

BELHAR AND THE WHITE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH: CHANGES IN THE DRC: 1974 – 1990

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Abstract

This article argues that the Dutch Reformed Church has been on the high seas of political, cultural and economic changes without the compass of a coherent universe of theological discourse. The reasons for this deficit are described and the ecclesiological implications identified. The article suggests that theological interaction with the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa on the basis of the Confession of Belhar (1986) might lead to the emergence of a new theological universe in the Dutch Reformed Church.

Introduction

The most central change that has taken place in the DRC is a changing self-identity.

This story of changes in the DRC is not only the story about a changing church but rather the story of a theological discourse¹ in the crucible. As such the story cannot really be complete without a reflection on the eventfulness of its theological idea. Only from such a point of view can a person make assumptions about the changes in the DRC between 1974 and 1990. Tristan Anne Borer argues aptly that understanding changes of churches require the investigation of three specific factors that form distinct self-identities: changing socio-political contexts, an evolving religious context and the institutional context². The first factor refers to the impact of external factors, namely political transition, on a church. The second factor pertains to the impact of theological discourses as the way in which churches form a universe of ideas and beliefs about the way theological discourses should be conducted and about the kinds of conflicts they can resolve. Willem Nicol has expertly indicated how the DRC's leadership has been following the self-identity of the Afrikaners as South Africa went through the mills of wide ranging socio-political changes³. I would like to share some thoughts on the development in the DRC from 1974-1990 with specific reference to the following outstanding questions:

- a) How should one understand the changes in the DRC in relation to its *universe of theological discourse*? This question takes its point of departure in Borer's assumption that changes in churches take place when the *universe of theological discourse* is altered.
- b) How do the broader changes relate to changing institutional characteristics of the DRC? This question departs from Borer's assumption that a church's institutional character explains its ability to change, i.e., that characteristics internal to the institution cultivate or limit the impact of theological ideas.

1. Smit, DJ 1992 'Reformed Theology in South Africa - A Story of Many Stories', in *Acta Theologia*, 12/1:88-110;
2. Borer, TA 1998 *Challenging the State: Churches as Political Actors in South Africa 1980 - 1994*. Notre Dame: University Press. pp. 8 - 20.
3. Nicol, W 2001 *Following the Flock: The Development of the Dutch Reformed Church 1974-1990*. Unpublished Conference Paper.

I am therefore interested in understanding the making and reshaping of theological discourses in the DRC from 1974 to 1990 to further ask how institutional changes limits or cultivate such reshaping of the *universe of theological discourse*.

The universe of theological discourse

Before 1970 the DRC had a distinct *universe of theological discourse* rooted in its missiological policy of 1935. This argument was made convincingly by JC Adonis in his dissertation *Afgebreekte skeidsmure weer opgebou*.

In the year 1974 the DRC proposed a theology of racial separation in their policy document *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*. The declaration claims to be an attempt by the church to listen anew to 'what the Word of God had to say on race relations in a plural society'. Theologically, however, their understanding was determined more by the additional source of a natural theology.

This document was the result of a theological conflict in the DRC between the young theologians who followed Karl Barth's dialectical theology and the senior theologians who followed Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian, in his neo-Calvinist theology⁴. The senior theologians regarded Barth as suspect because they disagreed with his views on Scripture and regarded his views on the authority and inspiration of scripture as less than orthodox. This longstanding struggle between the Barthians and the Kuyperians centered on the issue of creation theology as grand narrative for the self-identity of the DRC. Durand (Villa-Vicencio 1988:122), a Barthian himself, makes the following poignant statement regarding this power struggle:

Unfortunately, Barth's theological influence ... was negative as far as the three most crucial decades in the development of Afrikaner Reformed theology are concerned. During this period, from the beginning of the 1930s to the end of the 1950s, Barthian theology had such a formidable opponent in Kuyperianism that it was never able to obtain a firm foothold in the field of Afrikaner theological thinking... It was only as late as the 1960s, and particularly the early 1970s, that the Barthian resistance to a creation theology began to take hold among young Afrikaner theologians and new thoughts with a definite Barthian flavor made significant inroads into the debate on church and society.

Although the Barthians started their resistance in the 1970's their efforts were clearly too little and too late to significantly impact the *universe of theological ideas* in the DRC in the years leading to 1974.

