

**Academic theology as the yardstick of being  
Reformed in South Africa today:  
an appreciative critique of Calvin on the  
occasion of his 500th birthday<sup>i</sup>**

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*Abstract*

The 500th birthday of John Calvin provides us with an opportunity of revisiting the legacy of this great theologian and teacher of the church. While there is no doubt that the reformed legacy which is characterised as Calvinist has been controversial in South Africa, Calvin's legacy provided a platform of questioning certain half truths that were made out to be the truth. This article notes that literature increasingly indicates that Christianity is gravitating towards the global South. This poses significant questions about how we continue to do theology in Africa today. This article bemoans the fact that Reformed theology with its emphasis on academic theology has not done enough to contribute towards the appropriation of this faith in Africa and in South Africa in particular. As such many African Reformed Christians have at best become estranged from the very communities which it is expected they must serve. The article provides an appreciative critique of Calvin and therefore of the Reformed church tradition in South Africa.

### **Introduction**

Statistics increasingly indicate that Christianity is gravitating towards the global South and elsewhere.<sup>ii</sup> For some, this clearly means that Christianity cannot continue to exist as it has for the past centuries.<sup>ii</sup> As we celebrate the occasion of John Calvin's 500th birthday, and acknowledge the formidable impact that this great theologian and Christian has made especially on the South African Reformed psyche, we must continue to ask how much African Reformed Christians have succeeded in embodying calls that they seriously engage their Africanity in their Reformed theological reflections.<sup>iii</sup>

As this call for a more African Reformed Church for Africa resounds, we realise that it is being frustrated by the leadership of many African Reformed Churches which have inculcated a particular way of being a Reformed church even in Africa today.<sup>iv</sup> This frustration furthermore begs the question of whether the inability of African Reformed Christians to appropriate this faith in Africa is linked to their seminary training in particular or their university training in general.

As we celebrate Calvin and at the same time heed the call for a more African Reformed Church, we must engage the new struggle in Africa, and South Africa in particular, which is the struggle over the curricula. It goes without saying that what you put in is what you get out. It seems that the South African history of struggle for social justice has handicapped the African intellectual somewhat. Thus where they are not able to see clear social injustice issues, these intellectuals are bound to remain inactive. Therefore when it comes to issues of curricula, it is rather surprising to realise how the said issue is yet to attract the same attention as social questions.

The apartheid status quo, although legally abolished through the new negotiated democratic government, continues in the mindset of both white and black people of South Africa. In the case of some black South Africans, this becomes most pertinent when African leaders have to engage with changed contexts. Whereas you had signs in the past showing what black people could and could not do in apartheid South Africa, the difference today is that one does not need signs any longer since the apartheid behaviour is too deeply entrenched. Our political history has been controversial and so has our theological history as well.

For the South African Reformed Christian, the Reformed faith has been particularly ambivalent. It was however the versatility of this very faith that kept many especially African Reformed Christians from abandoning the Reformed faith. We remember with delight attempts by the likes of Allan Boesak to domesticate the faith within the African setting. While Boesak was able to dismantle the simplistic associate of Reformedness with whiteness in his celebrated work "Black and Reformed",<sup>v</sup> he failed

however to advocate for a sense of Africanity. In that way Reformedness continues in South Africa to ignore the diversity of cultures and the role that culture can play in domesticating this faith in Africa.

The adjectives “black” and “African” respectively are used to refer to distinct milieus in the history of the Reformed faith in South Africa. “Black” refers chiefly to the dawn of black liberation theology which was transported to South Africa. Within South African Reformed circles it refers particularly to the work of Allan Boesak (cited in footnote above) in which he challenged the hypocrisy of white Reformed church leaders. While it was aimed at dealing with the socioeconomic and political dilemmas of South Africa at the time, it did not really deal with a need for the Reformed theology to appreciate African cultures and world views. The word “African” on the other hand is used as a progressive notion which takes into account the contributions of black theology, especially as espoused in the theology of Boesak. More importantly it is aimed at propagating a platform where Reformed theology could seriously deal with its Africanness in South Africa.

This article is aimed at strengthening the call for a more African Reformed church, in South Africa especially. It joins in the celebration of Calvin, but remains conspicuously aware of the fact that colonial Reformed Christians cannot ignore their ambiguous feelings as they celebrate the contributions of Calvin. It takes the criticisms by Kwame Nkrumah very seriously about the role that colonial students must adopt as they participate in such events.

