evils in South Africa are a result of God, religion and religious scriptures being marginalised in society. Arguing that spiritual intelligence seems to be an answer to the country's problems, she suggests that Christianity should take part in the debate and play a role in developing spiritual intelligence.

We hope and trust that readers will find these articles both edifying and stimulating, and that they will contribute to continued discussions on reformed theology and its impact in South Africa and the rest of the world.

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