

The Laudium Declaration: A Missiological Statement Reaffirming the Reformed Evangelical Character of the Reformed Church in Africa

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Samevatting

Die Reformed Church in Africa is in die resente verlede as 'fundamentalisties' beskou. Vanweë haar posisionering as evangelies gereformeerde, asook besluite van die Sinode van 2002, is aanvaar dat dié kerk as piëtisties gesien moet word. Die Laudium Deklarasie (hierna LD) bly in hierdie opsig 'n belangrike dokument van die Reformed Church, ter uitdrukking van die evangeliese aard daarvan. In oorweging van die LD bly dit goeie praktyk om vas te stel wat die teologie behels wat so 'n deklarasie ondersteun en substansieer. Hierdie vasstelling help ook om die inhoud te verstaan, sodat dit gelees word sonder dat tot konklusies gekom word wat nooit deur die opstellers bedoel was nie, in besonder wanneer die Reformed Church as 'fundamentalisties' en 'piëtisties' bestempel word. Dit is steeds ook noodsaaklik om die LD aan die evangeliese etos, asook die posisie ten opsigte van sending en bekering wat deur dié kerk ingeneem word, te onderwerp. Die artikel dien daarom as 'n poging om aan die teologie, asook die intensie wat die ontwikkeling en formulering van die LD onderlê, te verklaar.

1. Introduction

The Dutch Reformed family of churches are currently made up of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA), the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA), and the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA). The RCA is the fourth and youngest member of the Dutch Reformed family of churches in South Africa. It was formerly established on the 27 August 1968 (Pypers, s.a.:2) as an independent church. As part of its constitution and doctrinal standards, the confessions of faith, as adopted by the Synod of Dordrecht

in 1618-1619 CE, became the doctrinal standards accepted by the RCA, namely: The *Thirty-seven Articles of the Belgic Confession (Netherlands Confession of Faith)*, the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Five Canons of Dordrecht*.

The ideology of Apartheid and especially the Group Areas Act played a significant role in determining the focus of the ministry of the RCA which was predominantly towards South African Indians. The majority of South African Indians were either Hindus or Muslims. It was therefore within this context that the RCA developed a more evangelical approach to missions, with the aim of missions being the conversion of Hindus and Muslims.

During the years of the ideology of Apartheid there was an uprising from especially the church community of which the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, among others, was instrumental. This uprising was against the church instituted ideology of apartheid. This evil ideology brought untold pain and human suffering to the so-called non-white people of South Africa. There were a number of documents, declarations and a confession of faith drafted during the 1960s-1980s CE to express either solidarity against the ideology of Apartheid or to challenge this ideology. Some of these documents were the Broederkring Theological Declaration, Kairos Document, The Road to Damascus, Evangelical Witness, Rustenburg Declaration, Church and Society, Belhar Confession, etcetera. These documents reflected the struggle for liberation and the restoration of the dignity of people.

The RCA was also vocal against the evil ideology of Apartheid as it hindered the proclamation of the gospel to Hindus and Muslims as well as the lack of Biblical justification for such a practice. The approach of the RCA was not as radical though because it saw the others as a strong social and liberal movement where the evangelistic thrust of the gospel was being compromised at the expense of a social and liberation gospel. The RCA itself was not immune to this influence of what it considered to be a social/ liberation gospel.

2. Problem statement

It was during the early 1980's that the RCA came under tremendous pressure by what was seen to be political interference in church polity. Allegations of a social and liberal theology from within its ranks were seen as an attack on the evangelical nature and ministry of the RCA. This caused a serious schism in the RCA which led to the defrocking of ministers who were seen as the ones propagating this social and liberal theology (Sukdaven, 2006:35). The result of these events was seen as a very difficult and trying time for the RCA. These events prompted the RCA to draft and adopt what is now known as the

“Laudium Declaration” (RCA Synod, 1990). The intention of this declaration was to restate its position as an evangelical reformed church. In this way it was also possible for the RCA to express its *balanced* approach to mission and conversion in light of a holistic missiological approach.