Deist (1994:155), through his studies of the way scripture was interpreted in the history of the Dutch Reformed Church between 1840 and 1990, described the period 1935-1950 as the 'neo-Calvinist period of the Dutch Reformed Church'. The document *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture* (1974) epitomizes the triumph of the senior Kuyperians over the younger Barthians in the struggle for the *universe of theological discourse*. Although the Afrikaner ambitiously wanted to develop an 'Afrikaner Calvinism' free from Princeton (in the United States of America) and the Free University (in the Netherlands), the principles in their political theology remained Kuyperian and this process culminated in the 1974 document. The reference to the notions of sphere sovereignty and 'common grace', the attack against 'the revolutionary spirit' of 'humanism', the usages of sphere sovereignty, and the centrality of a systemic life- and worldview that is Dutch and Reformed are distinct signs of the Kuyperian influence on the DRC. The neo-Calvinist

4. Refer to Durand, J 'Church and State in South Africa: Karl Barth vs Abraham Kuyper, in Villa-Vicencio, C 1988 *On reading Karl Barth in South Africa*, 121-138.

influence that started around 1930.

The year 1974 would see the birth of the DRC's first theological proposition for a theology of racial separation in their policy document *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*. This document represents a break with the missiological apology in its search to establish a theological framework for the DRC. The document is an attempt, it claims, to listen anew to the Word of God in the context of race relations in a plural society. Without establishing the means, the document assumes that the Bible is normative in all aspects of race relations. There was no need for an explanation of the meaning of 'a reformed scientific understanding of Scripture'. How this principle functions seems to have been common knowledge in the DRC. I take it as a further indication of the dominance of the Kuyperian *universe of theological discourse*. Once a theological idea is established as a *universe of discourse* it subsequently determines not only the changes in a church but also its hermeneutics.

The meaning of many Kuyperian phrases were clearly obvious to all Reformed-minded people in the DRC at the time. They had then gone through the strenuous debate between the young Barthians and the senior Kuyperians. They have heard that Kuyperians regarded Barth as suspect because they disagreed with his views on Scripture. They knew the seniors regarded Barth's views on the authority and inspiration of scripture as less than orthodox or Reformed (Durand in Villa-Vicencio 1988:122). They have agreed that the mother of all questions is the question of race relations and that the mother of all books, the Bible, speaks with authority on issues of Babel. They were convinced, via the DRC leadership, that Kuyper was the only theologian up to the task.

They have listened to papers presented at Afrikaner people's congresses and symposia (e.g., 1961 at Stellenbosch) which confirmed that Kuyper's 'common grace' and 'Pro Rege I, II and III' are valuable resources to South African Reformed Theology. They understood that Kuyper has stated that although the biblical ideal of unity is pivotal, the story of the tower of Babel points to a different kind of work that God is doing in creation and among nations⁵. They were saturated by the debates between the Barthians and the Kuyperians. They have listened to them addressing issues such as Kuyper and church unity, Kuyper and pluriformity, Kuyper and the issue of boundaries. And throughout this time Kuyper was the leading voice. Kuyper, they have heard, understood the special calling of the Dutch diaspora in South Africa and North America. He actually called black people 'the Kaffirs and Hottentots of Africa' just as they have done in his famous Stone lectures, reprinted 1987:85.

They understood the notion of development in their policy of 'separate development' as sufficient incorporation of Kuyper's understanding of justice and upliftment of the Kaffirs and Hottentots. They have been assured that Kuyper claimed that 'history has shown, almost on every page, that very often the minority was right over against the majority' (Stone Lectures reprinted 1987:82). By 1974, the majority opinion of the DRC was convinced that the biblical metaphor of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11 and creation theology, allegedly designed by Kuyper, would serve as adequate cornerstones of a theology of race that would become the grand narrative of the shift from a missionary apology to a theological justification of apartheid.

