

# English-medium church planting in the RCSA: Confessional or missional? Or both?

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Outline<sup>1</sup>

English-medium church planting address given on 7 June 2015 at RC Rietvallei, Pretoria

Horton on missional:

[http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/michael\\_horton\\_on\\_gods\\_strategy\\_for\\_making\\_disciples](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/michael_horton_on_gods_strategy_for_making_disciples)  
Darrell Guder

“... the eighteenth century saw the rise of a movement known as pietism, partly in reaction to what many regarded as a stale, dead orthodoxy prevalent in the state churches. This movement, identified with such pioneers as Jacob Spener and August Francke, and later leaders such as Count Zinzendorf and John Wesley, began as a “church within a church.” While unwilling to separate from their established churches, pietists founded “conventicles” - what we today would call small groups - where they thought the real growth took place. Religion increasingly became a religion of the heart rather than the mind, of self-directed and inward piety rather than an outwardly directed piety, and individualistic rather than corporate. Suspicious of outward forms, pietism eventually evolved into its own distinct denominations. As pietism coalesced into revivalism in America especially, sectarian groups sprouted up across the landscape, each promising a better, more direct way to God than that afforded by the traditional churches around them. Eschewing creeds, confession, catechisms, an educated ministry, and liturgy, many merely ended up setting up their own version of these - and their own sacraments (the “altar call,” for instance) - in their place. New anti-denominational denominations tore sections of the membership from parents bodies and populated the landscape with ever new eccentricities. (Michael Horton, *A Better Way*, 94)

## Introduction

- Gratitude to God for this conference and the opportunity to speak
  - Wrestle through with you what it means to plant a Reformed church in the English-medium in an ethnically and culturally diverse South African context
    - In a post-apartheid and post-Christian SA
    - Within a rich theological tradition (RCSA)
- On a personal note
  - To be preaching the gospel in a church-plant in this country is the fruition of a dream borne many years ago in the USA (1997)
    - While part of Campus Crusade for Christ
  - As a 19-year-old college student at the U of Nevada, Reno, exercising faith for the first time, I recall have a very strong desire to preach the gospel in my homeland. But as the time, I was not very well-grounded in terms of theology
    - Though, I had grown up in the Anglican church in SA and appreciated the liturgical forms and reverence, but only in my second year in college did the

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<sup>1</sup> This is not intended to be an full-order academic essay. Rather, it is intended to accompany the audio address that can be found on Youtube. It is not as a stand-alone piece.

substance of the gospel grip me (repentance and faith)

- My early years as a *confessing* Christian begun in the Roman Catholic Church (!), followed by dabbling in many Protestant traditions including Pentecostalism, Evangelical Free and Reformed Baptist traditions
- It was only during my seminary training at Westminster Seminary, CA, that my studies around Reformed and Presbyterian ecclesiology – specifically infant baptism and the regulative principle of worship – led me into the Presbyterian church and where I am today as Reformed minister
- I share this to give you a sense that I don't take it for granted where I am today with my theological convictions. It took much questioning and wrestling
  - It also makes me jealous to preserve the riches that I have by God's grace discovered.
    - It also hopefully makes me *sympathetic* to those who are at different stages of the journey. The patience it involves. Coming to appreciate the treasures of our tradition does not take place overnight. It is a process
      - It takes time to appropriate and translate it, specifically into English-medium Reformed church planting
    - We at RCSS are on a journey and we have not yet arrived!
- Essence of my argument<sup>2</sup>
  - The witness to the confessional (i.e. Three Forms of Unity) Reformed tradition in South Africa has historically been in the Afrikaans medium. This fact coupled with the decline in orthodoxy (liberal :: evangelical) among mainline and sideline Presbyterian and Anglican communions makes the need for English-medium Reformed churches all the more pressing.
    - *But how does the RCSA navigate the challenges of meeting this need in the relatively unknown territory of multi-cultural ministry in South Africa's new political dispensation? Does a more expansive evangelistic vision necessitate new (or revisions of old) doctrines and practices? Is it time to move on from at least some of our historic confessional distinctives and embrace insights from the likes of the more progressive-minded "missional" movement?*
      - In my presentation, I contend that because of the Word-based and countercultural nature of Christ's kingdom, English-speaking church-planting in the RCSA need not look beyond a critical retrieval and translation of the best it already possesses in its creedal heritage. In turn, I argue that to be confessional Reformed in doctrine and practice necessarily implies that we be zealously Great Commission(al). To plant confessional Reformed churches in Afrikaans or English means subjecting all things old and new – confessions, church orders, traditions

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<sup>2</sup> No mission (Great Commission) without the church (Horton, 2011:14). Another way of saying it is that there is no mission without confession. Our confessions give a churchly expression to our piety, around corporate worship.

and church growth methods – to the supreme arbitration of the Word of Christ.