Christopher Wright (2006:452) in response to a holistic approach to mission states that “... all people are also radically and comprehensibly infected and affected by sin and evil. Our missiological response must be as radical and comprehensive as the problem we address in the name of Christ and the power of the cross”.

This article is therefore intended to articulate this balanced missiological approach of the RCA to mission and conversion as well as to address the accusation that the RCA is a “fundamentalist and pietistic” church.

3. The Laudium Declaration (hereafter LD)

The LD deeply pronounces the character of the RCA. It not only establishes the RCA as an evangelical church, but is also expresses the strong mission character of this church (Sukdaven 2006: 40).

3.1 Biblical Gospel

We affirm that the biblical Gospel is God’s enduring message to our world, and we determine to defend, proclaim and embody it.

We affirm our commitment to the primacy of evangelism, of the preaching of the Gospel to every creature. We affirm that evangelism is not an option but an imperative.

We affirm that men are born in sin and guilty, and lost without Christ and totally depraved.

We affirm that religions and ideologies are not alternative paths to God, and there is no other name given among men whereby we can be saved but the name of Jesus.

We reject as derogatory to Christ and the Gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through other religions and ideologies. To proclaim Jesus as Saviour of the world is not to affirm that all men are either automatically or ultimately saved.

3.2 Holy Spirit’s Witness

We affirm that the Holy Spirit’s witness to Christ is indispensable to evangelism and that without His supernatural work new birth and new life is not possible and all our endeavours fruitless.

We affirm that we who proclaim the Gospel must exemplify it in a life of holiness and love; otherwise our testimony loses its credibility.

We affirm the constant need for revival and determine to seek God's face constantly for revival in our own lives, in the life of the RCA, and in the church of South Africa at large.

We affirm that nothing commends the Gospel more eloquently than a transformed life and nothing brings it into disrepute so much as personal inconsistency. We determine to live worthy of the Gospel of life.

3.3 Evangelistic witness and compassionate service

We affirm that the congregation of believers should turn itself outward to its local community in evangelistic witness and compassionate service.

We affirm that God has committed the whole Gospel to the whole world and to every member the task of making Christ known throughout the world. We long to see all lay and ordained persons mobilised and trained for the task. We determine to proclaim the Gospel faithfully, urgently, passionately and sacrificially, until He comes.

We affirm that we must demonstrate God's love visibly by caring for those who are deprived of justice, dignity, food and shelter.

Governments, religious bodies and nations will continue to be involved with social responsibilities but should the church fail in her mandate to preach the Gospel no other body will do so.

3.4 Unity

We affirm our God given unity at the deepest level with all born again bloodwashed believers. We determine to foster such unity across all denominational barriers. In the immediate circle of our church we will foster structural unity with those who share the same confession provided that such structural unity will not stifle the evangelical witness of the Reformed Church in Africa.

We affirm that we who claim to be members of the Body of Christ must transcend within the church the barriers of race, gender and class.

We affirm that racism within the church constitutes a denial of the Gospel and deterrent to evangelistic witness.

3.5 Prophetic witness

We affirm that the proclamation of God's kingdom of justice, peace and holiness demands the denunciation of all injustice, oppression and immorality. We will not shrink from this prophetic witness.

We affirm the freedom in Christ of the church of Jesus Christ and refuse the alignment of the church to any ideology or current political trend, power or movement.

We affirm our solidarity with those who suffer for the Gospel and will seek to prepare ourselves for the same possibility.

We affirm the right of the believer to conscientious objection. In our demonstration and witness against evil we determine not to use carnal weapons but to act in the spirit of Christ and through spiritual warfare and constant prayer enter into Christ's victory over the principalities and powers of evil.

The content of this declaration is indicative of the evangelical theology to which the RCA hold firmly to. At its Synod of 2002 the RCA decided that there were some issues that cannot be compromised on with regards to lifestyles such as gambling, prostitution, homosexuality, drugs etc. (Acts 9th Synod 2002: 83). These were listed so as to exemplify a holy life which was seen as consistent with the proclamation of the Gospel to the unsaved. Many among the Hindus and Muslims that are converted to Christianity have always considered the Christian as one that do not engage in any of the above mentioned activities. Therefore to the RCA an exemplary lifestyle is an important component in its mission to the Hindu and Muslim.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, there is neither an ultra "pietistic" evangelical nor an "ultra socio-political/ liberal theological missiology" that is given prominence in this declaration. It therefore becomes imperative now to consider very summarily the general concept for a pietistic and social gospel understanding of mission and conversion. This very brief understanding will culminate in grasping the full evangelical thrust of the RCA in that it is neither "pietistic"¹ nor "socio-political / liberal".

