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Reformational Theology of Ministry:
Introducing a New Perspective
on the Missiological Context
of the Secular West

By
Andreas van Wijngaarden

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Biblical & Theological Studies.

St. Louis, MO

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Dr. Robbie Griggs
Faculty Advisor

_____

Dr. David Chapman
Second Reader

_____

Dr. David Chapman
Director of MABTS Program

_____

Mr. Steve Jamieson
Library Director

_____

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Abstract

This thesis is about how a reformational theology of ministry influences missiology in the secular West. It is written because in a time where the Church in the West is in decline, it seems most necessary to deepen the understanding with regards to theological challenges that come with the missiological context of the secular West. The methodology is based upon descriptive research, which was guided by a main research question. The answering of the main question was done through answering four subquestions, and those four answers were key to most of the main content in the thesis. The first chapter starts with an introduction that describes the methodology, which is followed by a review of literature. Chapter two is about the characterization of a reformational theology of ministry, which is presented with the three principles of Gospel, Culture, and Movement. Chapter three then deals with the characterization of the secular West, in which it is first about the distinctiveness of the West and then about the concepts of postmodernity and post-Christian as essential insights into secularism. After that comes chapter four that has the focus on the characterization of the missional Church, which is described though an exploration of the missiological foundational elements of discipleship and faithful presence. The fifth chapter starts with summarizing the findings, followed by describing the characterization of the missional Church in the secular West, which is done by elaboration on six basic elements. These six basic elements are: Christian high theory, post-Christendom evangelistic dynamic, category-defying social vision, counter-catechesis for a digital age, faithful presence in public spheres, and grace to the point. This fifth chapter ends with the conclusion that the

secular West needs a healthy missional Church, which implies a reformational theology of ministry that is fruitful through proper incorporation of the three principles of Gospel, Culture, and Movement. And part of that conclusion is also that in order for the (missional) Church to be healthy it needs to embrace discipleship and faithful presence at the core of its (missiological) teaching. It is a conclusion that can also be understood with the two foundational commissions in the Bible: Genesis 1:26 and Matthew 28:18-20. Obeying this complete calling for Christians, so taking proper care of the world *as well as* making disciples, can be seen as the Biblical answer to the main research question of how reformational theology of ministry influences missiology in the secular West.

Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure for this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect. Next make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show it is.

— Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

"There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9b [English Standard Version]). This common proverb was originally pointing to natural cycles on earth that keep repeating themselves. The contemporary connotation is more broad, and relates to the understanding that there is nothing completely original in this world, as everything has a precedent in the past. And in that line of thought I argue it may also be true for the phenomenon of the secular skepticism in our day and age. Although the attitude of secular skeptics towards Christianity may seem novel, the observation of that kind of attitude was at least made centuries ago already,[1] and it would not be hard to argue it has been around for much longer actually. But the point is not *when* exactly the first human beings started to despise religion, and also not *that* men despise it in our generation, but that they have done that historically as well. It is the ambition in this research on a reformational theology of ministry as the main object of the study to learn from the theological lessons learned already in the past. But not only that, it is also the ambition to contextualize them in order to gain new insights in the contemporary world, which is a world that is ever-changing in some perspectives as well as it is staying the same in other perspectives. Indeed, "there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9b), if it comes to the theological (core) objects of study, but that is something else than the theological study (of the objects) itself, because by God's grace we can keep on learning about the

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[1] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1958), 52.

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universe, its inhabitants, and most of all its creator. It is my hope that this thesis may contribute to a deeper understanding of its implications in the missiological context of the twenty-first century secular West.

Rationale for This Study

Before the reasons are given why this study may be of import in, and what it may contribute to, the field of theology, it is preceded by a short description of the context in which the foundational questions for this research were born. First, as I work as a missionary myself, the significant interest in missiology is self-explanatory. Second to that, I live in the West, and it is the Western context I know best, and if there is any context in cultural geography I would like to learn more about, it is the West itself. Nevertheless, the *missional* context of the West comes with challenges, in particular for a Christian. After arriving in Cambridge, England to work as missionaries (in 2021), my wife and I soon started to experience the ongoing secularization in the West. Although we have lived in the West our whole life,[2] we have been confronted more intensely with the challenges than we did before.[3] Whatever the reason is that it was noticed so clearly, more important is that the experience is supported by scholarly consensus on secularism (in the West),[4] and thus it seemed essential to incorporate the secular understanding in the

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[2] As Dutch nationals we spend most of our lives in the Netherlands, but we also lived abroad for several years including Belgium, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

[3] With the *challenges* is meant the challenges of being a Christian in a secular context, and especially as missionaries.

[4] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 25; Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 189.

research. Actually, even more than that it is deemed as the emphasized missiological

context of the research, hence the latter part of the subtitle: "the Missiological Context of

the *Secular* West."

The main theme of the research deals with a theology of ministry, or to be more

precise, a *reformational* theology of ministry. It is the main theme of the research that

seems most necessary to deepen our knowledge with regards to the theological challenges

in the context as described in the previous paragraph. As Tim Keller argues, it is the

theology of ministry that needs to be developed out of a doctrinal foundation before

decisions are made about the ministry expressions.[5] And in agreement with this, I would

argue that it is a key area that needs to be laid out properly, and in particular with a

reformational philosophy, so that one may discover what the ministry implications are if

one takes into account the statement of Abraham Kuyper: "There is not a square inch in

the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all,

does not cry, Mine!"[6]

The main reason why this topic needs research is that the Church in the West is in

decline, and we need wisdom on the matter, especially what the Church can do to reach

the lost.[7] By connecting the dots of the main theme with the chosen context, it has led to a

new perspective, that in itself hopefully could be the groundwork for further research. At

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[5] Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 17-19. Although Tim Keller calls this the theological vision, but this would be interchangeable as it essentially carries the same meaning.

[6] In Dutch it reads as: "geen duimbreed is er op heel 't erf van ons menselijk leven, waarvan de Christus, die áller Soeverein is, niet roept: 'Mijn!'" Abraham Kuyper, *Soevereiniteit in Eigen Kring*, 3rd ed. (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok, 1930), 33.

