

## **A reminder of the call to repentance**

Report 1 of the Deputies Turnaround Strategy, which served on the Synod of 2015, shows the need for repentance and a call for repentance is also expressed in the report. The report states on Biblical grounds what we must repent from and what the Lord expects of us (Acts of General Synod, 2015: 495-499):

### **“3. Matters that the Synod decide on**

In light of and in reference to previous decisions (as above), the Synod calls on churches to stand in awe of the grace of sharing in Christ and the fulfilment of God’s eternal plan on earth through the advancement of the Gospel.

#### *3.1 Call to repentance*

The essence of a turnaround strategy is the renewal of hearts. Turnaround is a matter of repentance, of grateful devotion, of a daily recommitment to God and to have no shame in the Gospel of God (Rom 1:16 and Rev 2:1-7). The GKSA is faithful to the Lord in many things, but there are also aspects on which members (and the GKSA as a whole) must reflect. One of these is the lack of a missionary calling and this Report focuses on this particular aspect. The emphasis on the building up and growth of the church cannot be viewed and addressed in isolation of the calling to foster the church (preservation of the church).

It is not the Report’s intent for the GKSA to take up an apostolate theology, as though the church’s only function is missional, but addresses the GKSA’s serious neglect of this duty. The Report also shows that building the church on Biblical principles that it may be a sound church will necessarily also lead to the growth of the church.

#### *3.2 The reasons for repentance*

3.2.1 Erroneous views have arisen in the church that create obstacles for a sound church, despite the clear and Scripturally true definition in the Confessions of faith and Church Order. Questionnaires and discussions at turnaround strategy conferences as well as findings of previous Synod Reports brought forth the following erroneous views that create obstacles for a sound church and a lack of effort to reach out. (The items briefly mentioned below are to be thoroughly extrapolated by the CMTG. It will also bring the realisation that a turnaround, as continual Reformation, entails much more than just misleading “window-dressing”).

#### *3.2.2 Knowledge of God*

It would seem that some Reformed members have a rather superficial knowledge of God in His sovereignty, majesty, holiness, might and love.

This precludes a child-like fear of the Lord that is indeed a core aspect of Reformed godliness (spirituality) and a missional impetus (cf Acts 9:31: “It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord”). It is, therefore, foremost repentance to God, as He reveals Himself that enables true godliness and faith that attests of surrender and devotion to the Lord and a life of *childlike fear of the Lord* (Ps 130:2).

#### *3.2.3 View of the church*

It seems that some church views are not Christocentric and theocentric, considering the congregation almost as a social club. There is too much talk of OUR church and too little about the Lord’s church, of which Christ is the Head that rules through His Word and Spirit. This leads to a quite inward-directed church view and consequently a consumer mentality among some members. Some members are quick to complain

about how little the church does for them, but rarely show how the church, focused on God, must be driven to address the need of brothers and sisters in the church as well as have true compassion for the unbelieving world (e.g. Matt 9:36 –“When He (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” and 1 Pet 2:9 “...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may DECLARE the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”). The attitude of our Lord, as is clear from Matthew 20:28 viz. that He did not come to be served, but to serve doesn’t always find expression in the churches (Phil 2:5-11 and Mark 10:45).

#### 3.2.4 Covenant automatism

This erroneous philosophy, also highlighted in previous Synod Reports, espouse that all baptised members are to be considered born-again believers. The response to queries seem to reflect that the necessity of rebirth is rarely raised in sermons or otherwise addressed and members are virtually never called to repentance (or to root repentance) in Reformed churches. The truth that services always consist of a mixed audience, comprising a mix of the spiritually mature, immature and unconverted does not reflect in the ministry style. This results in a formalistic confession of faith, a lack of loving discipline and the absence of regular calls to repentance that is also “proclaimed and testified to all unbelievers and hypocrites that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them as long as they do not repent. According to this testimony of the gospel, God will judge both in this life and in the life to come” (HC, answer 84).

#### 3.2.5 Lack of missional action

Various previous Synod Reports have all indicated the one-sided focus on the preservation of the church and very little on growth, while the Bible and the Reformed Confessions of faith consider the preservation and growth as integrated, whereby the one will never succeed without the other.

#### 3.2.6 Office-led churches

The New Testament and the Confessions of faith make it clear that every believer receives gifts, to be used toward building the congregation (HC, answ 54; Belgic Confession, art 28). It is remarkable how often there is reference to *all* and *everyone* in passages referring to the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 12:11 and 28:31; Eph 4:7 and 1 Pet 4:10). When every believer uses his/her gifts, the congregation grows both qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

Yet it would seem that neither ministers nor Church Council members or members realise that every believer’s gifts must be recognised and applied toward the growth and outreach of the congregation and that it forms part of “bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and serve to build up others through the GIFTS GOD HAS GIVEN THEM as members of the same body (Belgic Confession, art 28). Leaders who fail to identify the gifts of those under their care and to motivate and guide them to service, with their own gifts, are not truly fulfilling their calling.