Indeed, John de Gruchy is right in pointing out that this use of neo-Calvinism was a

5. Pro Rege II:192, cf. FJM Potgieter's arguments in *Veelvormige Ontwikkeling die Wil van God*, 1956. (*Pluriform Development the will of God*). Bloemfontein: Sacum.

distortion rather than a responsible appropriation⁶. The people of the DRC have **not** been told that Kuyper has drawn a distinction between the condition of humanity before Babel, on the one hand, and after Christ, on the other, as outlined in *Pro Rege III* (263). Their mentors did not tell them that Kuyper regarded visible pluriformity as a passing phase in historical development (cf. *Common Grace III:235*). Kuyper's warning to the deputation from the Transvaal not to be falsely humanitarian towards blacks but to uplift them to equality is one of the best kept secrets of the DRC (Planciusrede, 1884). The people of the church have not even been reminded of Kuyper's conviction that unity would triumph as the eventual purpose of God's plan of creation (*Pro Rege III:263*). It has not been explained how Kuyper effectively continued to hold 'common grace' in tension with 'particular grace'. The Kuyperian winners took it all and had to explain no more since their grand narrative informed the new self-identity of the people of the DRC.

The third change in the *universe of theological discourse* was not occasioned by a Barthian backlash, as one might have expected, but from sources external to the DRC. A critical encounter between DRC theologians, EPJ Kleynhans, FE O'Brien Geldenhuys, CWH Boshoff, JA Heynes, AB du Toit, PA Verhoef, WD Jonker en NJ Smith, with theologians of the Swiss Protestant Federation in April 1979 led to a decision by the General Synod in 1982, to revise the document 'Human Relations and the South African Scene in light of the Scripture'. The product of the process is the document 'Church and Society' first adopted in 1986 as official policy of the DRC, subsequently revised and reissued in 1990.

The committee that prepared the first draft proposal in 1986 used a threefold outline: statement of the problem, clarification of the principles underlying the new document and, finally, the practical implication. They have attempted to develop the contents by virtue of consensus within the committee. The committee consisted of the moderator and ten members representing different theological disciplines as well as issues such as urbanisation and social concerns. I know too little of the individuals to form an opinion about the spread of Kuyperians and Barthians. The 1986 proposal to synod has a more coherent form than any of the two subsequent formal statements issued by synod in 1986 and 1990.

The Dutch Reformed Church's document 'Church and Society', re-issued in 1990 (hereafter called C&S), argues that the actual theological problem of South Africa is the unique composition of the Southern African society out of different groups and peoples and a variety of languages and cultures. With regard to this premise there is no difference between C&S 1990 and the 1974 policy document of the DRC 'Human Relations and the South African Scene in light of the Scripture'. This central historical problem, thus, places the church of Jesus Christ before great and exceptional challenges concerning the Kingdom of God. The Dutch Reformed Church then sums up its historical wrestling with this central theological problem saying that during the many years of its existence in Southern Africa, it endeavoured to understand which demands these circumstances, i.e. the reality of diversity, pose to the ministry of the Gospel. The next time C&S 1990 refers to those long years of theological agonising, it addresses the question of Apartheid in paragraph 279:

The Dutch Reformed Church realises that the ideal and policy of apartheid took form and shape over a long period in our history.

6. De Gruchy, J 1984 *Bonhoeffer and South Africa*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; De Gruchy, J 1991 *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Strauss, P J 1995 'Abraham Kuyper, Apartheid and Reformed Churches in South Africa in their support of Apartheid', in *Theological Forum*, 23/ 1: 4-27; etc.

At this point one would expect a confession about the ways in which this longstanding endeavour, sadly, opposed the very Gospel it pretended to serve. However, the DRC reached a different conclusion:

Knowing what has been done in this respect in the past, however faulty and full of shortcomings it may have been, the Dutch Reformed Church is nevertheless convinced that everything was not without significance, but was of service to the Kingdom of God (Paragraph 3).

The system of apartheid is not being regarded as an evil. Instead, the DRC contended that it is 'unreasonable to brand as wrong and bad everything which took place within the political structure of apartheid' (#280).

What then was regarded as reasonable judgement against apartheid in the mind of the DRC? It was, the document states, at the time reasonable to say that a legitimate cultural issue (#281) in later years began to function as an oppressive system (#284). This resulted from bad political management. Of course, this management was unacceptable in the light of Scripture and the Christian conscience (#285):

Any system which in practices functions in this way ... must be rejected as sinful (#285).