[7] Timothy Keller, *How to Reach the West Again: Six Essential Elements of a Missionary Encounter* (New York: Redeemer City to City, 2020), 4.

the same time it is my hope that the outcome will also contribute to the general understanding about this topic, so that whoever may read it can be encouraged that working with a proper reformational theology of ministry has the potential to open up the secular doors in the West and that the Gospel can be spread, and by God's grace transform lives.

Methodology and Overview

The methodology for the research has been based on descriptive research, with a design that follows certain steps, and that aligns with the organizational structure of the thesis. The first step was to state a main research question out of the topic, which is as follows:

How does reformational theology of ministry influence missiology in the secular West?

The answer to this main question is based on addressing the next four sub questions:

1. *What characterizes a reformational theology of ministry?*

2. *What characterizes the secular West?*

3. *What characterizes the missional Church?*

4. *What characterizes the missional Church in the secular West?*

After this section, in the review of literature, these subquestions will be introduced in a more general sense by describing a reformational theology of ministry, secularism and the West, and a missiological perspective. After that this will be described with more depth in the chapters two until four. The fifth, and final chapter will then summarize the findings, and deliver a conclusion in relationship to the main research question.

Aspects or entailments that cannot be covered in a work of this length are any other theologies of ministry that are not rooted in a reformational philosophy. Also, context-wise the main missiological focus will be on church planting, and thus any other missiological perspective cannot be covered as well. Finally there is the cultural boundary by focusing on the secular West, but again the implication then is that this will exclude the covering of research outside that boundary (e.g. non-secular countries like most, if not all, on the continent of Africa). Nevertheless it is the hope that this thesis still covers the so-called big picture, and creates fresh insights, and good soil for further research.

Literature Review

In order to deepen the subject of the research, it is essential to start with a survey of some key scholarly studies, discussions, and developments with regards to the main theme and its context. And if we want to understand anything at a deeper level, at some point, I argue, we first have to be conscious about the worldview we have, which for clarity's sake may be described as a "comprehensive framework of one's beliefs about

things."[8] Thus in order to properly understand a theology of ministry, including a reformational theology of ministry, it is foundational to start with the worldview anchoring it, which is a reformational worldview. This worldview is scripturally informed, and called after the Protestant Reformation, with an emphasis on the desire to live by Scripture alone as well as in an ongoing reformation, in wanting to be continuously re-formed by Scripture.[9] This is all in contrast with having Scripture alongside tradition, and living by unexamined traditions.[10] This reformational reflection on worldview has taken distinctive shape in the twentieth century, especially by the works of Dutch leaders such as Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Herman Dooyeweerd,[11] and which also became known as (Dutch) neo-Calvinism. Especially Kuyper is seen as the initiator as he formulated a vision on God, man, and world, which found its application in the whole of Dutch society, including in the Church, and the state itself.[12] This came forth out of Calvinism, but became *neo*-Calvinism, as it was presented with renewed vigor, and as a complete vision in the so-called "struggle for modernity" in the nineteenth century.[13] It was a societal struggle about the foundations of culture, and of which the neo-movements looked for answers into the principles of creation.[14] And a

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[8] Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 2.

[9] Wolters, 1; Acts 17:11, Rom. 12:2.

[10] Wolters, 1.

[11] Wolters, 1.

[12] George Harinck, *Waar Komt het VU-Kabinet Vandaan? Over de Traditie van het Neocalvinisme* (Ridderkerk, Netherlands: Ridderprint, 2007), 4.

[13] Harinck, 4.

[14] Harinck, 4.

worldview including a reformational worldview is not something on its own, but is also

related to each one's unique personality, or said in a different way it is not only about

what you believe, but also about what you do (with it).[15] Herman Bavinck once wrote

that we, as humans, are made to receive the objective truth, by a living and true faith in

Jesus Christ, and this ought to become part of our own thinking and acting, so it may be

spread outside ourselves, until the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord.[16] This neo-

Calvinistic statement of more than a hundred years ago makes clear that a proper

reformational reflection and understanding of worldview should not only become head

knowledge, but becomes meaningful where it is impacting that same world in which one

lives through its personality.[17] This is also something that inspired, and guided Tim

Keller; not only he had a reformational worldview,[18] but he also argued that how you live

your daily life will be determined by your worldview.[19] Part of that daily life, of what one

does, is ministry, which is also the focus of this research. Keller argues that ministry

expressions are related to one's worldview, but in order to relate it well, it needs to be

connected with a theological vision, which "is a faithful restatement of the gospel with

rich implications for life, ministry, and mission in a type of culture at a moment in

history."[20] The principles of this theological vision can be thought of as three axes:

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[15] J. H. Bavinck, *Persoonlijkheid en Wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1928), 24.

[16] H. Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1929), 106.

[17] J. H. Bavinck, *Persoonlijkheid en Wereldbeschouwing*.

[18] James Eglinton, "Tim Keller and American Neo-Calvinism" (plenary address, Gospel Coalition Dutch Conference, Almere, Netherlands, October 9–10, 2023), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HV_BSkSIiI&list=PLB13qtv3iBtr2T_d0fZd-xvkRDTq9jn2-&index=8.

[19] Keller, *Center Church*, 331.

[20] Keller, *Center Church*, 19–20.

Gospel, Culture,[21] and Movement.[22] In the following paragraph these principles

(including their relative spectra) will be briefly explained.

The Gospel Axis is about the degree of communication and practices with regard

to the Gospel, with legalism (or religion) on one end, and relativism (or irreligion) at the

other end.[23] The Culture Axis is about the degree of adaptation to the culture, with

underadaptedness (and only challenge) on one end, and overadaptedness (and only

appreciation) at the other end.[24] The Movement axis is about the degree of relationships

of the movement, with structured organisation (or tradition and authority) on one end,

and fluid organism (or cooperation and unity) at the other end.[25] In all cases of these three

axes, Keller argues that ministry should come from the central position, or one could say

from "keeping the tension" with the result that there will be more fruitfulness, and more

dynamism.[26] Roughly in line with the four things which Francis Schaeffer saw as

"absolutely necessary if we as Christians are to meet the need of our age and the

overwhelming pressure we are increasingly facing,"[27] Keller argues for the following

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[21] Keller, *Center Church*, 22. Keller uses the term "City," but that is done for specific reasons, as can be read in the introduction of his book. It is legitimately interchangeable with the term "Culture" that covers a broader grasp of the context, and which is necessary, and will be used from now on in this thesis as this thesis focuses on the culture as a whole, and not only the specific culture within the cities.

