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'Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda' Church Renewal from a Reformed Perspective

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With a view to the theme of Church renewal, this article explores the role of a well-known and popular phrase in the Reformed tradition within Protestantism, i.e. ecclesia reformata semper reformanda *('the reformed Church should always be reformed'). Is this a helpful slogan when considering the pros and cons, the possibilities and the limitations of Church renewal? First, the historical background of this phrase is described: it is rooted in the Dutch Reformed tradition, and only in the twentieth century was it widely recognized in Reformed circles. Against this background the hermeneutical problem, linked with the principle of sola Scriptura, is presented, and put into an ecumenical perspective: the Church as grounded in the gospel. Finally, the article focuses on Church polity as an important field of renewal, taking into account Karl Barth's interpretation of this phrase. From this perspective, a balanced and ecumenical approach of Church renewal is possible.*

Keywords: *ecclesia reformanda, renewal, hermeneutics, church polity, ecumenical exchange*

A reformation contains 'a turbulent something', Dutch Reformed theologian Arnold van Ruler wrote, half a century ago. He continues:

> That is why the slogan *ecclesia reformanda quia reformata* … is also deeply contestable. Of course, renewal, refreshment, purification will always be necessary in the Church. There is development in history, also in Church history. (…) But should that always and at any time happen in that terrible meaning of the sixteenth century Reformation? Should all authorities be violated every year? That is not a minor issue! That is a terrible issue, *if* it is really necessary! The Church may rather pray: save us from a new Luther.[1]

Ecclesia reformanda quia reformata, or, in a more common form, *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* is a well-known and popular rallying cry in the Reformed tradition within Protestantism. Basically it says: 'the reformed Church should always be reformed'. But is it also a helpful slogan when considering the pros and cons, the possibilities and the limitations of Church

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[1] Arnold A. van Ruler, *Reformatorische opmerkingen in de ontmoeting met Rome*, Hilversum – Antwerpen 1965, p. 29 (transl. LJK).

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renewal? This is a relevant question in the context of ongoing theological discussions on ecclesial renewal, particularly from a missional perspective.[2]

Historical background

In recent years several publications have examined the historical roots of this phrase. There is no proof of any kind that Luther, Calvin, Zwingli or any other outstanding representative of the early Reformation has coined these words. According to Michael Horton, the origins have to be found in the context of the Dutch Reformed tradition:

> Its first appearance was in a 1674 devotional by Jodocus van Lodenstein [1620-1677], who was an important figure in Dutch Reformed pietism – a movement known as the Dutch Second Reformation. According to these writers, the Reformation reformed the doctrine of the Church, but the lives and practices of God's people always need further reformation.[3]

Andrew Atherstone confirms this Dutch background. He also mentions the names of Jacobus Koelman (1631-1695) and Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617-1666) in this respect.[4] Willem Visser 't Hooft, the first general secretary of the World Council of Churches, suggests that eventually they all depend on Voetius (1589-1676), but without giving a direct quote.[5] Gisbertus Voetius was the most important theologian contributing to the development

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[2] Cf. Darrell L. Guder (ed.), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998; and Cornelius Johannes Petrus Niemandt, "Emerging Missional Ecclesiology in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and Church Polity: A Case Study" in: Allan J. Janssen & Leo J. Koffeman (eds.), *Protestant Church Polity in Changing Contexts. Ecclesiological and Historical Contributions. Proceedings of the International Conference, Utrecht, The Netherlands, 7-10 November, 2011,* Volume I, Church Polity and Ecumenism: International Perspectives 2, Zürich 2014, p. 65-81.

[3] Michael Horton, "Semper Reformanda" in: *Tabletalk Magazine* (October 1st/2009); www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/semper-reformanda (viewed 21 November, 2014).

[4] Cf. Andrew Atherstone, "The Implications of Semper Reformanda" in: *ANVIL*, 26 (1/2009), p. 31-42; Atherstone refers to a more detailed reconstruction of the developments in the seventeenth century by Bush: Michael Bush, "Calvin and the Reformanda Sayings" in: Herman J. Selderhuis (ed.), *Calvinus sacrarum literarum interpres: Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research*, Series: Reformed Historical Theology, Vol. 5, Göttingen 2008, p. 285-299, cf. p. 286-289.