### **How do we remember Calvin in South Africa today?**

Unlike the Lutherans, for whom the person of Martin Luther represents what the Lutheran church is to them, Reformed Christians in South Africa do not have such a unifying figure. Thus it is nothing out of the extraordinary to see a variety of Reformed Church fathers as representing what being Reformed means. South African Reformed Christians’ introduction to Calvin is intrinsically linked to the Dutch Calvinists who arrived in South Africa and were soon followed by the French Huguenots and later by the Scottish Presbyterians and Swiss missionaries.<sup>vi</sup> For black Reformed Christians, being both black and Reformed was a painful paradox. A painful paradox, because it was those very Reformed Christians who were largely responsible for the doctrine of apartheid which created an astronomical cleavage between black and white in South Africa. For many in South Africa, therefore, the question of celebrating the life of Calvin evokes diverse feelings and sentiments.

As African Reformed Christians move from being black and Reformed to being African and Reformed, we must continue to ask why we celebrate Calvin. Smit argues that the question of why we celebrate the legacy of John Calvin in South Africa is more than simply a rhetorical question.<sup>vii</sup> This is so because the history of the arrival of the Reformed faith in South Africa is a history that is fraught with controversies and deliberate ignorance of African people and their beliefs systems.<sup>viii</sup> It is therefore not by chance that Smit asks the question, “What does it mean to live in South Africa and be Reformed?”<sup>ix</sup>

A positive appreciation of Calvin (who it could be argued embodies the Reformed tradition for South African Reformed Christians) did not happen among African Reformed Christians until the mid 1970s. Heavily influenced by a new hermeneutics offered by black liberation theology which was transplanted to South Africa from the United States of America, the likes of Boesak were encouraged to challenge the Dutch Calvinists’ (later the Afrikaner Calvinists) presentation of Calvin in South Africa.<sup>x</sup>

Because Calvin was such a huge man and has contributed substantially to the human condition especially in his own context, the new-found hermeneutical tools enabled many African Reformed theologians to use the same Calvin in criticising a distorted presentation of him. Calvin came to be seen as a champion of the poor and marginalised.<sup>xi</sup> It was with this Calvin that some African Reformed church leaders could identify.

Recently, the question of “what does the great reformer John Calvin have to say about the critical issues facing Reformed churches around the world today?” resulted in the congregation of about 50 Calvin scholars in Geneva in April of 2007. The editorial which introduced the contributions of these scholars cautioned us to look beyond the clichés that have come to characterise the great John Calvin.<sup>xii</sup> If however, we agree with Dirk Smit that Calvin was a child of his time, then it goes without saying that we must let Calvin be Calvin.

It has always been the problem of the social sciences that they try to correct history and in that way sacrifice the truth. It is for this reason that the subject of history has become a dull and boring one, simply because it is made to be too good to be true. Dubois cautioned against this obsession of cutting out certain aspects in the lives of our heroes in our process of hero-making. He observes that

one is astonished in the study of history at the recurrence of the idea that evil must be forgotten, distorted, skimmed over. We must not remember that Daniel Webster got drunk but only remember that he was a splendid constitutional lawyer. We must forget that George Washington was a slave owner ... and simply remember the things we regard as credible and inspiring. The difficulty, of course, with this philosophy is that history loses its value as an incentive and example; it paints perfect men and noble nations, but it does not tell the truth.<sup>xiii</sup>

This tendency is inconspicuous when considering our theological heroes. There is little evidence disputing Calvin's association with capitalism; he is seen as the author of double predestination as well as the champion of moral austerity. He was somewhat responsible for the murder of Michael Servetus.<sup>xiv</sup> Some of these matters have impacted particularly negatively on the colonial Christian.

South Africa stands out as one of the nations that have consciously retained histories that might otherwise be intolerable to some. Perhaps this was done because the current dispensation is the result of a negotiation between the then rulers and those who are now ruling. For some reason some African Reformed Christian leaders were able to transcend some negativity in Calvin and use what was positive to enable a positive appropriation of Calvin in South Africa.