[22] Keller, *Center Church*, 23.

[23] Keller, *Center Church*, 23–24.

[24] Keller, *Center Church*, 23–24.

[25] Keller, *Center Church*, 23–24.

[26] Keller, *Center Church*, 24.

[27] Francis Schaeffer, *2 Contents, 2 Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975), 7. The four things Schaeffer addresses in this seminal book, and which was based upon the address of him to the first Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974, are sound doctrine; contextual, cultural engagement; spiritual recovering of the gospel of our hearts; and remarkable, vital Christian community.

eight elements, which he then calls "The Center Church theological vision."[28] With regard to the Gospel this can be elaborated with the topics of Gospel theology and Gospel renewal. For culture this is the case with Gospel contextualization, cultural vision, and cultural engagement. And with respect to the movement, it's about the perspectives of missional community, integrative ministry, and movement dynamics.[29]

The reformational worldview described so far cannot be of contemporary relevance, for at least the West, if secularism is not taken into account. This term, which comes from a modern definition of the secular, is an associated doctrine with a push towards public institutions to be areligious.[30] In this sense, a society is secular insofar as religious belief or believing in God is merely one option among other options.[31] The West is post-Christian, instead of non-Christian (e.g. China, India, Middle Eastern countries).[32] The West is also postmodern, or call it late modern (in order to avoid thinking our present culture is the opposite of modernity), after modernity got its roots in the West through the European enlightenment thinkers in the eighteenth century.[33] These elements of the secular West, including being post-Christian, and postmodern, are significant in their relationship to a reformational theology of ministry, and vice versa in its (potential) effect in the context of which the elements are part of.

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[28] Keller, *Center Church*, 24–25.

[29] Keller, *Center Church*, 24–25.

[30] James K. A. Smith, *How (not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor (*Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 142.

[31] Smith, *How (not) to be* Secular, 19.

[32] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 5.

[33] Keller, *Center Church*, 381.

Following the basic review of a reformational worldview, the associated theology of ministry*,* and the context of the secular West, things are lined up well to continue with discussion of the third element of the research: the "missional Church." Two words that also were the title of a published book in 1998 that popularized the first word of it: "missional."[34] But what is actually meant by it? In order to understand this it is important to first go a bit further back into history, namely the 1952 world mission conference in Willingen, Germany, because it was after that conference that the Latin phrase *missio Dei*,[35] that is closely associated with "missional," became more prominent.[36] In the years after this conference the prominence was in line with an evangelical theology. This became clear as the general discussion first led to an idea that the Church had to become less (instead of more) relevant.[37] Nevertheless by the end of the last millennium, Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch developed a new understanding of the *missio Dei* in which they argued that being missional was very much about the Church, and thus all churches are effectively on the mission field.[38] And with a culture that was no longer Christianized, yet at the same time, as the Church is captive to the culture of modernity, there is a dilemma as it has no real alternative on offer as well.[39] So the Church needs to reform

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[34] Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

[35] This can be translated as the "mission of God" or the "sending of God."

[36] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 18.

[37] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 18.

[38] Newbigin, *The Open Secret;* David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991); Guder, ed., *Missional Church.*

[39] Guder, ed., *Missional Church.*

itself, and it needs to discover the new ways in how culture may be engaged, for instance

by being a contrast community, contextualizing the message, and having concern for

justice (and not only church growth). In the past few decades the popularization of the the

term "missional church" in evangelical circles also led to a need for a further defining of

what it means to "be missional." This has led to four categories of what that means: being

evangelistic, being incarnational, being contextual, and being reciprocal and communal.[40]

And what all these categories have in common is that it requires renewal of the Church,

and renewal of its engagement with the culture. Instead of using paradigms that center

around "Defensive Against," "Relevance To," and "Purity From," Hunter argues there is

an alternative paradigm for renewal: "Faithful Presence Within."[41] The foundation of a

theology of faithful presence can be summarized in two essential lessons for our

contemporary age:

> The first is that incarnation is the only adequate reply to the challenges of
> dissolution; the erosion of trust between word and world and the problems
> that attend it. From this follows the second [which] is the way the Word
> became incarnate in Jesus Christ and the purposes to which the incarnation
> was directed that are the only adequate reply to challenge of difference.[42]

At the root it all begins with acknowledging the faithful presence of God to us,

and that in return we are called to be faithfully present to Him.[43] It is by being fully

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[40] Keller, *Center Church*, 256–258.

[41] James D. Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 237.

[42] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 241.

[43] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 243.

present to God *as* the Church, that we can also be faithfully present in the world, which effectively means to each other, to our tasks, and within our spheres of influence.[44]

Concluding this succinct review of the literature it was nothing more than a humble attempt in outlining an academic understanding of a reformational worldview, secularism, and the missional Church. In this way it hopefully has set the stage as the research will be further described in the coming chapters, which will continue with the exposition of the main theme of a reformation theology of ministry in the following chapter.

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[44] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 244–247.

Chapter 2

Reformational Theology of Ministry

In the review of the literature the argument was made that a theology of ministry is founded upon a worldview, which obviously also applies for a *reformational* theology of ministry. This theology has been described by Tim Keller, and will be guiding this chapter as the first subquestion will be addressed: "What characterizes a reformational theology of ministry?"[45] What has been refreshing in Keller's approach was the ascertainment of two obvious dimensions of ministry, namely having a doctrinal foundation (or call it theological beliefs) and conducting particular forms of ministry, while also acknowledging the regular lack of connection, or fit between those two dimensions.[46] This led to the insight that there is a necessity to have a theological vision,[47] which functions as an essential connector between the doctrinal foundation and the particular forms of ministry.[48] A theological vision, which is effectively a particular set of ministry emphases and stances,[49] can also be called a theology of ministry. For Tim Keller, as he held to a reformational worldview (and philosophy),[50] it is safe to say that

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[45] Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

[46] Keller, *Center Church*, 16.

[47] Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 9.