[5] Cf. Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, *De vernieuwing van de Kerk*, 's-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum 1958, p. 101; cf. Dirkie Smit, "Confessions as Instruments of (Dis)unity" in: Eduardus van der Borght, *The Unity of the Church: A Theological State of the Art and Beyond*, Leiden – Boston 2010, p. 137-156, p. 142, footnote 11; cf. also Anna Case-Winters, "Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda: Reformed and Always to Be Reformed" in: Robert H. Bullock, Jr. (ed.), *Presbyterians Being Reformed: Reflections on What the Church Needs Today*, Louisville 2006, p. xxix-xxxii, p. xxx; Koelman also refers to Voetius, see: M. Bush, "Calvin and the", p. 287.

of Reformed Church polity in the 17th century. However, the Dutch 'Second Reformation' (Dutch: *Nadere Reformatie*) as a whole – including Voetius – was less interested in changing Church life or structures (Church polity); it rather focused on spiritual growth, and in its later expressions it could even lead to an attitude of practically rejecting the institutional Church and preferring 'conventicles' (small home groups) instead.[6]

Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda. Whatever the historical roots of this phrase may be, it is clear that it was only in the twentieth century that it received its significance as somehow referring to a typical Reformed aspect of ecclesiology. Among others, Paul Haffner emphasizes that *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*

> is a shortened form of a motto of the Protestant Reformation, *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est secundum verbum Dei* («the reformed Church must be always reforming according to the Word of God»), which refers to the Protestant position that the Church must continually re-examine itself, reconsider its doctrines, and be prepared to accept change, in order to conform more closely to orthodox Christian belief as revealed in the Bible.[7]

Horton finds this extended version already with Van Lodenstein: „The Church is reformed and always [in need of] being reformed according to the Word of God".[8]

Conservatives and liberals

Anna Case-Winters, a theologian in the Presbyterian Church (USA), emphasizes that the phrase *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* has two sides:

> Our Reformed motto, rightly understood, challenges both the conservative and the liberal impulses that characterize our diverse body today. For it does not bless either preservation for preservation's sake, or change for change's sake.[9]

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[6] The 'Second Reformation' has to be clearly distinguished from another typical Dutch Reformed phenomenon, the so-called 'continuing Reformation' (Dutch: *doorgaande Reformatie*): in 1944, after a doctrinal conflict in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands a split-off denomination was founded, called the 'Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)' which saw this breach as a 'Reformation', indeed. As a consequence new Reformed organizations were founded in different areas of social life, in press, and in political life; those responsible called this process the 'continuing Reformation'.

[7] Paul Haffner, *Mystery of the Church*, Leominster 2007, p. 117, cf. Albert J.D. Walsh, *United and Uniting: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology for a Church in Crisis*, Eugene 2011, p. 49; Walsh refers to Darrell Guder (see below, footnote 32).

[8] M. Horton, "Semper Reformanda".

[9] A. Case-Winters, "Ecclesia Reformata", p. xxix.

The Church needs reforming, but newer is not always better. Atherstone, an Anglican theologian, examining 'the implications of *semper reformanda*', interprets it as „a clarion call amongst evangelical Christians not to be satisfied with the *status quo*".[10] He also identifies these two opposite aspects, and, therefore, sees the phrase as a challenge to both radicals and conservatives in today's Church. On the one hand, radicals should understand that this motto is not „an excuse for notorious departures from Christian orthodoxy" or „unhealthy forms of innovation",[11] like the „acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender lifestyle in the mainstream Christian Church":[12] „such teaching is not reformation, but unbiblical innovation".[13] On the other hand, „the motto *semper reformanda* reminds conservative Christians to seek continual reformation, not just historic reassertion".[14] It might be telling that in this case Atherstone only refers to examples of such conservatism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century; indeed, „the gospel needs to be continually reapplied, and our historic assumptions need to be continually reformed" and it is necessary „ruthlessly to scrutinize our evangelical and Anglican traditions in the light of Scripture, to shake the ecclesiastical *status quo* with all our might, and never to give up",[15] as Atherstone says in the final sentences of his article, but he does not give any specific contemporary example!