#### 3.2.7 Post-modernist relativism

The post-modern relativism of society that denies established truths and no longer accepts confirmed Biblically substantiated morals has also crept into churches and resulted in unbelievers and the churchless sometimes not finding anything different about the church or see it as an alternative community. It would seem that blatant sin like sexual immorality, homosexuality, materialism, racism, abuse of power, social injustice and idolatry (like ancestor worship, sorcery and the occult) is often not addressed openly, direct and with confidence or subject to loving corrective church discipline of those who openly persevere in such sin, listed in the formulary for the

Lord's Supper. When the church differs very little from the world, it loses its missionary appeal.

### 3.3 *Where to must we repent? (missionary duty)*

Please read Appendix 1 for the complete breakdown of the exegetic lines, drawn by the Deputies and according to which the following conclusions have been reached.

#### 3.3.1 The concept Missio Dei

- (1) The expression *Missio Dei* is not only an academic concept. God is a God that guides and dynamically controls the world (cf. the article of prof G Breed, titled "n Kritiese blik op Missio Dei in die lig van Efesiërs" – also on the CD).
- (2) God requires His church (***kuriake – those who belong to the Lord***) to contribute to this mission (*Missio Dei*). How? By *giving and protecting and reaching out to unbelievers and the churchless*.
- (3) Jesus Christ Himself brings the intent of His sacrifice on the Cross into missional and worldly perspective.
- (4) A missional church purposefully **goes out to witness** to the ends of the earth and long for all people from all nations to bend their knee before Jesus Christ.
- (5) Living missional is a deliberate choice to live a life directed by God's Word.

#### 3.3.2 Conclusions based on Old Testamentary exegetic lines

- (1) God's mission in the Old Testament is centripetal in nature (*centrum+petere* = seeking the middle point or centre). Israel and the example they had to set to the nations had to magnetically draw attention to God. The honour and glory of God (doxology) are thus inherent to this centripetal missional existence.
- (2) Blessing by God, with all His blessings, means that believers must also be a blessing to others.
- (3) In the Old Testament Israel was tasked to righteously and fully bring glory to God's Name that God's kingship may shine over all nations. They were, therefore, to live among the people and draw these nations to God through the way they lived.
- (4) The Old Testament also relates Israel's failure to be a light among nations and thus creating the expectation of the suffering Servant that was to come.
- (5) The missional expectation in the Old Testament also denotes the eschatological tension of the "already" and the "not yet". The day that all nations come to serve God remains the day looked toward with yearning.  
This is why the coming of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, is a necessary part of God's mission.

#### 3.3.3 Conclusions based on New Testamentary exegetic lines

- (1) God's mission in the New Testament is centrifugal in nature (*centrum+fungere* = centrum or middle-point flowing). God's new people/His church are sent out to all the nations. The centripetal movement of the Old Testament changed to a centrifugal one.
- (2) In the New Testament God's children are living stones of His spiritual home. They are temples of the Holy Spirit and that is why the church is the herald of the Good News of the triumph in and through Jesus Christ.
- (3) Living missional demands obedience to the command to *go out* or put differently, to not go out is disobedience.
- (4) The church must be a powerful symbol of how God manifests His kingdom in people's lives. The doxological and glorifying way of life must serve as testimony to the world and draw them in to also share in this joy (cf. Acts 2:47; 1 Cor 14:24-25). The church must be characteristic, instrumental and also the first fruits of the kingdom of God to give the world a kind of taste of the kingdom (Newbegin, 1994:33).

- (5) The work of the Holy Spirit for a missional church is essential, which necessitates the realisation that the Holy Spirit can be grieved (Eph 4:30) and “put out” (1 Thess 5:19) through sin, believers *sometimes lose for a time the knowledge of grace until God, when they once again return to the right path in sincere repentance, again shine the light of his Fatherly face on them* (CoD, 5:5).
- (6) The role of prayer in the spreading of God’s Word is central to the existence of the church in the New Testament.
- (7) The missional church must also have the eschatological expectation of all people bowing down to God that the second coming may be fulfilled.”

In view of the important work the deputies did, I preached a series of 10 sermons (in Afrikaans) in the Reformed Church of Pretoria North in 2015 to stimulate church growth in this way. I would like to make the series available to you to use in any way that seems fit to you. The sermons are included in the Afrikaans attachment. My prayers are that the Lord's Name will be glorified, that his church will be built and expanded and church growth will be strengthened. - Malan van Rhyn, ***Expando***.