INTRODUCTION

The issue of culture and its relationship to theology continues to remain a contentious issue within Reformed theological circles in South Africa and perhaps Africa as a whole. The transportation of Christianity to Africa has left the impression that Christianity is generally a symbiosis of this faith with Western culture. Western ways of living has become synonymous with Christianity. The result has been a synchrony of western cultures and Christianity.

This synchrony of Western cultures with Christianity has prompted many to question the possibility of a faith that can resist its assimilation of culture (and any culture for that matter). This paper seeks to ponder the question “whether African Reformed Christians can continue to assert their Africanness and at the same time maintain their reformed ecclesial tendencies.”

The implied tension is reminiscent of the same tension that became prevalent during the haydays of apartheid, whereby black Reformed people had to justify the fact that they were both black and Reformed. The need for Africans to assert their Reformedness occurred during a period in the history of the Reformed faith in South Africa where Reformedness was seen as tantamount to being ‘white.’ Today the challenge is not for African Reformed people to defend their Reformedness, but to assert their Africanness in the wake of the challenges that they are

---

1 The tendencies to which we are referring to here are primarily the Reformed principle of *sola scriptura, sola fidei, and sola gratia* that has tremendous ramifications for African Reformed Christians who had never been able to hygienically dissect culture from faith in Jesus Christ.
confronted with, as well as to deal with the mounting criticism from those who had become disillusioned with mainline Christian theology that, in most cases, seems to be content with its dismissal of any attempt of engaging African culture.

In attempting to deal with the indicated challenge, this paper remains grateful to the response of many African intellectuals who continues to instill pride in many Africans. It will be pointed out that although this paper agrees with the need to redefine Christian identity in the light of initiatives such as the famous African renaissance call, these calls have to realize that they are not made in vacuums, but shall have to wrestle with the broader global reality.

The Reformed Church in South Africa certainly needs to do much more to domesticate this ecclesiastical tradition in Africa. At the same time, the pace followed in terms of the progress made in this direction cannot be uncritically dictated to by African Traditional Religions (ATR’s), but Reformed theology must devise its own yardstick of measuring progress and failure encountered.

The Essence of Barth in a Changed and Changing South African Context?

The recent assertions of Africans in the wake of the participation of Africa in its own affairs without having to bow to the dictates of European forces impels African Reformed theology to give meaningful consideration to the question of who and what defines a Reformed Christian in Africa today.

While theology today must always remain aware of the challenges that multiply on a daily basis, it nonetheless should not be forgotten that theology in Africa is consistently faced with a monumental task of explaining itself to the rest of the world. The need for African Reformed theology to reassert itself in the light of the calls made by those who are convinced that theology practiced in Africa has to reckon seriously with African realities has instilled a degree of suspicion in those who still evoke European theologians in their theology deliberations. In conceding that African Reformed theology has to deal with its peculiar African reality, it has become imperative for us to continually explain the unique situation from which the theology of Barth emanated from. Therefore, to say that Barth was a male and European theologian is to state the obvious, yet such a piece of obvious detail is