- We have been given a unique opportunity
  - We have the great privilege of bringing the witness of the Reformed tradition to a wider audience in SA
    - Let us make the most of it!

## 1. Our English-medium confessional Protestant witness in the past

- It is no secret that the continental Reformed witness in SA has historically been in the Afrikaans language medium
  - We see this ethnic trend in the USA
    - For example the Dutch Reformed and German Lutheran immigrant churches
  - There arguably was a time when the Reformational witness outside of the Afrikaans Reformed family of churches was relatively orthodox
    - Through the likes of Presbyterians, Anglicans and Lutherans
      - Lutheran (1774)
      - Church of England (1800s)
      - Presbyterian (1820s)
      - CESA (1938)<sup>3</sup>
- Decline in confessional Protestant witness outside of the RCSA (1850sff)
  - Not denying still solid local churches in other denominations/ federations
  - Liberal turn in South Africa
    - Filtering down of a modern Western phenomenon
    - Rooted in early nineteenth-century German Enlightenment movement
    - Christian attempt to rescue Scripture from pressures of modern science & reason
      - Accommodation of teachings of Bible to culture to make them more acceptable
    - Traits of historic theological liberalism<sup>4</sup>
      - Tends to emphasize ethics over doctrine, & experience over Scriptural authority
      - Deconstruction (picking apart) of Bible and denial of its inerrancy
      - Casting doubt on the supernatural character of Scriptures and miracles
      - Inclusive and unoffensive
        - In short: worldly
      - Proto-liberals/ progressives were the Corinthians
    - Compounded pressure in our context due to history: anti-apartheid struggle

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<sup>3</sup> However, to my knowledge the RCSA has not enjoyed ecumenical relations with any of these bodies.

<sup>4</sup> Christianity is a life and not a doctrine; relegated to sphere of history (Machen, 1923:19).

- Pressure to reflect in church the unity & equality of broader society, at all costs
  - Examples
    - Egalitarianism in office
      - Women in office
    - Unity with other churches despite what they believe and confess
    - Innovations to make worship more accessible
- Coupled with theological liberalism, we have the influence of the *legacy of pietism*
  - In mainline liberal churches as well as in fundamentalist evangelical and pentecostal movements
  - Will define shortly
    - *Together*, they have challenged what it means to be Reformed in faith and practice
- Again, the *need*, and new sense of urgency with opportunity
  - Be orthodox & Reformed witness to Christian faith in English-language medium

## 2. Our (RCSA) English-speaking witness in the present

- Our response to date
  - English-medium Church plants (commend)
    - GK Rietvallei :: GK Randburg :: GK Roodepoort :: GK Wapadrand :: GK Bellville etc.
  - Embedded in RCSA Turnaround Strategy: plant new churches
    - Coming out of RCSA GA 2012
  - 2015 GA and church growth report (deputies of TA)
    - Integral to/ driving the Turnaround Strategy: “missional” perspective
      - See in particular the Report on Church Growth (number 27) in the Supplementary Agenda
    - Strong “missional” and “*missio dei*” influence
      - Orientation (at risk of being unfair and superficial)
        - Tied to a specific history and theology
        - *Ecumenical* attempt to define the church's identity and mission in a post-modern and post-Christian context
          - Reconcile relationship between worship and evangelism
          - Problems with the “seeker-sensitive” or “attractional” models
            - That ignore corporate worship
  - Brief history<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-worship/the-mission-of-worship-an-assessment-of-the-missional-church-movements-impact-upon-evangelical-worship-philosophy-and-practice/>