[48] Keller, *Center Church*, 17–19.

[49] Keller, *Center Church*, 21.

[50] James Eglinton, "Tim Keller and American Neo-Calvinism" (plenary address, Gospel Coalition Dutch Conference, Almere, Netherlands, October 9–10, 2023), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HV_BSkSIiI&list=PLB13qtv3iBtr2T_d0fZd-xvkRDTq9jn2-&index=8.

his elaboration on a theology of ministry is a reformational one. As already discussed briefly in the review of literature, this theology may be presented by principles that can be captured with three axes. These three axes that represent the principles, will also be the three main points whereby the characteristics of a reformational theology of ministry will be addressed.[51] Hereafter there will first be a discussion of the Gospel axis, followed by the Culture axis, and thereafter will then come the Movement axis. At the end of the chapter is a brief summary including a compendious answer to the first subquestion of this research.

Gospel

"What is the Gospel?" Captured on an axis it is neither religion nor irreligion (as they are on both ends; and in a way are equal enemies of the Gospel), but something entirely different "— a third way of relating to God through grace."[52] The Gospel means literally good news,[53] and it is the news about Jesus Christ, and what he has done to put our relationship right with God.[54] The Gospel is reporting about Christ's work on our behalf, salvation by grace; and it is news, because this salvation is accomplished *for* us, creating a loving life (although that itself is not the Gospel).[55] This biblical Gospel can be presented in many ways, nevertheless it is of great importance to do that with a "view,

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[51] Keller, *Center Church*, 23.

[52] Keller, *Center Church*, 27.

[53] Derived from the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον.

[54] Keller, *Center Church*, 30.

[55] D. A. Carson, "What is the Gospel? – Revisited," in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, ed. Sam Storms and Justing Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 158.

one way or another, [in relationship to] Luther's primary question: how may a weak perverse, and guilty sinner find a gracious God?"[56] At the same time the redemptive grand narrative of the Bible should not be neglected, as for helping people that is critical as well; the narrative approach is a way of presenting the Gospel that can incorporate a personal address in the context of the redemptive grand narrative.[57] In order to do so it puts the Gospel in as a part in the bigger story, which starts with God and Creation, then followed by Fall and Sin, after that comes the Gospel, and finally Faith; but besides making the Gospel the third in four chapters, the Gospel can also still be seen as the whole of the story, because after all the prologue and the epilogue are essential to make the story complete.[58] In that regard the Gospel (in a broad sense) also answers where we come from, why things went wrong, what will put it right, and how an individual can be put right; questions that are answered by good news about what has been done (in contrast to what we must do).[59] Nevertheless, this simplification does not mean the presentation of the Gospel should or even can be reduced to versions that do not fit into the redemptive grand narrative.[60] Every thematic approach expresses a perspective, but not one theme will give a full picture.[61] And as the Gospel is a singular message, but not a

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[56] J. I. Packer, *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 26–27.

[57] Keller, *Center Church*, 33.

[58] Keller, *Center Church*, 33.

[59] Keller, *Center Church*, 37.

[60] D. A. Carson, "The Biblical Gospel," in *For Such a Time as This: Perspectives on Evangelicalism, Past, Present and Future*, ed. Steve Brady and Harold Rowdon (London, England: Evangelical Alliance, 1996), 80–81.

[61] D. A. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 89–104.

simple thing and with a humanity that is complex and varied the Gospel needs (cultural)

contextualization.[62] After all, the Gospel is "so rich that it can be communicated in a form

that fits every situation," of which makes implications endless including the impact of

it.[63] Keller argues, provided that the outline of the Gospel with the incarnation, the

atonement, and the resurrection is grasped respectively upside-down, inside-out, and

forward-back, it will champion and cultivate all essential ministries and emphases.[64] The

Gospel changes everything, and that is including discouragement and depression, love

and relationships, sexuality, family, self-control, race and culture, witness, human

authority, guilt and self-image, joy and humor, attitudes toward class, etc..[65] At the same

time all these examples take place within a *culture*, which is also the second main

characteristic of the reformational theology of ministry, and which will now be discussed

in the following paragraphs.

Culture

When contextualization is being mentioned earlier on, it is effectively about the

contextualization *of* the Gospel, and *to* the culture; this should neither be

undercontextualized nor overcontextualized, but instead by using the Gospel to the

culture it can appreciate *and* challenge the culture in alignment with the truth of God.[66]

This truth of God, which results out of biblical teaching, shows us that every culture has

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[62] Keller, *Center Church*, 44.

[63] Keller, *Center Church*, 44–46.

[64] Keller, *Center Church*, 46–48.

[65] Keller, *Center Church*, 48–51.

[66] Keller, *Center Church*, 87.

the grace and revelation of God in them while at the same time being in rebellious

idolatry; and as a result overcontextualization would lead to accepting the idols of the

culture while undercontextualization would make our own culture an idol.[67] The answer

to avoiding these two so-called extremes, and to keep the life-changing power of the

Gospel, is living and working from the healthy tension in between (with both

appreciating *and* challenging the culture).[68] But what is necessary to realize this? In order

to answer that question the topic of contextualization needs further explanation, and also

deepening the insights about cultural vision, and cultural engagement are just as essential

in order to have a better grasp at the cultural subject in regards of a reformational

theology of ministry.

Starting with contextualization, or to be more clear *Gospel* contextualization, the

question arises what is actually meant by this? Keller argues that it is about

> giving people *the Bible's answers*, which they may not all want to hear, *to questions about life* that people in their particular time and place are asking *in language and forms* they can comprehend, *and through appeals and arguments* with force they can feel, even if they reject them. Sound contextualization means translating and adapting the communication and ministry of the gospel to a particular culture without compromising the essence and particular of the gospel itself.[69]

And if it is essentially a relationship with the culture, it is also essential to make

clear what is meant with culture. Although it may be described in many ways, a powerful

metaphor is that of an onion with at its inmost core a worldview; followed and growing

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[67] Keller, *Center Church*, 24.

[68] Keller, *Center Church*, 24.