4. 'Pietistic' understanding of conversion

Stephen Neill (1965: 227-228) claims that there were different influences that played a part in the origin of pietism such as the "Spiritualism of the sixteenth century, Roman Catholic mysticism, English Puritanism ...". Some of the principles of pietism were the demands for conversion and

1 Pietistic is used in the sense of being ultra spiritual and where emphasis is focussed on individual conversion.

holiness, close fellowship and responsibility for witness.

James Scherer (1964: 48) claims that pietism rose in Protestant circles and was against “dead orthodoxy and ecclesiastical conservatism”.

Kenneth Latourette (1964:813-814) refers to the “Puritans” as those that wanted to purify the Church of England “from traces of what they held to be the remains of the corruption which survived from the Roman connexion.

Williston Walker (1959:403) dated this movement to about the early 1560’s CE. Although they differed amongst themselves of what needed to be purified, they generally held to a covenant or federalist theology. This understanding will be discussed later in the paper.

According to Willem Saayman, in the pietistic understanding of mission, repentance and conversion was a move out of the realm of sin and into the realm of holiness. This seemed as a withdrawal from the sinful world (Kritzinger *et al.*, 1994: 27). David Bosch (1996: 252-253) claims that for the pietist “a disciplined life rather than sound doctrine, subjective experience of the individual rather than ecclesiastic authority, practice rather than theory” were the hallmarks.

Saayman (Kritzinger *et al.*, 1994: 27) therefore suggests that this kind of mission understanding left little scope for social development.

It is in this context of understanding pietism that the LD and the RCA disassociates itself. The other context which the RCA also distances itself from is the emphasis on the socio-political / liberal influence.

5. ‘Social’ understanding of mission

According to Latourette (1964: 1125), Albrecht Ritschl reacted against pietism as he understood it to be “assurance based exclusively upon an inner experience. He had no use for mysticism.” Ritschl argued persuasively for the ethical development of man in the context of his community, which for Ritschl took precedence even over the church itself. It is here that we begin to see a shift from pietism.

Charles van Engen (1981: 291), in making reference to Walter Freytag’s “four successive waves in the missionary movement”, quotes Freytag’s third wave which shows an implicit shift towards social concerns in missionary endeavours. According to the quote, the third wave, the philanthropic missions, conceived of the Kingdom in terms of bettered social conditions in the world.

Bosch (1996:323) regards the move from evangelism to social concern to be a shift from individual to society.

According to Saayman (Kritzinger *et al.*, 1994: 29), the social understanding of mission evolved as result of an awareness of poverty, disease, ignorance, oppression etcetera in the colonies. What transpired was that Social Gospellers felt that all Christian missionary reserves focus on fighting these social evils so that the world can reflect the ideal of the Kingdom of God. He suggests that in this the task of mission was not to work for the conversion of these people but for Western missionaries to rather provide social and economic upliftment.

At the World Council of Churches in Uppsala in 1968, the focus was on humanising the world through socio-political development projects. Within such a framework therefore the need for conversion has disappeared to such an extent so as to be non-existent.

The above considerations reflect two radical expressions of mission and conversion which need to be addressed and reflected upon based on scriptural understanding. The RCA and the LD do not support either of these expressions in isolation but have developed its theology around what George Peters (1972:166-171) calls as the twofold mandate.

6. Understanding of the twofold mandate

According to Peters (1972: 166) God gave a fundamental twofold mandate to man. This twofold mandate was given at the beginning of each Testament in the Bible to each humanity: the humanity in the first Adam, and the humanity in the second Adam, Christ. He sounds a note of caution though in that the second mandate “does not negate, supersede duplicate, or absorb the first mandate. While it closely relates itself to it, it is unique. It does not depend upon it, since it is a distinct mandate arising out of different circumstances and serving different needs and purposes”.