- New movement in the discourse in last 20 years
- Seminal influence of David Bosch in SA (1929-1992)
- Leslie Newbigin (1909-1998), Anglican missionary to India
- Newbigin's influence spread to the USA in the 1980s
  - Through the likes of Darrell Guder<sup>6</sup>
  - More recently: Ed Stetzer; Alan Hirsch; Mark Driscoll & Tim Keller
- Definition
  - The notion that God guides and controls the world. The church is integral to God's mission by “giving and protecting and reaching out to unbelievers and the churchless.” A missional church is intentional about witnessing to the gospel locally and to the ends of the earth. (Agenda *RCSA Synod 2015*, 434)
  - “Missional represents a *significant shift* in the way we understand the church. As the people of a missionary God, we are entrusted to participate in the world the same way He does—by committing to be His ambassadors. Missional is the perspective to see people as God does and to engage in the activity of reaching them. The church on mission is the church as God intended” (*Missional Manifesto*; signed by Keller, Stetzer and Hirsch)<sup>7</sup>
  - To be missional is to understand that God is a missionary God and that just as he sent his Son into the world, he *sends his people out into the world* to be witnesses to Christ and his gospel. (Alan Hirsch)<sup>8</sup>
    - “... missional church advocates explore how each ministry relates to the overarching idea of “mission.” The church is part of the mission of God
      - It is critical of an church-centered notion of mission (as just one of its ministries), rather must be God-centered (Scott Aniol).<sup>9</sup>
- Evaluation of RCSA response to the church-planting challenge to date
  - Points of commendation
    - We must plant churches (be outward focused) and we are in the process of doing so
    - “*Missional movement*”
      - Helping us recover importance of witnessing to the gospel as we fulfill our various vocations in the world (1 Peter 3:15)
      - Evangelism should take place within the corporate worship service as the whole counsel of God is preached

<sup>6</sup> Guder's *The Missional Church* helped to turn a concept into a movement (Horton, 2011:267).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.edstetzer.com/missional-manifesto/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2008/fall/17.20.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-worship/the-mission-of-worship-an-assessment-of-the-missional-church-movements-impact-upon-evangelical-worship-philosophy-and-practice/>

- Reminding us that there is danger of cold intellectualism or traditionalism that is devoid of the gospel
- General and peculiar challenges in our current state as a denomination (RCSA)
  - General
    - Temptation to over-reach and accommodate to world in view of our need
      - Declining church numbers
      - Still viewed by many as an ethnic church
      - Reputation for being inward-focused
      - Question of relevance in a post-Christian & secular context
  - Particular
    - The pressure toward social justice in post-apartheid South Africa
      - Women in office
      - Same sex union
      - Influence of DRC, URCSA etc.
        - Cf. *Belhar Confession*
    - Church unity in age of ecumenism
      - Temptations that comes with the isolation and loneliness of being in a confessional denomination (Hart, 2004:174)
      - Union with DRC (per 2015 Synod decision)
    - In influence of “*Missional movement*” specifically
      - Its growing popularity in our circles<sup>10</sup>
        - Church growth report from GA 2015
          - Is at the heart of the Turnaround Strategy report (p446ff)
        - At center of Turnaround Strategy conferences in Boland Classis
        - *Reformation Gesprek* Facebook blog
          - “Conversation about being *missional* from/within a Reformed tradition...”
            - 300 plus participants; many RCSA ministers
          - *Remissio* “breakaway” for 8-10 June 2015
        - Rev. Griffel Van Wyk's recent PHD, NWU
          - “Missio-Dei: A paradigm for the relationship between faith communities” (2014)
      - Some constructive points of critique of missional movement

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10 While I regret not making it explicit in my audio address, just because there is growing interest in the RCSA toward the missional movement does not imply wholesale endorsement of it. This observation can be likened to the PCA and its adoption of significant aspects of the movement, but with qualification. In our context, the work of Rev. Griffel van Wyk is indicative of wanting to critically harness missional insights towards the end of what he perceives to be the enrichment of our Reformed witness in the SA context.