One of the greatest contributions that the “struggle Reformed church”<sup>xv</sup> made in the fight against apartheid was the Belhar Confession. The Reformed faith has always been a confessional faith. Sometimes the rigour with which it upheld confessions caused grave concerns with regard to the place of scripture in relation to its confessions. Confessions were seen as closed and almost having irreproachable status within the church. It was Calvin through Karl Barth who encouraged a new approach to confessions, at least in South Africa.<sup>xvi</sup>

Seen as perhaps one who presented Reformed thought in the most systematic way, John Calvin has brought with him an even more innovative lens of reading and understanding the significance of confessions.<sup>xvii</sup> In France, many years after Luther had skyrocketed to prominence, Calvin was attempting to find ways of explaining to the king of France, Francis I, that what he taught was not in contradiction with the gospel. His career was brought to a halt by an incident in 1534 where placards were attached at night on doors of private and public buildings defaming the Roman Mass.

This act elicited fury from authorities against all manner of “Lutherans” who might have been responsible for such action.<sup>xviii</sup> This prompted Calvin to go into exile where among other things he wrote one of the greatest contributions to Reformed theology ever (his *Institutes of the Christian religion*). The intention of this work was to declare what he as well as those who were persecuted believed in, and it is addressed to the king of France.

Although it was intended to be used as a textbook for the king,<sup>xix</sup> this work may fundamentally be construed as a confession of what Calvin and his followers believed. In the preface addressed to the king, Calvin explains the purpose of his book movingly and respectfully. Its purpose is twofold. Firstly, it sought to vindicate the Protestants in France who were incarcerated, tortured and persecuted. Secondly, it afforded French Protestants a catechism, a book of religious instruction responsible for instructing them in the word of God.<sup>xx</sup>

In a nutshell, Calvin wanted to show the king that the charge against them – in the main that of revolution – should not be accepted without examination.<sup>xxi</sup> To put the mind of the king at rest about the claim that his camp wanted to overthrow the king's government, Calvin concludes:

Your mind is now indeed turned away and estranged from us ... but we trust that we can regain your favour, if in a quiet, composed mood, you will once read this confession, which we intend in lieu of a defence before Your Majesty. Suppose, however, the whisperings of the malevolent so fill your ears that the accused have no chance to speak for themselves, but those savage furies, while you connive at them, rage against us with imprisonings, scourgings, rackings, maimings and burnings. Then we will be reduced to the last extremity even as sheep destined for the slaughter. Yet this will so happen that “in our patience we may possess our souls”; and may await the strong hand of the Lord, which will surely appear in due season, coming forth to deliver the poor from their affliction, and also to punish their despisers, who now exult with great assurance. May the Lord, the King of kings, establish your throne in righteousness, and your dominion in equity, most illustrious king.<sup>xxii</sup>

While, as pointed out, this most important work of Calvin can be characterised as his confession addressed to King Francis I, Calvin has succeeded in discouraging attempts at reading this work as an

ultimate truth. It is therefore not by chance that this work in question also underwent numerous vigorous revisions during his life.

With Calvin in the picture one is introduced to an understanding of a confession that is not an end in itself but always a means towards an end. To understand that this important work of Calvin is not to be read as closed or completed is a very important point for the diverse South African Reformed community. We shall return to this crucial point later. For now let us examine the disjunction between academic theology and African communities.

### **The disjunction between academic theology and South African societies**

While it is true that Christianity is increasingly situating its gravitational centre in the global South, it must be pointed out that the so-called mainline churches are increasingly becoming empty. Many factors can be cited for why this is happening. What is also important to note is that these mainline churches (including especially the Reformed church in South Africa) are losing membership to charismatic and African-initiated churches.

Clearly, with the collapse of the western empires and the end of their control of the Africans' way of worshipping, the Reformed faith cannot continue to exist as it has until now. The long-loathed idea of bringing the Reformed faith into serious dialogue with Africa and its people now seems inevitable. The emphasis on the irreconcilable differences between Africa and the Reformed tradition has created serious problems with regard to how we viewed and continue to view education.

Bediako argues that a larger intellectual framework for describing, analysing and interpreting African Christian history, life and thought is now needed more than ever.<sup>xxiii</sup> This can only be achieved when academic theology realises that it can indeed learn something from African primal traditions. Bediako reminds us of the fact that Western paradigms that were used in the interpretation of Africa by Western theology, including its missionary wing, regarded the African primal traditions as primitive with nothing substantial to contribute to their own theological significance.<sup>xxiv</sup>