The first Adam was regarded as the representative of the race and as well as the whole realm of human culture. This also included an inclination of religion as is found in the doctrine of General Revelation. The first mandate therefore serves man in his need as a socio-religio-cultural creature which was to benefit man and glorify God.

The second mandate according to Peters (1972: 167) was given to the apostles as representatives of the church of Jesus Christ. This mandate involved the whole realm of the gospel. Its focus is primarily on the spiritual liberation and restoration of man yet taking into consideration mans' physical and social welfare. This could be construed as the gospel

being designed to make man whole, restoring both his spiritual and socio-cultural needs.

This second mandate is promulgated through evangelism and deals principally with the problem of sin and guilt with the intention of restoring man to the original position and purpose as God intended.

The RCA believes that these two mandates must not be confused with each other, but has to be carried out simultaneously with the focus of the conversion of humanity in its Missiology. The RCA also sees this twofold mandate embedded with the covenantal theology expressed by an understanding of reformed theology.

7. Mission and conversion during the Reformation

By way of introduction a statement by Gustav Warneck (1906: 9) reflects the opinion of many when he says that there was neither a missionary action nor a missionary idea developed by the Reformers. The intention in the following argument is certainly not an attempt to exhaust all the pros and cons for or against the position of the Reformers with regards to mission and conversion. It merely serves to highlight that there were hints of an understanding of the spread of the gospel as we understand it today in terms of mission and conversion.

In defence of the Reformers some scholars have said that one has to understand the thrust of the theology and ministry of these Reformers for their time and purpose.

Notwithstanding the above statement of Warneck, some scholars have suggested that Luther in particular should be regarded as a “creative and original missionary thinker” (Scherer 1987: 65-66). The premise of Luther’s contribution was seen in the statement that it is not what people can do for the salvation of the world, but what God did through Jesus Christ.

Bosch (1996:245), who quotes from Walter Holsten, makes reference to where Luther responds to a Christian who finds himself/herself in a place where there are no other Christian that “he/she should be under the obligation to preach and teach the gospel to erring pagans or non-Christians because of the duty of brotherly love, even if no human being had called him/her to do so”.

With regards to John Calvin, Frank James (rUrevolutionary.com – Calvin the Evangelist: 2006) claims that history depicts another story of Calvin and missions. He recalls that during the 6th CE persecuted Protestants fled to Geneva. In 1550s the population of Geneva literally doubled. Most of

the refugees came from France as they were French speaking. Through the teaching of Calvin many felt a conviction to return to their homeland. Calvin, as James recalls, did not want to send uneducated missionaries back to France. He believed that you have to be a good theologian to be a good missionary. He therefore educated them and inspired and trained them for this task.

Van Engen (1981: 241), although referring to the Reformers as having no missionary zeal like the Protestants of the eighteen and nineteen centuries, nonetheless refers to Calvin who was in touch with a French colony in Brazil which had missionary implications. He also refers to the Lutherans who attempted a mission to the Lapps in 1559 and of some German reformed persons who attempted mission with the Slavs and Turks. He does concede though that much in Reformation theology formed the foundation for Protestant missions in general (1981: 242).

From the above brief discussion one may conclude that the Reformers were not altogether ignorant of what we understand today as missions. During the time of the Reformation they were certainly on another mission to address the issues of their time, which was necessary, and laid the foundation which mission work today has to acknowledge.

To the RCA, one of the great contributions of these Reformers was the development of the concept of Covenantal Theology. It is within this theology that the RCA finds its twofold mandate of missions as mentioned earlier by Peters. Robert Sproul (1997: 107-114) indicates that there are basically three prominent covenants that can be acknowledged. These are follows:

7.1 Covenant of redemption

It is important to note that this covenant is rooted in eternity. This does not directly include human beings but demonstrates the harmony of the roles of each person within the Trinity in effecting human redemption. It stresses the total agreement between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the plan of salvation. This could be expressed as follows: the Father sends the Son and Holy Spirit. The Son enters the arena of the world by incarnation voluntarily. The Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to us for salvation. All these actions are necessary to fulfil the terms of redemption which were agreed upon in eternity.