In his article, he also quotes Karl Barth:

> [I]t is not the newness, the modernity, the up-to-dateness of a Church which as such proves and commends it as the true and catholic Church. (…) [M]odernity, up-to-dateness, has nothing whatever to do with the question of the truth of the Church. For that reason the idea of progress is a highly doubtful one as applied to the Church. What counts in the Church is not progress but reformation.[16]

Barth continues:

> *Semper reformari,* however, does not mean always to go with the time, to let the current spirit of the age be the judge of what is true and false, but in every age, and in controversy with the spirit of the age, to ask

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10 A. Atherstone, "The Implications", p. 31.

11 *Ibidem*, p. 32.

12 *Ibidem*, p. 33.

13 *Ibidem*. "For the record, this is Atherstone's view of the issue of homosexuality, not mine, LJK".

14 *Ibidem*, p. 37.

15 *Ibidem*, p. 40.

16 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part 1. Translated by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. Edinburgh 1956, p. 704, cf. A. Atherstone, "The Implications", p. 35.

> concerning the form and doctrine and order and ministry which is in accordance with the unalterable essence of the Church. (…) It means never to grow tired of returning not to the origin in time but to the origin in substance of the community.[17]

However, Barth should not be interpreted one-sidedly as if he would only see the dangers of modernity and up-to-dateness – as Atherstone seems to suggest. As it is always the case in Barth's theology, there is another side to it:

> The Church stands in the fire of the criticism of its Lord. It is also exposed to the criticism of the world and this criticism has never been altogether false and unjust. It has always needed, and it always will need, self-examination and self-correction. It cannot exist except as *ecclesia semper reformanda* – if only it had always understood itself in this light and acted accordingly! (…) Taking it all in all, the community of Jesus Christ in the world may at times be clothed with every kind of pomp and glory; but what a frail vessel it is, exposed to every kind of assault, and actually assaulted both outwardly and above all inwardly![18]

Atherstone seems to ignore this aspect of Barth's approach; we have to recognize that Barth wrote these words down less than a decade after the years that major parts of the German Protestant Church had given in to national socialism, actually 'assaulted both outwardly and above all inwardly', indeed.[19] Barth certainly had that in mind.

Church and Holy Scripture

I repeat my question: is the slogan e*cclesia reformata semper reformanda*, either in its shortened or in its lengthier form, a helpful slogan when considering the pros and cons, the possibilities and the limitations of Church renewal in the Reformed tradition? It seems to me that it is not, as long as it leaves open the question of what in practice *secundum verbum Dei* means. It provides a formal criterion. Therefore, the real issue at stake is that of biblical hermeneutics.

Behind this slogan we clearly see the Reformed principle of *sola Scriptura*: 'Scripture alone' is the norm. Luther and Calvin and their fellow-Reformers, confronted with the decay of the Roman Catholic Church in the early sixteenth century, could only criticize its practical consequences from the perspective of an intensive reading of Holy Scripture. It was not their intention

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17 K. Barth, KD IV/1, p. 705.

18 *Ibidem*, p. 690.

19 Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 691: „that in which in any given case the Church does err, giving place to alien voices and powers and denying its Lord".

to found a new Church, but, indeed, to serve the renewal or reformation of the existing Church in order to bring it back to its Scriptural roots. It is, however, a matter of fact that throughout recent history, until today, both more radical or liberal *and* more conservative Reformed Christians have appealed to (their understanding of) the biblical message in order to plead their cause. It is what happened in the German struggle of the Church under National Socialism; it is what happened in the South African struggle of the Churches under apartheid; and it happens again in the aforementioned case of both the acceptance and the rejection by the church of same-sex marriage.

Reformata secundum verbum Dei – in no way should this phrase be misinterpreted as legitimizing a 'biblistic' approach of Church renewal. It rather reminds us of an important theological insight and reflects a fundamental Reformed and (if I am not mistaken) ecumenical theological point of departure in ecclesiology: the Word of God, i.e. God's self-revelation, is the foundation of the Church; therefore, the Church can be called *creatura Verbi*, created by the Word of God.[20] Any form of Church renewal – or, for that matter, Reformation – should be based on this principle. We recognize this approach in the following paragraph of the Faith and Order document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, published in 2013:

> The Church is centred and grounded in the gospel, the proclamation of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, Son of the Father. This is reflected in the New Testament affirmation, «You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God» (1 Pet. 1:23). Through the preaching of the gospel (cf. Rom. 10:14-18) and under the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3), human beings come to saving faith and, by sacramental means, are incorporated into the body of Christ (cf. Eph. 1:23). Some communities, following this teaching, would call the Church *creatura evangelii* or «creature of the Gospel.» A defining aspect of the Church's life is to be a community that hears and proclaims the word of God. The Church draws life from the Gospel and discovers ever anew the direction for her journey.[21]

The Church is founded on the Word of God. It is '*creatura Verbi*', not '*creatura fidelium*'. It is not us that make – or, for that matter: reform or renew – the Church; it is God who does so, through the preaching of the gospel, under the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words: if it makes sense at all to

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[20] For a broader exposition of the following thoughts cf. also: Leo J. Koffeman, *In Order to Serve: An Ecumenical Introduction to Church Polity*, Zürich 2014, p. 19, 84, 95, and 106.

[21] *The Church — Towards a Common Vision,* Faith and Order Paper 214, Geneva: WCC, 2013, § 14.

speak about the Church as '*(semper) reformanda, secundum verbum Dei*', we should understand that primarily in the context of worship. That is also why we have, indeed, to decline the (quite common) translation of *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* as 'reformed and always reforming':

> This can mislead us to believe that the Church is the agent of its own reformation. God is the agent of reformation. The Church is rather the object of God's reforming work. God's agency and initiative have priority here. The Latin verb is in fact passive, and is much better translated as «always being reformed» or «always to be reformed».[22]

If we speak of renewal of the Church, we need to keep this in mind: God's agency and initiative are pivotal. In the aforementioned Faith and Order report on *The Church* this insight is reflected in a few words that appear again and again: the Church depends upon „the guidance of the Holy Spirit".[23]

Church polity

In Church life, renewal can play a role in different fields. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Churches can develop new forms of diaconal work or missionary outreach. Pastoral work, Christian education and catechesis, liturgical forms, songbooks and Bible translations can be renewed. Such renewal is due to changing circumstances, new theological insights with regard to the *missio Dei*, and – together with these – a renewed understanding of Holy Scripture. In this contribution I will focus on the main field of my expertise, i.e. Church polity.

Renewal is possible and can be necessary also in the area of structures and offices, first of all from the perspective of the mission of the Church, but also for reasons of ecumenical credibility. As long as Churches are not able to fully recognize each other's ministries mutually, they cannot deny the challenge of reconsidering and changing their own understanding of the basics of Church polity.

In Volume IV, part 2, of his *Church Dogmatics* Karl Barth deals with basic theological questions regarding Church polity.[24] Because the risen Christ is the one and only Lord of the Church, the Church is a 'christocratic brotherhood', and as the body of Christ it is the earthly-historical form of existence

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[22] A. Case-Winters, "Ecclesia Reformata", p. xxx; cf. M. Horton, "Semper Reformanda".

[23] *The Church*, Introduction, and § 6, 19, 22, 51, 52, 53, and 68.

[24] See: K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Volume IV. The Doctrine of Reconciliation. Part 2*, (translated by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance). Edinburgh 1958, p. 676-726. Cf. L. J. Koffeman, *In Order*, p. 72f.

of its Head, Jesus Christ.[25] This is manifest in the work of the Holy Spirit. He sanctifies the believer and builds up the community, which includes the organization – the 'ordering' (German: *Ordnung*) – of the Christian community: „[T]he fact that we leave it to the Holy Ghost does not mean that we leave it to the rash and willful, but that we ask ourselves unitedly and conscientiously, and in the light of Holy Scripture, what obedience means in this matter".[26] God works through his Word and Spirit together.

From this perspective, Church polity has, according to Barth, to meet four criteria. It has to be a law of service; it has to be liturgical, living and exemplary. Here, first of all the third criterion is relevant: Church polity is 'living', alive, because the Lord is alive. This implies that Church polity has always to be ready to respond anew to changing circumstances: it is dynamic and basically human, as a matter of ongoing obedience to Christ, and it is essentially provisional. Fundamentally, Church polity is *ius humanum*, human law. So, Barth declines the concept of *ius divinum*, divine law.