The document *Church and Society* was certainly a watershed position within the DRC. *Church and Society 1990* failed to establish a new *universe of theological discourse*. Why couldn't it achieve the status of a reshaping grand narrative? Why did the document fail in establishing a new theological common sense in the DRC?

The reason for the failure is to be found in the fundamental difference between the draft proposal of *Church and Society* and the cut and paste version that resulted from the dreadful debate on the synod floor in 1990. A careful study of the two versions indicate that the draft proposal took the form of a theological discourse whilst the latter bears all the blemishes of a compromise emptied of its theological centre. Johan Heynes played a significant part in the cut and paste process as assessor of Synod as he struggled to let the centre hold. The draft proposal represents clear signs of a considered Barthian underpinning. However, it was deflated by the compromises the synod has decided to make in following the habits of the heart in Afrikanerdom.

There is a small illustration in the acts of synod. Just after the final paragraph of C&S 1990 was adopted by a member of Synod posed a very necessary question which received a very revealing reply:

Question: Does the final adoption of this revised document *Church and Society* mean that the political model of partitioning (as proposed by the Conservative Party) is sinful?

This person simply wanted to know whether *Church and Society 1990* amounts to the establishment of a new *universe of theological discourse* in the DRC.

To this the Synod answered as follows:

Sin is not vested in an issue (saak), but in the attitude of a person's heart and his actions. The test to establish if the support for the political model of partitioning is sinful and unacceptable to the Christian conscience, is whether in reality by forced division of people it unjustly advantages one group over and against the other and in so doing violates the Biblical principles of human dignity, love and justice' (Acts, DRC, 1990, 604).

This definitely was not the answer to the crucial question and the devastation of the cut

and paste process in synod left the DRC stripped of whatever *universe of theological discourse* it had before *Church and Society 1990* or could have had as a result of *Church and Society 1990* to reshaped the self-identity of its local faith communities. The DRC has been on the high seas of political, cultural and economic changes ever since without the compass of a coherent *universe of theological discourse*.

The institutional character

It is a mistake to think of the DRC as simply the sum-total of its synodical decisions and the views of its leadership. The liberating result of the theological void in *Church and Society 1990* is that the members in the DRC are now more aware of the theological vulnerability of its leaders and are, therefore, more open to influences external to the DRC. People of the Uniting Reformed Church are experiencing a willingness to talk and listen that was never seen before.

However, the theological void of *Church and Society 1990* has become a major obstacle to unity between the DRC and the URCSA. Many influential people in the DRC then started to say that the problem is not a deficit of theology in *Church and Society 1990*, but rather a surplus of liberation theology in the *Confession of Belhar 1986*.

The result is that the response to the broader changes in the political context and the cut and paste result of *Church and Society 1990* left the DRC with changes to its institutional character which had to feed on other sources. Willie Jonker names the three major forces struggling to win the hearts and minds of people of the Dutch Reformed Church. These three are: Afrikaner ethnic identity (Volksaard), Evangelical piety and the Reformed tradition⁷. Real change in the DRC is only possible when its institutional character will no longer be determined by Afrikaner ethnic identity or a Romantic Evangelical piety, but rather by a new *universe of theological discourse*.

To answer the question whether the church's institutional character cultivates or limit the impact of theological ideas one has to turn to the discourse on the Confession of Belhar.

The DRC has, to this day been unable to accept the Confession of Belhar as part of its confessional heritage. The Dutch Reformed Church decided at its General Synodical Committee (GSC) in 1996 that the Confession of Belhar constitutes 'a stumbling block to some of our (its) members' because it has a strong political connotation and is regarded as fruit of a theology of liberation. Although there was no unanimous agreement on the latter, the GSC declared that the Confession of Belhar has the potential to divide the Dutch Reformed Church. Therefore, the meeting resolved, acceptance of the Confession of Belhar was at that stage not an option for the Dutch Reformed Church.