- (1) The mission of God (“*missio dei*”)
  - (1.1.) The Mission Movement MM emphasizes “sending out” and the conversion experience
    - *Yet*, we believe and confess (per our Three Forms of Unity)
      - First and foremost God is concerned to glorify himself
        - By redeeming sinners for worship
        - *And* in exercising judgment
      - The emphasis of the Great Commission is on discipleship and not evangelism
      - What is more, God's mission also includes his non-saving works of creation and sustaining the world
  - (1.2.) According to MM, God's mission is to redeem *all* of life. Notion that God's mission and church's mission are one
    - *Yet*, Scripture affirms
      - Christ's kingdom is not of this world ([John 18:36](#))
      - Christians are to turn other cheek, while the civil magistrate is to use sword to enforce justice ([Matt. 5](#); [Rom. 13](#))
      - God in Christ rules the church differently from all other institutions. Christians are dual citizens
- (2) The mission of God and worship
  - (2.1.) MM argues that corporate worship should have the unbeliever in view
    - Worship and its ordinances should be crafted to engage and appeal to the unbeliever
    - Apologetic and evangelistic
      - cf. CS Lewis
    - *Yet*, we believe and confess
      - Worship is first and foremost for the covenant community of God
      - For believers and their children (Acts 2:38-39)
      - This is not to say that confessional Reformed preaching is not evangelistic! Faithful proclamation and liturgy construction that faithfully ministers law and gospel will convince and convert sinners
  - (2.2.) MM: Worship should make use of cultural idioms of the day
    - Assumption is that culture is neutral or at least redeemable
      - Notion of contextualisation or incarnational ministry
      - The church must build “bridges” between the Word and modern culture

- *Yet*, we believe and confess
  - Creation is good, but culture is fallen (Heidelberg Part 1)
    - Antithesis between church and world (Gen. 3:15ff)
  - Cultural mediums communicate a message
    - E.g. Is a rock or pop tune appropriate for worship?
    - Setting up corporate worship like a theater?
  - Cultural forms and target demographics *exclude*
    - Analogies and stories that not all have access to
    - Youth culture
    - Are we not running the risk of a kind of *apartheid* all over again?
- (2.3.) Corporate worship is a place from which to be sent, as if the real business of Christianity is out there (in the world)
  - Analogy: church is like a fueling station :: tea-break :: huddle
  - Great Commission fulfilled by lay-persons in world
- *Yet*, we believe and confess
  - Corporate worship is the highest duty of the Christian and an end in itself
  - The Great Commission is fulfilled chiefly by ordained officers entrusted with the keys to the kingdom of heaven (cf. Matt. 16, 18, 28)
- (3) The mission of God and the church
  - (3.1.) MM endorses and depends heavily upon para-church organisations/ church planting networks
    - *Acts 29; Gospel Coalition; City to City* etc.
  - *Yet*, we believe and confess
    - Presbyterian polity: connectivity, accountability and oversight
      - Which includes confessional subscription and ordination vows
  - (3.2.) MM adopts a lowest common denominator approach for maximum missional impact
    - Tends to reduce Christianity to a few bare essentials
    - It does not necessarily matter what one believes concerning ordained office, Lord's Day observance, regulative principle of worship & sacraments, etc.
  - *Yet*, we believe and confess
    - What distinguishes us as Reformed matters
    - Great Commission (Matt. 28)
      - Discipleship and the whole counsel of God
      - “*teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.*”



- (4) The mission of God and church growth
  - (4.1.) MM techniques that go beyond the Word
    - Small groups
    - Private acts of devotion
    - Various programs
    - Moral crusades
  - *Yet*, we believe and confess
    - Ministry of Word and sacraments
    - Nurture of our children toward the Lord's Table
  - (4.2.) MM indicators of success
    - Numbers
    - Evangelism
    - Programs: e.g. youth ministry
    - Inward change of the heart
    - Social influence
  - *Yet*, we believe and confess
    - Submitting to and assimilating teaching of the church
    - Sanctifying the Lord's day
      - Attending two services
    - Catechising children
    - *Persevering* as pilgrims through doubts, pain & suffering
- (5) The mission of God and the Great Commission<sup>11</sup>
  - MM: language of “significant shift” :: radical
    - cf. “*missional manifesto*”
    - Also “Young, restless and reformed” movement
      - Calvinism on the “Next big thing” list in *Time* in March 2009
      - Colin Hansen's book (cf. Horton, 2014:25)
  - *Yet*, anything new and radical must be tested to Scripture and our confessional standards
    - The language itself should make us weary
      - *Anabaptists* thought Reformers did not go far enough
      - Radical Protestants of today are not content with the ordinary (Horton, 2014; cf. Horton, 2014:99)
    - Let us remember: God shares his extraordinary gifts through ordinary means (Horton, 2014:14)
- Summary
  - MM commendable in certain respects (see above)
    - *But* these truths are already in our confessional standards