The ideas of the superiority of western paradigms in academe were perpetuated (and continue today) through stereotypes of what was or what was not theology. Notions such as "proper theology",<sup>xxv</sup> which existed during the struggle against apartheid, have simply taken new forms. The ignorance about Africa which came about as a result of the western intellectual tradition's disdain of African thought has yet to be dealt with. Pursuant to this, a great premium was placed on university education. One association with Calvin and therefore Reformed theology is of course the high premium placed on academic theology. For a very long time Reformed ministers and theologians prided themselves on having the highest degree of university education.<sup>xxvi</sup>

While that has been a laudable idea, one must quickly ask what that meant for the communities in which these church leaders laboured. Since much emphasis was placed on university education, the use of the English language became the yardstick by which real education was measured. This in turn devalued indigenous languages consciously and unconsciously. While the balkanisation of South Africa into different Bantustans was one of the greatest evils of apartheid from which we are currently still trying to recover, one would have hoped that the different universities placed within ethnic boundaries (although greatly monitored and dictated to by white South Africa) would cultivate African languages so that the gap between the academe and communities could be bridged. A number of challenges inhibited attempts at truly translating theology into the language of the people.

Smit acknowledges that the theological education of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) is complicated and has often been very controversial and painful. In line with the then apartheid ideology of separate development, separate institutions of learning were designed for the diverse ethnic groups of South Africa.<sup>xxvii</sup> The Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA), which was the church organised to cater for African Christians, was forced to establish schools for theological training in the different ethnic locations. Thus you had theological schools in Turfloop for Sepedi speakers, Witsieshoek for Sesotho speakers, Dingaanstad for isiZulu speakers and Decoligny for isiXhosa speakers.

While this was encouraged, the curriculum mostly attempted to mimic what was taught in traditional white theological schools, especially in the Dutch Reformed Church's seminaries.

In most cases you had white missionaries in the employ of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC)<sup>xxviii</sup> teaching at these institutions. While these white missionaries were involved with black churches and therefore its theological training, they invariably left upon retirement to be members of the DRC. It was also their presence at black schools which maintained a status quo which was hell-bent on ensuring that the unique African experiences and stories would never receive any significant importance. Smit is correct when he asserts that the three faculties of theology at Stellenbosch, Pretoria and Bloemfontein served as examples, for degree structures, preconditions, curricula etc.<sup>xxix</sup> The fact

that most of these black theological schools lacked the infrastructure that the white and sometimes the coloured schools had, always caused tensions with regard to how they viewed their theological education vis-à-vis that of their white and coloured counterparts.

Feelings of inferiority have clearly not escaped black Reformed ministers and theologians who trained at traditionally black centres. With such feelings of inferiority, one often has to deal with blacks who try very hard to escape themselves. They are the very ones who are more vociferous in challenging everything that seeks to suggest that the African experiences and stories must be elevated to where they currently are in theological deliberations.

Bediako is correct when he holds that one issue that academic theology continues to ignore, perhaps at its own peril, is the fact that African Christianity is lived largely in African indigenous languages rather than the colonial languages.<sup>xxx</sup> The result however is that the very African leaders who are immersed in this form of education become at best estranged from their communities.

The regrettable devaluing of Africa, its people, its history and languages is all tied to a colonial project which was aimed at eventually controlling both Africa and its people. Since the Africans became convinced that there is nothing to pride themselves on in Africa, a “fleeing from the self” became inevitable. There have been some attempts at reconciling the African with the self, although it must be added that such initiatives are infrequently hampered by the African’s internalised slavish or oppressive mentality.<sup>xxxi</sup>

One such attempt at restoring the African to the self is contained in the call for the Renaissance of Africa which was first popularised by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana in the 1960s. What this simply means is that African leaders, scholars, theologians etc must begin to embrace their Africanness. The Africanness here relates to that which makes the African distinct from the rest of the world. This distinction includes world-views as well as ways of approaching life. Simply put, the African Renaissance means a conscious retreat to antiquity and reclaiming what is great in the African past and can be of benefit to the current African situation and condition. This consciousness realises that in an attempt to conquer Africa and its people, African history was intentionally discarded and distorted to ensure a swift assimilation of the Africans into a new world order.