[69] Keller, *Center Church*, 89.

out of that comes a layer of values (i.e. the value system of the culture); then comes an

institutional layer that perpetuate education, law, marriage, etc.; and finally the outside,

and (most) observable layer with artifacts and behavior.[70] Now this may sound as if

culture is something neutral, and that one can be free and independent from it, but

nothing would be further from the truth as that cannot account for the power that culture

has, and how much more pervasive, powerful, and compelling culture is (in stark contrast

with a liberal perspective on a person and its relationship to culture).[71] Nevertheless

relating to the culture, or more specific contextualization of the Gospel to the culture, is

inevitable, as "there is no single, context-free way to express the gospel," and lacking

cultural awareness would lead to a distortion in the Christian ministry (and living).[72]

Awareness is a key factor in order to not only be intentional, but also balanced in

approaching contextualization to the culture. This balance act means going back and forth

between the biblical text and the reader's cultural context, although in this two-way

process the Bible is supreme in the end (and its final authority must be maintained).[73]

And because of this dynamical inequality in the hermeneutics it is suggested that instead

of a viewing as a two-way process, it can also be seen as an hermeneutical spiral,[74] which

then also avoids the spectral extremes of cultural fundamentalism at one end, and cultural

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[70] David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 145.

[71] James D. Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 202.

[72] Keller, *Center Church,* 94–97.

[73] John Stott and R. Coote, eds., *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980).

[74] Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

relativism at the other end.[75] What follows out of that is that balanced contextualization, as it avoids the two extremes, is balanced, because the authority of Scripture is effectively the fulcrum where it firmly, and ultimately rests on.[76] Keller argues for three principles in order to do the balancing act of contextualization well, or in other words, to do it biblically. The first biblical principle is based on Romans 1 and 2, and it shows that the Bible has a mixed view on culture, with elements of affirmation, but not without examination from the Gospel's perspective.[77] The second biblical principle from 1 Corinthians 9 gives motivation, as there is a need to be culturally flexible and free to enculturated,[78] and open to adapt what can be adapted so that the Gospel message may be communicated.[79] Finally the third principle is taken from 1 Corinthians 1 which is about an approach that is "neither completely confrontational nor totally affirming," but "instead [Paul] shows them that the ways they are pursuing these good things are ultimately self-defeating," and "points them to the resolution that can only be found in Christ."[80] With these three principles, Keller argues, the maintaining of the balance can be done in such a way that the examples and patterns of Scripture will shape it.[81] At the heart of these examples and patterns is not only the Gospel itself, it is also a result of having a high view of Scripture, and consequently of such a view it was Schaeffer who

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[75] Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993).

[76] Keller, *Center Church*, 105.

[77] Keller, *Center Church*, 108–110.

[78] Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life (*Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 198–99.

[79] Keller, *Center Church*, 110–11.

[80] Keller, *Center Church*, 112.

[81] Keller, *Center Church*, 106.

said that "anything [that] the New Testament does not command in regard to church form is a freedom to be under the leadership of the Holy Spirit for that particular time and place," and that calls for activeness (in contrast to passiveness) in the contextualization.[82]

Next to contextualization, it is also essential to be in thoughtful engagement with the culture. In order to look at this properly, the starting point is the discussion of four models that relate Christianity to the culture, and thereafter how a reformational theology of ministry is effectively a blend of the key insights on all of these four.[83] Although Niebuhr wrote a classic book with five ways of relating,[84] Keller translated this into four that roughly correspond with all the options presented by Niebuhr, albeit that two ways of relating were merged into one model, hence the four models.[85] The first model is the transformationist model in which engagement is happening mostly through emphasizing Christians to pursue their vocation with a Christian worldview, and as a result they can thereby change the culture.[86] This is a model that builds upon Kuyper's insights, and that includes that according to him "Christians should articulate their way of thinking, speaking, and acting not off in their own corner somewhere but in the course of interacting with non-Christians in our shared human practices and institutions."[87] Nevertheless this model has problems, according to Keller, which includes that the

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[82] Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970), 67.

[83] Keller, *Center Church*, 88.

[84] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 1956).

[85] Keller, *Center Church*, 196–97.

[86] Keller, *Center Church*, 195.

[87] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "In Reply," *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought*, February 2008, https://reformedjournal.com/in-reply/.

conception of a worldview is too cognitive, that the model has a tendency to overconfidence in its ability to understand the will of God for society as well as bringing it about, and that it often has put too much trust in politics while also not recognizing that power comes with dangers.[88] The second model is called the relevance model,[89] and is "equally at home" in the culture as in the church.[90] With this model Christ is at work in all philosophical movements, and toward the assertion of unity and order for the world, including morally as it moves towards self-denial and caring for the common good including concerns for politics aimed at justice.[91] In summary this model is optimistic about culture and its trends, puts great emphasis on the flourishing of humans as well as the common good, and has the main objective to become more relevant to the culture by reinventing the ministry of the church.[92] The significant problems with this second model are that churches can quickly be seen as dated with every shift in culture as they are constantly adapting. Also the fact that Scripture can become negotiable truth as being relevant easily becomes normative over the Bible, besides that the means itself can become an end easily as producing art or seeking justice trumps teaching the Gospel and seeking conversions.[93] The third model is the counterculturalist model, of which the name says it all already, but the emphasis with this model is for the church to be "a contrast society to the world," primarily manifesting through the community of the church that

[88] Keller, *Center Church*, 199–201.

[89] Keller, *Center Church*, 201.

[90] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 80.

[91] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 106.

[92] Keller, *Center Church*, 202.

[93] Keller, *Center Church*, 203–4.

opposes to the world and its kingdoms.[94] With this model God is not seen to work

through cultural movements in a redemptive way (outside the church), and thus the focus

is not at the culture of the world at all, but instead the effort ought to be put into a "life of

simplicity, of material self-denial for the sake of charity, justice, and community."[95] The

significant problems with this model is that the pessimism about potential social change

is unwarranted, and it tends to despise business, markets, and government. Next to that it

fails in giving sufficient weight to the fact that contextualization is inevitable, and finally

just as (and even more than) the relevance model, it undermines the emphasis for

evangelism.[96] The fourth and last model is the two kingdoms model, a name that comes

from a foundational teaching that all of creation is ruled by God, but in two distinct ways:

in the realms of the common kingdom and the redemptive kingdom.[97] And those two

distinct kingdoms, of which a Christian take part of in both, operate in different ways.