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<sup>11</sup> No longer reform, but revolution! (Horton, 2014:74)

- We must be Great Commission as a church!
  - Belgic Confession Article 27ff
  - Keys to the kingdom – Heidelberg LD 31
  - Witness to our neighbor as among chief acts of gratitude (Heidelberg Q/A 86)
- MM taken as a *whole* should not to be endorsed
  - It has more in common with a pietist and revivalist legacy
    - Allow me to explain
    - Pietism arguably borne out of the monastic movement in middle ages
      - And later Anabaptist movement
      - Rooted more in Radical Reformation, pietism and revivalism, than our confessional Reformed tradition (Horton, 2014:71)
        - Revivalism (Horton, 2014:74)
- Europe
  - 17th-century pietist developments among Lutherans in Germany
    - Phillip Spener (1635-1705); so-called father of pietism
  - Devotional zeal/ practical divinity of 17th-century English Puritans
    - William Ames (1576-1633)
    - Richard Baxter (1615-91)
    - John Bunyan (1628-88)
  - Strains of spiritual intensity in Dutch Calvinism (Hart, 2013:170ff)
    - Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676)
    - Wilhelmus Brakel (1635-1711)
    - Introspective piety of Dutch Nadere Reformatie (2nd Reformation)
  - Scottish Presbyterians (Covenanters)
    - Revival tied to observation of Lord's Supper (1640s-1650s)
    - Communal responses to church rites
- North America
  - Revivalism
    - Culmination of English and Dutch contribution to language and practice of Reformed pietism
    - Imported to new world through
      - Theodore Frelinghuysen
      - George Whitefield
  - Two Great Awakenings
    - First (1739-43)
      - Setting standard for experiential Calvinism was Jonathan Edwards (1703-58); Northampton
        - cf. *Religious affections*
          - Standard for sifting the chaff from wheat of spiritual

## authenticity

- Second (began around 1790)
- South Africa
  - Pietist influence in (Dutch Reformed Church) DRC from outset?
  - New breed of evangelical ministers from 1860s
    - Notably John and Andrew Murray, Jr of the DRC
  - Andrew Murray, Jr.
    - Of Scottish descent, but influenced by Dutch pietism while a student in Holland
    - First seminary Prof at Stellenbosch (Elphick, 1997:127)
    - Member of the British holiness movement
    - 7 times moderator of the DRC (Elphick, 228)
    - Led evangelical revivals
- Ever since mid-nineteenth century Murray's Reformed evangelical pietism has dominated spirituality of DRC in SA (de Gruchy, 1991:23)<sup>12</sup>
- Characteristics<sup>13</sup>
  - Suspicion of church and its offices and forms
    - Institutional church plays a small role. “Clergy, creeds, rituals, and church order did not matter since they did not affect the heart noticeably.” (Hart, 2004:21)
  - Tends toward the individual and the subjective
  - “... the hallmarks of a pietism are the conversion experience or new birth, the supremacy of the Bible (often studied in private, small-group settings), moral earnestness, and a social conscience.” Essence of piety is the right ordering of the heart; institutional church [with its ordinances of Word and sacraments] plays a marginal role; like a vitamin supplement in the Christian life (Hart, 2004:xvii; Hart, 2004:21 )
  - “For pietist Protestantism the ideal believer is the one who is constantly active in extending the kingdom of God... Pietist Protestantism is inherently activist; for its adherents the Christian life is one of perpetual motion as

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12 See Jonker, “Die Eie-Aard van Gereformeerde Spiritualiteit,” NGT 30 (July 1989).