While issuing this call, Kwame Nkrumah was very careful to avoid any frustration. He immediately acknowledged

that the defeat of colonialism and even neo-colonialism will not result in the automatic disappearance of the imported patterns of thought and social organization. For those patterns have taken root, and are in varying degree sociological features of our contemporary society. Nor will a simple return to the communalistic society of ancient Africa offer a solution either. To advocate a return, as it were, to the rock from which we were hewn is a charming thought but we are faced with contemporary problems, which have arisen from political subjugation, economic exploitation etc.<sup>xxxii</sup>

This very important acknowledgement is not to be confused with sentiments held by some that Africa must forever remain grateful to the West for having brought the Christian faith to it, even though they exploited the continent in exchange. In fact, Nkrumah was very serious about the need for an African consciousness. He had the following to say about the African-conscious colonial student:

A colonial student does not by origin belong to the intellectual history in which the university philosophers are such impressive landmarks. The colonial student can be so seduced by these attempts to give philosophical account of the universe, that he [sic] surrenders his whole personality to them. When he does this, he loses sight of the fundamental societal fact that he is a colonial subject.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

This is an important critique against academic theology in as far as it encourages the African Reformed Christian to regurgitate western philosophical and theological constructs, and in the process contributes to the alienation of the African Reformed Christian from his or her community. This very critique is also closely linked to that of Carter G Woodson, who prefers to speak of the mis-educated Negro. He argues that the Western education system at best alienates Africans from their communities.<sup>xxxiv</sup> While these Africans might be lifted up by the hegemonies, they in essence are removed from the very communities which it is expected they might enhance.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Nkrumah reminds us that many of the colonial students who lack an African consciousness have been handpicked and so to say, carried certificates of worthiness with them. These they considered fit to become enlightened servants of the colonial administration. The process by which this category of student became fit usually started at an early age, for not infrequently, they had lost contact with their

own roots, they became prone to accept some theory of universalism, provided it was expressed in vague, mellifluous terms.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Nkrumah continues,

when we study philosophy [ and I will add theology] which is not ours, we must see it in the context of the intellectual history to which it belongs, and we must see it in the context of the milieu in which it was born. That way, we can use it in the furtherance of cultural development and in the strengthening of our human society.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

The concern raised by Nkrumah raises significant challenges to how we go about domesticating the Reformed tradition in South Africa today. We need to highlight a number of problems. Firstly, African Reformed Christians need to acknowledge that the current university system, which is still steeped in Western concepts and frameworks, is to a great extent responsible for the disjunction between theology as an academic subject and the African communities which theology purportedly wants to ameliorate. Secondly, the mis-education of the African Reformed Christian leaders has become so pervasive that they expect the very laity that they want to be in the service of to rise to their level of conceptualisation. Thirdly, the absolutisation of Western views which is now carried out by the subjects of the Western colonial administration [the mis-educated leaders] has prevented these leaders from seeing anything good in African approaches to life.

### **“A change is gonna come!” Reformed theology in South Africa beyond Calvin**

The R&B singer and song-writer, Sam Cooke, wrote and produced the hit single “A change is gonna come” in 1963.<sup>xxxviii</sup> While this song remained popular during those tumultuous times in the lives of black people in the United States, it seemed to have been forgotten until the election of the first black president of the United States of America in 2008.<sup>xxxix</sup> In that hit single Cooke managed to remind an oppressed people about one of the most fundamental tenets of Christian life – hope.

With a global consensus that Christianity is indeed gaining more prominence in the global South and elsewhere, it seems that this hit single by Cooke is most appropriate in our current theological milieu. With this of course, we must acknowledge that it is one thing to hope for change which is coming, but equally important to acknowledge the fact that African Reformed Christians must work towards the realisation of this imminent change. In this regard, the African Reformed Christians are indeed on their own.<sup>xl</sup>

It seems apparent that these Christians must begin to seriously deal with an education system that leaves the impression that the African is a perpetual child. The African Reformed Christians have always acknowledged their link to those who are credited with having championed the cause of Christianity. In fact, this association has been so close that we virtually forget that these icons were also men of their time and contributed extensively to the subordinate position which Africans have internalised in almost all aspects of their existence. We have allowed ourselves to be assimilated into the histories of these icons such that their histories have become, indiscriminately, our histories.

Our positions of being subjects, which in most cases put us at the mercies of our colonial masters, have encouraged us to look for ways of survival. It is therefore not by chance that there are so many black people willing to bid farewell to black initiatives and self-assertion in exchange for the conditional shade provided to us by our white masters. This process has been accelerated by systems that tended to intentionally inculcate into these Christians the belief that their own views are neither important nor to be taken seriously if they are to be people to be reckoned with in their communities.