The General Synodical Committee draws attention to the 1990 resolution of the General Synod. This resolution states that the Belhar Confession as such is not in conflict with the three Doctrinal Standards (of Reformed Confessions, i.e. The Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort) and that it need not cause estrangement between the churches. In addition it compromised by saying:

The GSC ... is of the opinion that the Confession of Belhar cannot simply be brushed off as 'liberation theology'. It ... has to be seen against the background of the suffering and need of believing and devout members whose faith stranded in a crisis as a result of the system of apartheid. The GSC is of the opinion that the 'unconditional acceptance' of the Confession of Belhar as a fourth Confession additional to the three Doctrinal Standards will

7. See DJ Smit's open discussion at the Synod of the DRC in SA (Western and Southern Cape) in *Acta Synodi*, DRCSA (Western and Southern Cape), 1999. Cape Town. Pp. H194-Hh196.

presently cause so much disunity in the DRC that at the moment it is no option (Minutes, General Synodical Committee, 29-30 October 1996).

What are the conditions set by the DRC for the acceptance of the Confession of Belhar? First, a revision of the believe that God is a God of justice who, in a situation of injustice and enmity revealed himself in a special way as the God of the oppressed en the destitute (Confession of Belhar, 1986, Clause 4): 'The Church (DRC) is of the opinion that certain statements could have been formulated differently, among others, paragraph 4 of the Belhar Confession' (Minutes of Synod, October 1990, Appendix 1 to Moderature's report).

This statement reveals the actual depth of the struggle for change in the DRC. The difference is not simply a matter of wording or formulation.

Centrally, the DRC stands against the *Confession of Belhar 1986*, with specific reference to the fourth clause, because it lacks the *universe of theological discourse* that is required for a real understanding of the Confession of Belhar. It cannot reflect theologically on the confession from any meaningful theological framework left aside the Barthian understanding of the notion of reconciliation and justice.

Finding a way between an uncritical progressive understanding of God as 'a God of the poor' or an equally uncritical conservative view of God as 'a God of compassion', Belhar has opted for the Barthian description of this relationship⁸. God has been revealed, it says, as One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people. This revelation is embedded in a contextual understanding of how God acts. In a world full of injustice and enmity God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged. This is then extended ecclesologically. It means that the Church is called, in these actions, to follow God, standing by people in any form of suffering and need, which means, among other things, that the church shall witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that 'justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream'. Standing with God impels the church, as God's possession in this world, to stand where God stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged.

Barth's strong call for focusing on the historical-theological meaning of discipleship, in the form of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's argument, is then retrieved. In following Christ, the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged 'who seek selfishly their own interests and thus control and harm others.'

The reason for this lack of a crucial theological capacity relates directly to the theological void in the DRC since the adoption of *Church and Society 1990*. Moreover, it evolved from the defeat of the Barthians (now no longer so junior) by default on the floor of synod by an over anxious leadership in the 1990 synod who succumbed to the suction power of whatever was left of the final disintegration of a yielding Kuyperian mindset. Thereby, the DRC was left without any significant theological common sense to empower the Barthians and, equally, without any significant mind set to carry the wasted Kuyperians. This theological tragedy was impounded by the fact that the Barthians misunderstood the level of their strategic claim within the DRC regardless of the outcome of the 1990 Synod. Apart from Willie Jonker, I see almost no visible sign of leaders willing to engage the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa in a discussion of the Barthian centre of the Confession of Belhar.

8. Karl Barth clearly understood that the church has to side with the poor, oppressed and exploited people. His discussion of the mercy and righteousness of God in *Church Dogmatics II/1* reveals this: 'God always takes his stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly; against those who already enjoy right and privilege an on behalf of those who are denied it and deprived of it' (p. 386).

What is a greater pity is that the DRC failed to see how this very clause they are objecting to has the potential to unite the opposing theological universes in the Church. Already in the discussions in ABRECSA it was understood that the one single point at which Kuyper and Barth was in agreement was the essence of clause 4 of Belhar.

The Charter⁹ of ABRECSA (Association of Black Christians in South Africa) lamented the oppressive history of the reformed tradition, but responded by stating:

As heirs of the Reformed tradition ... it has become absolutely necessary for Black Reformed Christians to come together and struggle with the question: 'What does it mean to be Black and Reformed in Southern Africa today'

Speaking at the founding conference of ABRECSA, Allan Boesak (1984:94) reclaimed Reformed theology with a specific reference to Kuyper:

... Reformed Theology has in many instances become a curious mixture of pietism, German Romanticism, and *Volkstheologie*, and the negative aspects of Kuyperianism¹⁰.