13 Authenticity of faith is manifest in lives of believers that are visibly different from nonbelievers → not only provided impetus for social reform, but also provided foundation for seeing Christianity in practical categories; attaches great significance to public life and everyday affairs (Hart, 2004: xxiii) :: Faith is utilitarian: serve private and public ends; makes Christianity into a benign influence (Hart, 2004: xvii) :: “stresses the individuals original encounter with the divine in a flash of spiritual intensity” (Hart, 2004:170) :: Decision of sovereign individuals to choose Christ (Hart, 2004:172) :: Favours and compatible with unity and multi-culturalism; reduce Christianity to a few essentials (Hart, 2004:176) :: Irony of USA influence and our different context: USA influence of sincerity and openness over form and privacy, which characterized the old world; enthusiasm for all kinds of things; cultural ideals of popular sovereignty and individual freedom (Hart, 2004:174)

converts, secure in their salvation, seek to take their faith to all corners of the globe and to all spheres of human existence.” (Hart, 2004:171)

- *At this point*, good to recall our denominational history
  - Founded in part due to a reaction to pietism: untested hymns
  - “At the other extreme, the Gereformeerde Kerk has always been the most theologically conservative of the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa. *It broke from the Hervormdes in 1859, largely because its founders objected to the singing of hymns in the church.* The the first minister, Ds. Dirk Postma, of the Christelike Afgescheide Kerken in Holland... The Calvinist right became as a matter of course another opponent for the evangelical Murray tradition in the N.G. At the Cape.
    - *Weary from their struggle with liberalism, Murray adherents were forced to wheel and face a new series of attacks led by Ds. S. J. du Toit, a disciple of Abraham Kuyper, who accused them of Methodism, roundly declaring that they were outside the true Reformed tradition in church government, worship, and theology. He especially condemned centralised church government and practices such as prayer meetings, revivals, special revivalist preachers, and prayers to the Holy Spirit, as well as co-operation with non-Calvinist mission bodies...*” (Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, 60-61)<sup>14</sup>
- In short, not only does MM not go far enough
  - *But* also makes pietistic affirmations that work against, or at least undermine, what we believe and confess
- What is more, may I suggest that the perceived tension is not between evangelicalism and liberals, but rather our Confessional Reformed piety and pietism
  - Pietism that exists among liberals and evangelicals, including those who advocate the MM
  - “Evangelicalism and liberalism both discount the formal and churchly aspects of the faith in favor of religious sincerity and moral uprightness” (Hart, 2004:xxviii)
    - Both liberal and evangelical Protestants “regard religion as a means to the greater good of solving the nation's many difficulties.” (Hart, 2004:177).
- How do we get religion? Christ and all his benefits?

### **3. Our English-speaking witness for the future: missional, confessional or both?**

- Our confessional heritage
  - To be Reformed is to be confessional
    - Overlap with other confessional Protestant denominations
  - In short

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<sup>14</sup> “The first division, which led to the establishment of the NHK in 1853, was a product of the Great Trek... The second division, which had its roots in Holland, led to the formation of the Gereformeerde Kerk (popularly referred to as the “Dopper” church), a church committed to the restoration of the strictly orthodox Calvinism of the Synod of Dordt and therefore opposed to Calvinism's dilution through evangelical pietism. Of particular importance in the development of the Gereformeerde Kerk's theological identity was the influence of the Dutch statesman-theologian Abraham Kuyper.” (de Gruchy, *Liberating*, 25; cf. *Church Struggle*, 6)

- “Creeds and confessions reflect a common understanding of the Bible's basic teachings... we all read the Bible together, submitting to the common mind of the church through its representative bodies.” (Horton)
    - To be confessional is Biblical (will largely assume this)
      - Every church has a confession, whether explicit or not
        - But it goes beyond innerancy and affirming justification by faith alone
      - Summary of system of doctrine found in Scripture
        - Example of OT witness
          - “*Shema*” recited every morning and evening (Deut. 6:7)
            - Note context of their redemption from Egypt
        - Example of NT witness
          - Peter's Great Confession (Matt. 16)
          - Mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16)
          - Guarding the deposit and handing down to next generation
    - Purpose
      - Guide to interpretation
        - “Rather, we all read the Bible together, submitting to the common mind of the church through its representative bodies” (Horton, 2014:73)
      - Foster appropriate respect for the past
        - Living tradition
        - Reading Scripture in conversation with the past
      - Safeguard the church and its doctrine (from heresy)
        - Provide a standard for church discipline
        - Standard to evaluate teaching
      - Prepare members to confess their faith (cf. Rom. 10)
      - Form basis of our fellowship
      - Teaching aids
- Church planting from our confessional Reformed perspective<sup>15</sup>