It has recently been discovered that this process at best alienates these Christians from their communities. Even after the collapse of official colonialism and apartheid, the structures that were put in place as projects of colonialism and apartheid have remained. Real change in Reformed theology in South Africa requires African Reformed Christians to seriously challenge attempts at seeing the African reality and stories as merely appendixes.

This article has already referred to Nkrumah, who reminded us that the struggle against colonialism and even neocolonialism will never return the Africans to the rock from whence they have been hewed, yet real change in the way that we do theology calls for a covenant among African Reformed Christians. Covenant here refers to a deliberate attempt at getting together as a people who have suffered from divisions intentionally engineered to keep African people separate and therefore in disagreement about what is in the true interest of their communities.

As Reformed theology in South Africa moves beyond Calvin, realising his unique context and time and wanting to appropriate this faith on this continent, we must concede that the task of uniting

African Reformed Christians is daunting. It will perhaps continue like this until South Africa begins to realise that it is not an island on Africa but that it is indeed part of Africa. To produce church leaders who will be able to lead this fight means clearly that we must take a serious look at our curricula.

As we celebrate this event of the 500th birthday of Calvin, we must especially remember that Calvin himself was once a refugee and minister for refugees in Strasbourg. Thus the recent Afrophobic attacks against Africans mostly from north of the Limpopo River by black South Africans must bring greater shame on us. It seems that the inculcated notions of superiority that some South Africans have vis-à-vis other Africans is clearly linked with the division that has characterised Africa especially since the Berlin Conference of 1884.<sup>xli</sup> It is for this reason that the Reformed church in South Africa must intentionally begin to cultivate a sense of Africanness in contradistinction to the current pervasive South Africanness.

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### Endnotes

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- 1 This paper was originally read at a conference organised by the International Reformed Theological Institute and hosted by the *Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée* in Aix-en Provence, France 7–12 July 2009.
- 2 K Bediako, “Whose religion is Christianity? Reflections on opportunities and challenges in Christian theological scholarship: the African dimension”, in A Walls and C Ross (eds.), *Mission in the 21st century: exploring the five marks of global mission*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008, 115ff.

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- 3 RS Tshaka, “African you are on your own! The need for African Reformed Christians to seriously engage their Africanity in their Reformed theological reflections” in *Scriptura* 96. (2007:3), 533-550.
- 4 While the scope of this article is confined to the South African context and the author might as well have spoken of a South African Reformed Church or community instead of an African Reformed Church or community, this is done deliberately for the author is aware of the troubling perception which many South Africans hold, seeing themselves as different from and therefore as better than most of the Africans north of the Limpopo River. It is an attempt by the author to allow especially black South Africans to see themselves as being truly African and united with the joys and concerns shared by Africans across the globe and on the continent.
- 5 See A Boesak, *Black and Reformed: apartheid, liberation and the Calvinist tradition*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984.
- 6 A Boesak, “Black and Reformed: contradiction or challenge” in D McKim (ed.), *Major themes in the Reformed tradition*. Wipf and Stock Publishers: Orlando, 1998, 416-425.
- 7 D Smit, “Views on Calvin’s ethics: reading Calvin in the South African context” in *Reformed world*, vol 57 no. 4, December 2007, 306.
- 8 RS Tshaka, “African you are on your own!” 533ff.
- 9 D Smit, “Views on Calvin’s ethics: reading Calvin in the South African context”, 306f.
- 10 A Boesak, “Black and Reformed: contradiction or challenge”, 417f.
- 11 D Smit, “Views on Calvin’s ethics: reading Calvin in the South African context”, 308.
- 12 See J Aslin, Editorial. *Reformed world* vol 57 no. 4, December 2007. 229.
- 13 WEB Dubois, *Black Reconstruction*. Cleveland: World Meridian. 1964, 722.
- 14 M Hillar, *The case of Michael Servetus (1511-1553): the turning point in the struggle for freedom of conscience*. Edwin Mellen Press: Lewiston: 1997.
- 15 I use the concept “struggle reformed church” because I am aware of the fact that we cannot really speak of a church which struggled against apartheid. This is so simply because we always had individuals within churches aligning themselves with the struggle. Thus even though the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa produced the Belhar Confession, there was constant disagreement as to what role the church should play in that critical political situation.
- 16 See RS Tshaka, *Confessional theology: a critical analysis of the confessional theology of Karl Barth and its significance for the Belhar Confession*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 2005.
- 17 Barth echoes the sentiments that Calvin was the great systematician of the older Protestantism and perhaps of all Protestantism. Cf K Barth, *The theology of John Calvin*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1995, 159.
- 18 B Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers: a history of the Renaissance and Reformation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1996, 483.
- 19 K Barth, *The theology of John Calvin*, 109.
- 20 B Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers*, 483.
- 21 K Barth, *The theology of John Calvin*, 107.
- 22 J Calvin cited in RS Tshaka, *Confessional theology?* 44-45.
- 23 K Bediako, “Whose religion is Christianity?” 115.
- 24 K Bediako, “Whose religion is Christianity?” 109.
- 25 The notion “proper theology” is one which became very prominent during my theological education. To a certain degree it can be used to refer to academic theology. In hindsight, “proper theology” seems to have been a notion that was used to discourage any attempts of devaluing the so-called classics at the expense of the African student’s uniquely African experience. Most of those African theologians who dealt with issues like African theology or black theology were not really taken seriously. It is not by chance that this rather important and existential approach of the African to theology has become nothing but appendixes in theological education. The classical works of the likes of Schleiermacher, Ritchie and many others were strongly encouraged. While it has always been my view that these great church fathers remain especially important to us even as colonial students, it has often been very difficult to rework them for ourselves so that they speak to our unique African situations.
- 26 D Smit’s brief yet significant outline of theological education in South Africa. Smit focuses particularly on the URCSA and the DRC. See D Smit, “Modernity and theological education crises at Western Cape and Stellenbosch?” in E Conradie (ed.). *Essays in public theology: collected essays of D Smit*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press. 2007, 75 (see especially the footnotes).
- 27 D Smit, “Modernity and theological education crises at Western Cape and Stellenbosch?” 79.