The common kingdom operates by natural revelation, while the redemptive kingdom

operates by special revelation (that is only for Christians).[98] As a result, just like with the

transformationalist model, it attributes a high value for the pursuit on so-called secular

vocations, but it also differs in that same comparison on *how* to do the work, as in the two

kingdom model there is no such thing as a "uniquely Christian" way of doing an ordinary

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[94] Keller, *Center Church*, 205.

[95] Keller, *Center Church*, 205–6.

[96] Keller, *Center Church*, 207–8.

[97] David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 75–76.

[98] Keller, *Center Church*, 209.

task.[99] The two kingdoms model also differs with the countercultural model insofar it comes to markets and government, and instead of viewing that as demonic it is seen as a space of common grace where Christians pursue their vocation with skill and joy (and without pressure to make it more so-called Christian).[100] Not surprisingly in this model there is not much, if any, improvement expected in the culture, as the common kingdom is regulated by natural law, and is very limited in what is attainable.[101] Looking at the problems that the model gives it stands out that common grace gets more credit (and weight) than Scripture itself (Rom. 1:18–32),[102] that a significant amount of the so-called natural revelation is actually forthcoming of special revelation, and the model also has an implication as if living life can be done neutral (in a religious sense).[103]

After describing the four models (and its shortcomings) to relate Christianity to culture in the last paragraph, they can also be seen together in relationship to one another if they would be placed in a graph with two axes, of which one axis represent the amount of common grace, and the other axis the activeness in influencing the culture. The transformationist model is low on common grace, but active in influencing culture. The counterculturalist model is also low on common grace, but passive in influencing culture. The relevance model is full of common grace, but also active in influencing culture. And last but not least the two kingdoms model is also full of common grace, but passive in

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[99] Keller, *Center Church*, 210.

[100] VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 27.

[101] David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Acton Institute, 2006), 40.

[102] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 1:273–75.

[103] Keller, *Center Church*, 212–215.

influencing culture.[104] Keller argues that if you blend their insights it can lead to

strengthening each model with at the center a respective emphasis on distinctive

worldview, common good, humble excellence, and the church as a counter culture.[105] But

blending is not the same as combining, and it is of course not as simplistic that there is an

"über-model," although Keller does argue that there are guiding principles that steer

towards faithful, balanced, and skillful relating Christianity to culture, and that is

regardless for any of the four models that have been described in this paragraph.[106] Which

leads back to the big picture of a reformational theology of ministry, because an essential

part is practically about cultural engagement through the mentioned blended insights of

the four models.[107] What that means, according to Keller, is effectively avoiding the

extremes on either of the ends in the graph about the four models (i.e. the extremes of

triumphalism or withdrawal, and cultural compromise or cultural withdrawal). The main

way to go about that is by "[appreciating] the seminal insights of each model."[108] It also

results preventing reductionism, and gives more space to honor all biblical themes at the

same time, including creation and fall, natural and special revelation, curse and common

grace, continuity and discontinuity, sin and grace, etc..[109] Of course this can be complex,

as reality is complex, and thus one of the ways to help out in dealing with this is

acknowledging and understanding the cycle, or seasons that the relationship to the culture

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[104] Keller, *Center Church*, 231.

[105] Keller, *Center Church*, 231.

[106] Keller, *Center Church*, 232.

[107] Keller, *Center Church*, 235.

[108] Keller, *Center Church*, 235–236.

[109] Keller, *Center Church*, 236.

can go through,[110] as well as on a personal level being flexible with postures and gestures (which respectively are the unconscious basic position to the culture, and moves being made that are coming from another model of cultural engagement).[111] And as the model that we prefer will most likely be influenced by theological commitments and personal factors like temperament and spiritual gifts, it is even of greater importance to have a shared vision on the mission of the church.[112] The reason for that is that actually the lack of shared missiological unity can easily distort and limit the effectiveness of cultural engagement, as different models use different means to be(come) missional. This topic of missiology will be addressed with greater depth in a later chapter, but what is also related is the principle in regards of the movement, of which will be dealt with in the next paragraph.

Movement

With movement it is meant how the relationships of the movement are organized, and this can be seen on an axis or spectrum with structured organisation and fluid organism on both ends.[113] And in order to make the right connection to the mission of church, both sides need to be understood properly, and not only that, it also needs to be acknowledged and appreciated that there are two sides necessary with tradition and

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[110] H. Richard Niebuhr, "Toward the Independence of the Church," in *The Church Against the World*, by H. Richard Niebuhr, Wilhelm Pauck, and Francis P. Miller (Chicago: Willet, 1935), https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/part-iii-toward-the-independence-of-the-church-by-h-richard-niebuhr/.

[111] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 90–96.

[112] Keller, *Center Church*, 238–240.

[113] Keller, *Center Church*, 23–24.

authority, and with cooperation and unity.[114] The way to gain insight at how (with a healthy tension) structured organization and fluid organism can co-exist, will be done by describing the implications within the two perspectives of integrative ministry and movement dynamics.[115]

Starting with the perspective of an integrative ministry, in a way this is also setting the stage that there is a need for integration, and balance, which is in contrast with putting the emphasis on the church as an institution, a mystical communion, a sacrament, a herald, or a servant.[116] All of these metaphors are biblical descriptions and cannot, and should not be played out to each other. Instead it is necessary to balance, and integrate the ministries. Keller argues those can be summarized by the following four: it is about evangelism and worship to connect people to God, about community and discipleship to connect people to each other, about mercy and justice ministries to connect people to the needs of the society, and about integrating faith and work in order to connect people to the culture.[117] By "engagement of some kind on all four of these fronts [it] is the only way to honor the full range of the biblical metaphors of the church. This is what [Keller calls] integrative ministry,"[118] and which also go hand in hand with the threefold goals of ministry which are worship (Rom. 15:8–16; 1 Pet. 2:9), Christian nurture (Eph. 4:12–26),

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[114] Keller, *Center Church*, 249.

[115] Keller, *Center Church*, 250.

[116] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, NY: Image, 1978).

[117] Keller, *Center Church*, 293.