7.2 Covenant of works

This was the initial covenant God made with mankind through Adam as the representative of the human race in the Garden of Eden. Life was

promised to Adam as a reward for personal and perfect obedience (Rom. 5:21). Due to his disobedience Adam lost this reward of life and death became imminent. This did not mean that the Covenant of Works is no longer valid, but it became impossible for man to obey God because of the fall. The demands of the Covenant of Works still remain in force but can now only be achieved through the Covenant of Grace.

7.3 Covenant of grace

The Covenant of Grace, as the word implies, is a covenant made between God and sinners as opposed to the Covenant of Works made between God and unfallen man. Thus man's only hope was through divine grace of God. This is not to say that the Covenant of Grace only came into being because of the violation of the Covenant of Works. The Covenant of Grace was already decreed in the Covenant of Redemption. Man can only be redeemed and restored to his original position through the grace of God and not through the demands laid out by the Covenant of Works although within the Covenant of Works the grace of God is active.

This is also to be understood in light of what Dean Flemming (2005:254) refers to as "comprehensive salvation". He suggests that the Gospel of Luke has an all encompassing salvation in that Jesus "offers liberation from whatever forces create brokenness and exclusion in the human situation, and whatever tries to frustrate God's redemptive purpose". He also sees in this that salvation as wholeness has social, physical and spiritual consequences. Through healing, be it sickness or demonic, signals both physical and spiritual restoration.

This is where the Covenant of Grace is operational in the Covenant of Works. The intention is to liberate the whole of humankind and restore humankind to its original position.

This therefore brings me to the point of Peters' (1972:166-169) concept of the twofold mandate which the RCA expresses through the LD.

8. The twofold mandate and the RCA

This twofold mandate expresses itself with the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace as alluded to earlier. Within the first mandate which was given by God to man, it was man's responsibility to build a wholesome culture in which he could live as a true man according to the moral order and creative purpose of God. To this end the LD declares in paragraph 2.3 that "it would demonstrate God's love visibly by caring for those who are deprived of justice, dignity, food and shelter". As a result of

the fall God never absolved man from his divinely ordained mission and responsibility as found in Genesis 1 and 2. Man remains man and stays within the providential care of God even after the fall (Peters 1972:167).

The second mandate, according to Peters (1972: 167) was given to the church of God. It involved the whole realm of the gospel. Its primary focus was on the liberation and restoration of man although it does not overlook his physical and social welfare. This mandate is carried out by evangelism. This position is also documented in the LD in paragraph 2.1.

Peters caution those who do not distinguish the twofold mandate, but blends them together as a unity. He says that the result will be that the gospel will suffer as the divine priorities will become blurred and that man's spiritual welfare will be imperilled. This then will give rise to either a pietistic or a social/ liberation understanding of mission. The LD brings a sombre thought into this equation when it states in paragraph 2.3 that "we affirm that the congregation of believers should turn itself outward to its local community in evangelistic witness and compassionate service" and then again "Governments, religious bodies and nations will continue to be involved with social responsibilities, but should the church fail in her mandate to preach the gospel no other body will do so".

The LD also considers the importance of the evangelical witness within a form of unity with other churches. In paragraph 2.4 it states that "the RCA will foster structural unity with those who share the same confession provided that such structural unity will not stifle the evangelical witness of the RCA".

9. Mission and conversion in the RCA

When the topic of mission and evangelism is tabled one begins to see the tension in Missiology beginning to appear. The tension between evangelism and social concern becomes a widely debated discussion. It is not the intention in this article to address these tensions and debates between mission as evangelism and mission as service among Evangelicals and Ecumenicals. This is indeed an important debate and should be addressed more comprehensively in another article.

John Orme (2000) observes that "the gospel has often been sidelined in our missions conferences by important, but non-evangelistic activities and ministries". He continues to say that though non-evangelistic activities are good and needed, they are not evangelistic in essence. Further in the article he contends that "evangelical social action, service and welfare programs should not become substitute for the gospel of Jesus Christ".