In this context, Barth, as we will see, takes up the issue of *ecclesia reformanda* again. His line of argument is as follows:

> [W]e have also to say that all Church law, however great the seriousness with which it is sought and found and instituted, can only be human law and not divine (*ius humanum* and not *ius divinum*). The same can and must be said of all law. (…) All other law reveals an ultimate vulnerability to the danger of … its own absolutisation. In Church law, however, this danger is averted by the very root and essence of this law, by the basic law of the community, by the lordship of Jesus Christ over His body. Church law will respect absolutely this basic law of the community as the authority with reference to which it has to order the community and to which it has to subject it, and above all itself, in all its determinations. (…) It must always remember that the *ius divinum* of Christocracy is not only its origin but also its limit, and thus understand itself in all strictness as *ius humanum*. (…) As it respects this limit, it places itself in the context of the life of the community which under the lordship of its living Head is engaged in its upbuilding, growing both outwardly and inwardly; of the community which necessarily surrenders or does not take itself seriously if it tries to be

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[25] See: K. Barth, KD IV/2, p. 633, 653.

[26] *Ibidem*, p. 710. Cf. Pieter Coertzen, *'Decently and in Order': A Theological Reflection on the Order for, and the Order in, the Church*. Canon Law Monograph Series 4, Leuven 2004, p. 203: "[T]he mere compliance of rules may never be viewed as the only requirement for a Spirit-filled church. A church order is necessary and must be maintained, but it must be borne by living faith, a humble walk with God and obediently hearing his Word".

> only an *ecclesia formata* or *reformata* and not as such an *ecclesia semper reformanda*. How can it exist and know itself as such if it regards itself as its own lord and therefore the sovereign subject of its law instead of being strictly and exclusively the attorney of Jesus Christ, aware that at every step it is directly and freshly responsible and committed to Him? It is when it acts as His attorney, especially in this matter of its law, and therefore when its law participates in its life as the body of which Jesus Christ is Head, that Church law is living and growing law; a law which calls continually for reformation whatever its existing formation or reformation, and which is therefore unlike any other law, a *ius sui generis*.[27]

So, Barth links the dynamic and provisional character of Church polity – and so the possibility and need of Church renewal also in terms of its order and structures – directly with the phrase *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda.* The ongoing evaluation of valid rules, connected with new experiences, leads to changing insights and the adaptation of regulations. This is particularly, but certainly not exclusively true for Protestant Churches in the global South that have inherited their Church order from a European or American mission Church. Many of them are in a process of contextualization of Church polity. Of course, Churches may understand certain aspects of their particular Church polity as having a universal value. But this can never exclude the option of testing the universality of such aspects in contextual settings. Universality and contextuality are reverse sides of the same issue.[28]

Context and normativity

However, this does not directly answer the question how the role of *(reformanda) secundum verbum Dei* has to be perceived. How to solve, or at least how to deal with the hermeneutical issue? According to Coertzen, „[i]t remains a fact that the quest for the relation between Divine law and the Church order is not easily solved. To merely minister God's law from the Word, is not always simple".[29] The New Testament does not offer one Church order model – be it episcopal, or presbyterial-synodical, or congregationalist – but rather a variety that depends on historical and contextual factors as well as practical needs. New Testament texts cannot be applied directly in a Church order. In my Reformed tradition 1 Corinthians 14:40 has played a major role: 'do everything properly and in order' (Contemporary English Version). This reference might be to the point, albeit in a way slightly different from its

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27 K. Barth, KD IV/2, p. 713.

28 Cf. L. J. Koffeman, *In Order*, p. 254, 263.

29 P. Coertzen, *Decently*, p. 145, cf. L. J. Koffeman, *In Order*, p. 14.

traditional interpretation, that focused on the sheer need to organize Church life. On the one hand, the adverb εὐσχημόνως (properly) suggests a certain adaptation to what is understood as accepted norms in a specific context: the Church should not be unnecessarily provocative nor get itself talked about. On the other hand, the words κατὰ τάξιν (in order) refer to what was a common understanding in the Hellenistic context in which the New Testament is written: there is a relationship between God and 'what is good', 'harmony', or 'world order' (cf. 1 Cor. 14:33: „God wants everything to be done peacefully and in order").

