Korean Reformed Response

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It is my privilege to have read the Final Report of the international dialogue between representatives of the Reformed churches and some classical Pentecostal churches. This report entails a dialogical effort and a mutual friendship over the period of five years from 1996 to 2000 and shows a genuine éspírit for aiming at a confession-al ecumenicity between two different traditions that have long been uncomfortable with and even hostile to each other. It reflects how participants of both parties have transformed their misunderstanding and prejudices within the spirit of mutual understanding and respect. Of course, the significance of this report lies not in theological or professional achievements but in its spiritual effort and practical concern to surmount differences.

What the dialogue brings forth is to foster friendship, to encourage participants to carry out the study performed in the dialogue, to help them realize the necessity and importance of dialogue between two churches within self-critique and self-transformation in terms of the reciprocal investigation and challenge. My response to this report is based on my Reformed background. As an Asian pastor and theologian, trained mainly in the theology of John Calvin and Karl Barth, my comments are limited to my theological bias and confined to certain aspects of the Reformed church. They thus aim to be received as critical solidarity and a complementary help to the report for future ecumenical development.

The purpose of the report is to explore the common concerns of the two traditions and confront their differences, in order to increase mutual understanding and respect and foster mutual strength and renewal thereby leading to common witness to the gospel in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is at the center of the two churches in that both confess their loyalty to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. Therefore, the witness to Jesus Christ is the common basis, albeit in different approaches to the work of the Holy Spirit. Generally speaking, the Reformed understanding of Jesus Christ is based on a threefold understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ, Christ's so-called munus triplex, which is of pneumatological relevance and
even closely related to the anointing of the Holy Spirit. As for Christ’s prophetic office, we must notice that “Jesus Christ received anointing, not only for himself that he might carry out the office of teaching, but for his whole body that the power of the Spirit might be present in the continuing preaching of the gospel.”¹ The kingly office refers to the eternity of Christ’s dominion, which inspires us to have hope for blessed eternity and immortality. In addition, the spiritual nature of Christ’s kingly office refers to the sovereignty of Christ. “Christ’s kingdom lies in the Spirit” (Inst. II.xv.5). Christ’s kingly office is also related to personal and social sanctification, as long as Christ as King rules us through his Spirit, by leading our struggle with the oppressed world. The priestly office is treated in the context of reconciliation and intercession of the Mediator. Beginning with his sacrificial death we are given the efficacy and benefits of his priesthood. Our justification is possible through the priestly office in which Christ offers a sacrifice and becomes the objective basis of our justification. Given this fact, the report needs to reflect more on the person and work of Christ and the relevance of justification by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of dialogue with the Pentecostal churches.

Concerning the relationship between gospel and culture, the report emphasizes the Reformed tradition’s notion of the Spirit universally at work in other cultures and religions in comparison with a Pentecostal individualistic understanding of the Spirit. The report deals with gospel and culture under the heading of Holy Spirit and Missio Dei. The term “Missio Dei” is overdue in recent theological debate concerning religions. Since the Second Vatican Council, much has been said about a theology of religious pluralism. As a matter of course, this project is sharply challenged by a theology of Christian uniqueness with radical openness to religious pluralism. Participants need to study this current debate carefully because the cultural issue has become a point of conflict especially in the Asian context, which associates Western Christianity with imperialism.

Every culture is unique and regarded as an integral part of the “theater of the glory of God,” not merely an object to be transformed.