Questions that arise from these discussions are: Which came first? Which is more important? Can they co-exist? Can the one exist without the other? Is social concern a mandate or a means to an end?

An attempt was made in this article to clearly show how from the very beginning two fundamental mandates existed. If one draws these mandates in a vertical linear structure, then on the left one can allocate the first mandate to be between God and Adam as the representative of man. In this vertical linear structure one can identify the Covenant of Works that God entered with man. Here man failed God and the result was death. Yet God did not cancel this mandate or Covenant of Works, as man was supposed to continue in this mandate although it was made extremely difficult. Man lost his status and became a depraved being.

On the right side of the vertical linear structure one can allocate the second mandate. Together with it one can identify the Covenant of Grace that God offered through Jesus Christ. This mandate was given to the church of God. Although the church of God is in the world, it is not of the world. It can therefore not divorce itself from the world. The church as the bearer of the gospel has a mandate to evangelise the world. The message of this gospel is that only through grace in Jesus Christ can man be restored to his rightful place and be made acceptable to God as he was at the beginning of his creation.

It is in this context and understanding that the LD declares that for the total liberation and restoration of man both mandates, though separate, comes together for the salvation of humanity.

Rene Padilla (Claydon (Ed.): 2005:217), in referring to a more comprehensive view of missions, makes reference to paragraph 5 of the Lausanne Covenant which lends support to the understanding of the RCA and the LD, in that “although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nevertheless we affirm evangelism and socio-political involvement are part of our Christian duty”.

The LD makes it crystal clear that other worldly institutions can work for the betterment of society, but these works can never offer eternal salvation to humanity or restore humanity to what God intended humanity to be. These works of worldly societies are for temporal appeasement, but faith in Jesus Christ is for eternal appeasement. The RCA and the LD carries the message that conversion is the primary aim of its missionary endeavours but at the same time it does not exclude the first mandate of its involvement in its social responsibility to God’s creation.

10. Conclusion

The LD has brought the RCA in line with biblical theology for its missiological understanding of its existence on earth. Its theology is based on the understanding of the twofold mandate, yet not separated from each other but yet distinguished from each other with regards to its mandate. This seems to be in agreement with Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). According to Bosch (1996:403) Jonathan understood God's work of redemption in two facets. "One consists in the converting, sanctifying and glorifying of individuals; the other pertains to God's grand design in creation, history and providence. "Still for Edwards these two 'mandates' were inseparable.

Further to this, according to Lindsell (1966:234), the "Wheaton Declaration" of 1966, although it acknowledged the involvement of the 18th-19th century CE evangelicals in being involved with matters of social concerns, it stated that this should be done "without minimising the preaching of the gospel of individual salvation".

To quote Van Engen (1981:251)

Maybe we need to remind ourselves a little more that although the world may feel and experience and see the church, still the men and women who populate it will not hear "without a preacher" (Rom. 10:14). Maybe we need to listen to Martin Luther again, that the church is not found in pomp, in altars, temples, and monasteries. Is the church to be found in political movements for social justice? Or in social service projects for the sake of the poor or the hungry? Or in massive cathedrals, or small clandestine groups? Or in Christian hospitals? Or in Christian nations? Or in world conferences, councils, and consultations? The radical answer given by Martin Luther to each of these questions was NO. The church is found, and is only found, where there is the WORD and holy Christian people who accept and believe it.

There is therefore no substitution for the preaching of the gospel to bring humanity to conversion and the assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ.

One needs to be mindful also of what Jean-Paul Heldt (2004:166) says regarding missions as "holistic":

Proclamation alone, apart from any social concern, may be perceived as a distortion, a truncated version of the true gospel, a parody and travesty of the good news, lacking relevance for the real problems of real people living in the real world. On the other end of the spectrum, exclusive focus on transformation and advocacy may just result in social and humanitarian activism, void of any spiritual dimension.

If one has to summarise the theology of the RCA and the LD, it can be likened to the lawyer who asked Jesus a question, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” and Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:36: *The Reformation Bible*, 2005)

Would this be the same answer if one must ask God as to which is the great mission task of the church? The LD clearly answers that.

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