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- 28 The Dutch Reformed Church, better known by its Afrikaans name the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk*, is the white Reformed church. Out of this church emerged three daughter churches in line with the then policies of apartheid for the other three racial groups of South Africa. These churches were the Dutch Reformed Mission church for coloured Reformed Christians; the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa for black Reformed Christians; and the Reformed Church in Africa for the Indian Reformed Christians.
- 29 D Smit, “Modernity and theological education crises at Western Cape and Stellenbosch?” 79.
- 30 K Bediako, “Whose religion is Christianity?” 116.
- 31 Harold Cruse dealt extensively with this question in his USA context, bemoaning especially the collapse of black leadership. The author is of the view that the same challenges and problems with regard to black leadership can be directed to the African continent and particularly to South Africa post 1994. For a detailed account of the matter, see H Cruse. *Crisis of the negro intellectual: a historical analysis of the failure of black leadership*. New York: New York Review Books, 2005.
- 32 K Nkrumah, from  
<http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/nkrumah/1967/african-socialism-revisited.htm>
- 33 K Nkrumah. *Consciencism: philosophy and ideology for decolonization and development with particular reference to the African revolution*. Heinemann Educational Books: London. 1966, 2.
- 34 C Woodson. *The mis-education of the Negro*. New York: Classic House Books. 2008
- 35 Adebayo Olukoshi, former Executive Secretary of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), was invited to be the inaugural lecturer for the establishment of the African Visiting Scholar lecture series, an initiative within the College of Human Sciences at the University of South Africa (Unisa). Key in his lecture was the issue of the responsibility of a university. Olukoshi argued that a university must not simply be an institution that provides qualified man-power; on the contrary, a university proper must have the responsibility of being the conscience of society. Seen in this way, the intellectual activity can never be a neutral exercise. A. Olukoshi, *The responsibilities of the human and social sciences in a period of crisis: transitions and transformations*. Unpublished lecture, Unisa, 27 February 2009.
- 36 K Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 3.
- 37 K Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 55.
- 38 S Cooke. *Ain't that good news* [Audio CD]. ABKCO: Los Angeles, California. 1963.
- 39 The election of Barack Hussein Obama to the highest office in the United States of America is of course seen as one of the major milestones in the history of black people across the globe. The Obama era has been seen as the dawn of better life conditions for many black people in the USA. The said era can be compared to the Mandela era of 1994. Suffice it to say that the South African situation has swiftly learnt that since the structures are still kept in place and one race has simply been exchanged for the other, one has always to look at such transitions critically.
- 40 RS Tshaka, “African you are on your own!” 533-550.
- 41 Wesseling, HL. *Divide and rule: the partition of Africa 1880-1914*. Westport: Praeger, 1996.