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15 “In sum, confessionalist piety was essentially churchly; participation in the forms and rites of the church, as opposed to the convert's solitary quest to lead an earnest moral life, was the way to be a Christian.” (Hart, 2004:47) :: “We get religion, not in bulk but little by little. Just as we get natural life and strength, so spiritual life and strength, day by day” (Hart quoted Nevin; Hart, 2004:52) :: “So, too, in contrast with pietism and the ideal of the lone convert engaging in times of private or small-group prayer and Bible study, confessional Protestantism regards the ministry of clergy and public worship as the primary sources of spiritual edification.” (Hart, 2004:171) :: “Creed, liturgy and polity are not peripheral or even barriers to genuine faith, as pietist Protestants have usually regarded them, but actually define and communicate religious identity, whether to new converts or those who have grown up in the faith.” (Hart, 2004:171) :: Inherently antagonistic (Hart, 2004:176) :: “liturgicalists regarded Christianity as a sacramental religion in which the church nurtures believers from birth to death...” (Hart, 2003:14) :: “So essential to the Christian walk are the means of grace and the ministry of the church, ordinances that transpire chiefly during corporate worship, that to engage in theological or cultural reflection or to pursue Christian devotion apart from the reality of belonging to the church and partaking of her ordinances is to commit a form of religious reduction” (Darryl Hart, *Recovering Mother Kirk*)

- Glory of God
  - First table of the Ten Commandments
  - Being careful of idolatry
  - cf. Canons of Dordt in general
  
- Church at worship takes center stage in life of Christian<sup>16</sup>
  - We are saved to worship; worship will be the activity of heaven
  
  - Forms and ordinances
    - “... confessionalism situates the things of greatest religious meaning in the sacred sphere of the church and its ministry.” (Hart, 2004:xxiii)
    - Early church and elements of worship (Acts 2:42)
  
    - Brings us into contact with heaven
      - Through keys to the kingdom (Heidelberg LD 31)
        - Word and sacraments (Heidelberg Q/A 65)
  
  - Our piety is corporate versus individual
    - “churchly and corporate form of devotion” (Hart, 2004:170)
  
  - Which is why we place such importance upon
    - Church membership (BC 28)
      - Outside of the church there is no salvation
      - Access to the full benefits of the covenant community
  
    - Obedience to the fourth command (Heidelberg Q/A 103)
      - Holy activity happens on a holy day
  
- Worship is governed by the Word: regulative principle of worship
  - cf. Heidelberg LD 35; Belgic Articles 28ff
  - What matters is not only content
  - *But also* form – for our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12)
    - cf. Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10)
  
- Three marks of a true church (BC 29) → determine its mission
  - Word preached, sacraments duly administered and church discipline

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<sup>16</sup>“Confessionalism, which can be used interchangeably with “liturgicalism” refers to “Protestants whose piety is grounded in ceremonies, officers, teachings, and worship of the church.” This is “in contrast to the low-church outlook of Protestants who thrive in revivalistic and parachurch settings.” (Hart, 2004:xi)

“... liturgical Calvinism involves more than just ecclesiology and worship; it has implications for office, piety, relations with other Christians, and the church’s responsibility to society. But at the heart of the liturgical outlook is a concern for the life of the visible church as embodied in her public worship. In fact, this concern is crucial to the other ways that Reformed believers have articulated their self-identity because worship keeps doctrine, culture, and piety in proper balance. The church in worship embodies the doctrines that God’s people confess. Ecclesiology and liturgy present the cultural endeavors of believers from going in directions that neglect the fundamental differences between the church and the world. Furthermore, without being grounded in worship and the visible church, Christian piety tends toward individualism and subjectivity” (Hart, 2003:13)