[118] Keller, *Center Church*, 294.

and witness (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:28; Acts 5:32); which is together the one calling of the Church.[119]

The second perspective to look at are the relationships of the movement are the dynamics itself, because in order to connect the Gospel with the culture, it is essential that there is intentionality within the movement, and that churches will plant new churches, so God's truth is proclaimed in new places and new communities may be served.[120] As the Church is (and should be) an institution,[121] it also must be a movement. And the way this goes together could describe the church as an "organized organism," which effectively reflects the organization as well as the organism part.[122] It is also this movement dynamic (i.e. being an organized organism) that will naturally involve the church in planting churches.[123]

Summary

The end of this second chapter brings us back to first sub question of what characterizes a reformational theology of ministry? Part of the answer is that a theology of ministry is a particular set of ministry emphases and stances.[124] And in order to categorize it as "reformational," it then has to be based upon a *reformational* worldview. This reformational theology of ministry can be presented by three axes that represent

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[119] Edmund P. Clowney, *Living in Christ's Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Great Commission,1986), 140.

[120] Keller, *Center Church*, 250.

[121] Clowney, "Perspectives on the Church," *Living in Christ's Church.*

[122] Keller, *Center Church*, 344.

[123] Keller, *Center Church*, 355.

[124] Keller, *Center Church*, 21.

three principles: Gospel, Culture, and Movement.[125] Hence it are these principles that are also the three main points whereby the characteristics of a reformational theology of ministry can be described, and of which an attempt was made in this second chapter. For the Gospel characteristic this was done with theological depth, including what the Gospel is (and is not). In regards of the Culture characteristic the elaboration was mainly on what it means to contextualize the Gospel to the culture.[126] Besides that it was also about cultural engagement. And the last part was on the third principle of Movement, with a deepening on the topics of integrative ministry and movement dynamics.

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[125] Keller, *Center Church*, 23.

[126] Keller, *Center Church*, 70.

Chapter 3

Secularism and the West

The West is (increasingly) secular,[127] but what does that mean? Or in the words of the second subquestion: "What characterizes the secular West?" In order to answer this question there are a few steps to take. The first step is to describe the West itself, and how it may contrast with the East. What then follows is deepening some implications of the " Post"-age that the West is in, and in particular postmodernity, and post-Christian, which also are characteristics of secularism in the West.[128] Finally, at the end this chapter will be succinctly summarized and combined with answering the second subquestion.

East vs West

The whole world is a big place, and in order to make sense of it, albeit in part, categorization can be a means to an end. This can be done in so many ways, but not without the use of boundaries, and this paragraph is an attempt to make clear the sociological boundary between the East and the West. It is sociological, and not geographical per sé, as first of all the world is shaped as a globe (and has no fixed ends to it), but there is also a connotative effect which has a historical root, as it developed over time. The boundaries itself can also be a point of discussion, but generally speaking there is agreement that the following geographical areas belong to the West: Europe, America,

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[127] Alan Noble, *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 37.

[128] Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 186.

New Zealand and Australia. And what belong to the East are the countries of the Middle

East and Asia.[129] What makes up the division can be explained by different arguments,

but at least one interpretation seem to stand out, and that is the one that centers around the

differences in the schools of thought, which then gives an explanation for the profound

difference in implications of the social relationships, views concerning nature, and typical

processes of thought.[130] Well known stereotypical examples of this are the high valuation

of individualism (e.g. being independent, personally achieving, etc.) in the West, while in

the East there is instead more emphasis on the collective (e.g. relating to the family,

having harmony in the community, etc.). As this research is focussing on the West, that

will direct what to describe further as the purpose of this paragraph is to discern, and gain

a basic understanding of what makes the West what it is. The philosophy that influenced

it (and that we know of) has come out of the Greco-Roman world, and that on its turn set

the stage for the West in a unique way in which the monotheism that came with

Christianity has shaped our modern culture.[131] And thus it was specifically the West

where the so-called Enlightenment happened,[132] which is part of the origins of what we

now call secularism in our day and age.[133] And so it can be concluded that secularism is

tied to the West, as it developed and arose in that setting, but it is just as well true that the

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[129] I am aware that there are caveats as a result of this simplification, which is an area of improvement for further studies.

[130] Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently…and Why* (New York: Free Press, 2004), xx.

[131] Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[132] Stark, *For the Glory of God*, 123–124.

[133] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 371.

West has, and is shaped through secularism as well. Above it all, if anyone wants to understand more about secularism, it needs to incorporate studies about the West, but vice versa is also true, and thus if anyone wants to understand the West, it cannot step over the subject of secularism. In the following paragraphs the focus will be on two characteristics of the secular West: postmodernity, and post-Christian.

Postmodernity

This perspective of "postmodernity," as the word itself also reveals, is historically related to "modernity." And this cultural change of eras, whatever one might evaluate about the quality of impact, has nevertheless brought significant change. At the root of modernity lies the idea that all authority, outside itself, needs to be overturned. Since the Enlightenment in Europe, it became emphasized that one must question everything, including traditions, revelations, and actually any authority that is external (in order to subject it to the judgement of one's own intuition and reason).[134] The stereotype of modernity can be described as an obsessiveness if it comes to techniques and science, and there seems to be an addictive draw to absolute knowledge and certainty.[135] Examples of this are about having analysis as the favourite way of processing information, and that includes thinking in models, and developing strategies that are rationalistic.[136] What a contrast to the stereotype of postmodernity. In postmodernity theories that are encompassing are not easily accepted, nor a truth with a claim that is absolute. And this

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[134] Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 381.

[135] Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West*, 187–188.

[136] Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West*, 187–188.

includes a reluctancy towards black-and-white discussions, and submission to systems

and structures (by people).[137] Rather in postmodernity there is intentional focus on the

elements of "mystery, relationships, multisensory communication, bottom-up networking

and personal authenticity."[138] And although such stereotypes can be overly simplistic,

they still serves the purpose of setting the stage, and in particular to introduce post-

modernity in contrast to modernity. At the same time there is a push-back, as it can give

an impression as if the true philosophical developments have a straightforward and linear

development from one into the other (i.e. from modern into postmodern). And although

there can be domains where it is, or at least looks like that, overall it is not always that

straightforward, and it is even argued to be "liquid."[139] Nevertheless whether it is

described as *liquid* modernity, *second* modernity, *late* modernity, or *reflexive* modernity,

there is still much value to having the perspective of postmodernity itself as long as one

keeps in mind it is more complex than the simplicity it is represented with. A good

example of the value is that the main principle of modernity (i.e. the autonomy of the

individual, and freedom on a personal level in regards of religion, community, tradition,

and family) is a principle that also attributes to postmodernity.[140] The point with this is

that I agree there is part of modernity in postmodernity, and as long as there is awareness

about the complexity of its understanding, the main point of this paragraph can keep

standing. That point is, albeit simplified, that post-modernity gives a well-reasoned and

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[137] Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West*, 187–188.