In other words, „Scripture and tradition have to be applied in conjunction with reason and experience to respond to ongoing needs".[30] Whatever a Christian community does, e.g. in its legislation, it should be done in a certain harmony both with the cultural context of this community and with an understanding of a normative framework that transcends that context.[31] It is exactly this bi-polarity that makes it impossible to 'simply' systematize a number of biblical texts into a Church order framework. Instead, fundamental ecclesiological questions have to be the starting point. The pivotal question is how the Church is related to the message and mission of Jesus Christ, to the biblical mission of the Church itself, and – behind that – to God's gracious initiative starting from the Old Testament covenant. Basically, the mission of the Church is related to the mystery of God, revealed in Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

As long as this is the leading perspective, Church renewal is not just a matter of 'reorganization'. Darell Guder emphasizes that the phrase *ecclesia reformata semper reformata secundum verbum Dei*

> can, in fact, ignore the central missional vocation of the church, or narrow our focus to questions of our shape and organization, that is, issues of «form». There is a tendency, especially in North American churches, to solve problems by reorganization (…) Our missional challenge is a crisis of faith and spirit, and it will be met only through conversion, the continuing conversion of the Church.[32]

Ecumenical exchange

Renewal of the Church, *secundum verbum Dei*, can only make sense and take place within this framework of ecclesiology as a common search of

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30 Edward L. Long, *Patterns of Polity: Varieties of Church Governance*, Cleveland, OH 2001, p. 30.

31 Cf. L. J. Koffeman, *In Order*, p. 15.

32 Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, Grand Rapids 2000, p. 150.

what the Church should be from the perspective of its mission in particular contexts. Churches are called to listen in obedience to the biblical message, and at the same time to engage in discussions on particular situations, contextual theological and cultural arguments included.

Secundum verbum Dei: the Word of God is the foundation of the Church as a communion, and the community of the Church in itself represents a response to this Word. But this response is always necessarily provisional and incomplete, due to human inadequacy and sin, but also because no cultural setting is able to fully receive and embody the Gospel.[33] In addition, cultures are not static entities but they are marked by processes of continuous change, be they fast or slow. This also causes an ongoing, dynamic, challenging and inspiring dialogue between Gospel and cultural context.

It is this 'incompleteness' that is decisive. That is why in this process Churches cannot do without ecumenical exchange. No Church can fully embody the Church of Jesus Christ. Faith is not a matter of 'having', but of 'sharing' with others, inside and outside the boundaries of the visible faith community. Therefore, Church renewal, including adaptations of structures and ministries, is a matter that necessarily urges Churches in a particular context to recognize the challenges they share, and to deal with them together. In addition, lasting and fruitful solutions for dilemmas in Church polity and Church renewal can gain a lot from orienting themselves towards international ecumenical theological dialogue:

> Every church polity system is necessarily one-sided. It has developed in history, mainly in response to ecclesial, theological, cultural and political challenges that could not be neglected. But no church polity system can recognize all important intuitions at the same time. Therefore, … churches, theologians and church lawyers in all traditions have to be open to ecumenical dialogue, in an attitude of ecumenical learning.[34]

The Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church distanced itself from Vatican I's triumphalism, and recognized the core of the Reformed phrase *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, when it spoke of the *ecclesia sancta simul et semper purificanda*, 'at the same time holy and always in need of being purified'.[35] Although a difference in theological approach certainly plays a role in the Roman Catholic choice for *purificanda* instead of *reformanda*,[36] it seems

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33 Cf. L. J. Koffeman, *In Order*, p. 159.

34 Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 61.

35 Dogmatic Constitution On The Church *Lumen Gentium* (1965), § 8. See: www.vatican.va.

36 Cf. L. J. Koffeman, *In Order*, p. 218-223.

to me that representatives of both traditions can agree on not only the possibility but also the need for ongoing renewal of the Church, called to adapt to ever new requirements in a specific context. For that reason, a joint ecumenical commemoration of the sixteenth century Reformation in 2017 might be a promising venture from the perspective of necessary Church renewal.

Conclusion

As far as the motto *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* points to the possibility of and need for Church renewal, it represents a welcome reminder for all Churches that take seriously their identity and mandate. But it can easily over-emphasize human action ('always reforming') at the expense of the awareness of how the Church is an instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit ('always being reformed). Therefore, a focus on the role of the Church in the *missio Dei* and a clear understanding of the need for ecumenical cooperation is pivotal.