- Church's mission = Great Commission
  - The marks of a true church determine its mission, which is to exercise the keys to the kingdom
    - Through an ordained and educated ministry
  - The Great Commission is fulfilled by the church at worship!
    - Faithful worship is inherently evangelistic
    - The whole counsel of God contains both law and gospel
- Church growth techniques
  - Methods of church growth
    - Apostolic method of church growth – (Acts 2:42)
      - Public means of grace administered on the Lord's Day
      - Objective
    - “Salvation does not depend on clever programs, strategic plans, or marketing savvy”
      - Reaching God's elect with his techniques (Hart, 2003:49)
    - Should not be discouraged if church “*sometimes for a while appears very small, and in the eyes of men reduced to nothing.*” (BC 27)
- Measure of church growth
  - Gauge Christian health/maturity “by the degree to which a believer conforms to the teachings and practices of the tradition” (Hart, 2004:173).
- Church and her constitution are cross-centered = counter-cultural
  - Church is a spiritual organism governed by a spiritual polity
    - BC 30 – government of the church and its officers
  - Word of God is inherently relevant to sinners
    - And powerful to convert and give life
  - But to the world, it is foolishness (1 Cor. 1-2)
    - *Content*: Christ and him crucified!
    - *Medium*: weakness and seeming ineffectiveness of preaching
      - Paul came in weakness, and fear and much trembling
    - *Recipients*: the low and despised of the world
- Closely related: pilgrim mentality
  - Pilgrims and exiles (1 Peter 2)
    - More real than ever for us in post-apartheid South Africa in a narrow confessional Reformed denomination :: facing many social trials
    - Canons of Dordt 5:14 on “*perseverance of the Saints*”
  - “Being a Christian, then, means participating in churchly rites and ceremonies, not simply as means of inspiration for evangelism and Christian activism, but primarily to learn dependence on grace and persevere through life's doubts and temptations. Pietists have typically

complained that the confessional Protestant conception of Christian devotion is too passive if not selfish because it is oriented to believers rather than those outside the faith. Confessionalism, it is said, exhibits a ghetto mentality.

- *But this complaint is based on an assumption about the nature of Christian devotion that confessionalism rejects – namely, that conversion results in strong believers who are so powerful that the true measure of spiritual zeal is what they accomplish either by winning new converts or by performing moral deeds. Confessionalism's understanding of the Christian life as a pilgrimage, however, assumes the weakness and frailty of believers and measures success by the degree to which they continue to trust in God and hope for the world to come despite the trials and sufferings of this life.*
  - This outlook even extends to the direction and purpose of history; where confessionalists have regarded human history as a cosmic drama that awaits consummation according to the will of God, pietists have swung between optimism and despair in assessing the relative proximity of history's conclusion.” (Hart, 2004:172)
- Notion of an inherited faith<sup>17</sup>
  - Distinctly Presbyterian/ Reformed (cf. infant baptism)
    - Stems from our understanding of covenant continuity ([Acts 2:38-39](#))
    - Extraordinary conversion experience should not be seen as the norm
  - Hart quoting John Williamson Nevin: “[It was] based throughout on the idea of covenant family religion, church membership by God's holy act in baptism, and following this a regular catechetical training of the young, with direct reference to their coming to the Lord's table. In one word, all proceeded on the theory of sacramental, educational religion, as it had belonged properly to all the national branches of the *Reformed Church in Europe* from the beginning.” (Hart, 2004:30).
  - “... confessionalism relies on patterns of inheritance in which the expectation is for believers to come into the faith through birth and Christian nurture” (Hart, 2004:172)

## Conclusion

- May we recover and renew a confessional Reformed approach to ministry
  - Both for existing churches and new church plants in the English-medium
  - We don't have to reinvent the wheel
    - Let us stick with the Great Commission
      - Let us shepherd those we have reached

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<sup>17</sup> Marks beginning of Christian experience typically with infant baptism and the notion that believers inherit the faith of their parents and the larger Christian community. This does not mean that conversion of adolescents or adults is prohibited but only that the experience of children who grow up in the church and learn the ways of the community of faith is the norm for Christian life than one that makes the radical change of conversion the paradigm of faith.” (Hart, 2004:170)



- Let us put our confidence in God's Word and Spirit to grow us
  - Let us send out more called and ordained missionaries
  - Let us all witness to the faith
    - Trust that God will bring his elect our way in his time according to his ordained mens
- Return to our central mission: which is the Great Commission set forth in God's Word, which is faithfully summarized in our confessions
- Let us preach Christ and him crucified, in weakness, to a weak and needy sinners
  - So that God might get all the glory in building his church

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