He then continued (on the same page) to stipulate some central notions of Reformed Theology concluding with a positive reference to Kuyper:

We believe passionately with Abraham Kuyper that there is not a single inch of life that does not fall under the lordship of Christ ... Here the reformed tradition comes so close to the African idea of the wholeness of life that these two should combine to renew the thrust that was brought to Christian life by the followers of Calvin.

Boesak's references fully:

In the area of social justice, reformed belief was expressed magnificently by Abraham Kuyper speaking to the Christian Social Congress in 1891:

When rich and poor stand opposed to each other, Jesus never takes his place with the wealthier, but always stands with the poorer. He is born in a stable; and while foxes have holes and birds have nests, the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head ... Both the Christ, and also just as much as his disciples after him as the prophets before him, invariably took sides *against* those who were powerful and living in luxury, and *for* the suffering and oppressed (Boesak 1984:91).

ABRECSA grounded its charter in Kuyper's legacy and specifically his social justice concern. Boesak, at the same founding meeting pointed to the agreement between Kuyper and Barth on this point. The Confession of Belhar adopted Barth's formulation of the depth of this theological issue.

However, in the year 1990 both Kuyperians and Barthians were so severely beaten by the internal conflicts that both forces were spent or have resigned from a visible and active role in the reshaping of the *universe of theological discourse* in the DRC. Their resignation came at the worst possible time for the DRC, at a time it was forced to face major and rapid changes in the external environment. At this crucial moment of change the DRC was lacking a *universe of theological discourse*, which should have played a major role in forming its new self-identity. The anti-Belhar people in the DRC stripped the church of a most needed theological interaction with the *universe of theological discourse* in the URCSA. They continue even today in their battle against Belhar and as they do so they further silence both

9. De Gruchy J and Villa-Vicencio C (eds) 1983 *Apartheid is a Heresy* Cape Town: David Philip, 161-65.

10. Boesak A 1984 *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition* Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers p 94

the Kuyperians and the Barthians who could now have formed a strong theological alliance that could have expressed the theological unity of the DRC and that might have led to a firmer engagement with a constructive *universe of theological discourse*. The Confession of Belhar is the fruitful meeting ground of two *universes of theological discourse* that lived in isolation for too long within the Dutch Reformed.

Karl Barth defined the nature of reformed confession with reference to their potential to shape the universe of theological discourse and subsequent changes in a churches life and thought:

A Reformed confession of faith is the spontaneously and publicly formulated presentation to the Christian Church in general of a provisionally granted insight from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ attested to in Holy Scripture alone by a geographically circumscribed Christian fellowship which, until further notice, authoritatively defines its character to outsiders and which, until further notice, gives direction to its own doctrine and life¹¹.

This definition of the nature of reformed confessions, developed in a paper presented in 1925, affirms the idea that confessions *direct* thought and life in churches. In short: it gives birth to a universe of theological discourse that underscores real changes in a church.

Conclusion

I conclude with two final statements. First, my many references to Kuyperians and Barthians do not exhaust the scope of the different theological formations in the DRC. It tells a specific and important part of the story but it is not the only story in the DRC. I also do not think that there are real people who would acknowledge these labels as adequate descriptions of their thoughts. They may be deeply influenced by their theological ancestors, but there is more to them than these labels may imply. Second, the main tenants of this paper must not be seen as an attempt to resurrect Barth or even Kuyper, for that matter. I am calling for the reshaping of an informed, contextual *universe of theological discourse*. Such a universe can no longer be formed by a mere repetition of Barth. The context now requires a serious engagement between the members of the URCSA and the membership of the DRC in towns and cities not merely around the strict agenda of church unity, but in an effort to listen and learn about each other's *universe of theological discourse*.

Has there been any change in the Dutch Reformed Church between the years 1974 and 1990? Yes, there had been many changes and the most tragic change was the loss of a universe of theological discourse that should have directed the churches doctrine and life at this time¹².

11. In Smit DJ Karl Barth's views on confession revisited, in *Scriptura*, 200:1. pp. 72. The whole article is instructive to the essence of my argument (pp. 67 – 85).

12. The formulation of a Declaration of Faith recently by the DRC is a symptom of its real problem.

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