[138] Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West*, 187–188.

[139] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2000).

[140] Keller, *Center Church*, 381.

plausible perspective on the secular age and its secularism, and that what it stands for can be taken as a characteristic of the secular West.

Post-Christian

Another perspective is that of post-Christian, which again can be put in contrast, and in this case to a Christian era. Before we elaborate on this, let us be clear on what is not meant by this. A Christian era of the West should not convey that before the "post"-era the majority of people were going to church, and were all Christians, which is not the case.[141] But nevertheless it is intentional to choose the post-*Christian* perspective over the post-*Christendom* perspective. The main reason is that with that choice of words, there is also a result of implied meaning in a positive sense. What is being aimed at with this is that the post-Christian perspective underlines the change that the West has gone through, and in particular with the rise of secular skepticism (i.e. anti-religious attitudes) being the norm with the majority of the population, and not only among the cultural elites.[142] Or in other words the change of view of, and attitude towards, Christendom and Christians have both changed, but it is contemporary attitudes towards Christians that has more significance in relationship to secularism in the West (and the studies of secularism for this thesis). After all, understanding secularism is about understanding people, or at least in part, and thus the causes and effects between secularism and post-Christian perspective have more significance in that case (in contrast to the post-Christendom perspective that

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[141] Stuart Murray, "Post-Christendom, Post-Constantinian, Post-Christian…Does the Label Matter?," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9, no. 3 (2009): 205–7.

[142] Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West*, 188.

deals more with the institutional relationship). And what stands out in this perspective is that it is less about how people can find their way into the Christian faith, as that question is deemed irrelevant by many in the post-Christian era, but rather how Christians can "keep their faith."[143] It is argued that instead of a so-called religious free market with a post-Christendom perspective, the emphasis should be on the crisis of faith itself, and on the decreasing "*demand*" of Christianity in order to shape life and the world in which it takes place.[144] And thus the the secularism in the West, taking place in a post-Christian era, does not only have implications for the irreligious, but just as well (if not more) for the Christians, since for instance there is need for discovering how to be a Christian community in a culture that is so thoroughly secularized.[145] And besides the impact on communities, other examples are also evangelism and forming disciples, which also have been hugely impacted as "today's culture believes the thing we need salvation from is the idea that we need salvation."[146]

Summary

This chapter was written in order to answer the second subquestion of what characterizes the secular West. With regards to what is meant with the term "secular," it is understood in connection to a so-called secular age in which not believing (or religious

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[143] Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West*, 188–189.

[144] Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West*, 188–189.

[145] Stefan Paas, *Vreemdelingen en Priesters: Christelijke Missie in een Postchristelijke Omgeving* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2015).

[146] Timothy Keller, *How to Reach the West Again: Six Essential Elements of a Missionary Encounter* (New York: Redeemer City to City, 2020), 7.

belief) in God is a real option among other (contested) options.[147] And as the second subquestion has two elements, there has first been a brief explanation on what is the West (in comparison to the East). After that followed a further deepening of how secularism in the West can be described, in which two characteristics are used to do so: postmodern and post-Christian. This secular context in the West, as was argued in this chapter, comes with challenges on many levels: from what it means, and how to live as a Christian, but also how to engage with secular skeptics in missiological sense. It is the latter topic that forms a bridge, because the way to understand how to connect is through missiology, and hence the subtitle that states to introduce a new perspective on the *missiological* context. Thus the next topic will attempt to describe missiology in connection with the missional church, which has the potential to bring constructive connection between the main theme of the thesis, a reformation theology of ministry, in the context of the secular West.

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[147] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

Chapter 4

Missiology as the Third Strand

What is missiology? That is the question this chapter will deal with first, because as this is a vital connection between the reformational theology of ministry and the secular context of the West, it is essential to understand what is meant by it. Alan Hirsch explains it as follows:

> [Missiology] is the study of missions, [and] as a discipline, it seeks to identify the primal impulses in the scriptures that compel God's people into engagement with the world. Such impulses involve, for example, the *missio Dei* (the mission of God), the Incarnation, and the kingdom of God. It also describes the authentic church's commitment to social justice, relational righteousness, and evangelism. As such missiology seeks to define the church's purposes in light of God's will for the world. It also seeks to study the methods of achieving these ends, both from scripture and from history.[148]

As a result, and in order for the Church to be missional, the Church needs to reform itself, and it needs to discover new ways to engage with the culture. Earlier examples (mentioned in the literature review) suggested it is about being a contrast community, contextualizing the message, and having concern for justice (and not only church growth). These are all good examples, but in order to keep the focus on the research and the questions of this thesis, this chapter is an attempt to describe the characteristics on a deeper, more foundational level. Hence the third subquestion of the research: "What characterizes the missional Church?" By doing so (i.e. aiming to

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[148] Alan Hirsch *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 284.

describe fundamental traits of being missional as a Church) it may hopefully contribute to the conceptual understanding of the missional Church, our reformational theology of ministry, and the secular context of the West, as being part of an interrelational threefold cord.[149] And it is this (metaphoric) cord that is idiomatically walked upon when the challenges are faced of evangelism in the post-Christian world, of forming disciples in a digital culture, and of political polarisation in a fragmented culture.[150] The best way to go about these challenges, according to Keller, is by encountering them missionally as missionaries (in the literal sense) by taking into account six elements: a Christian high theory, a truly post-Christendom evangelistic dynamic, a category-defying social vision, a counter-catechesis for a digital age, a faithful presence in public spheres, and grace to the point.[151] Coming back to the missiological characteristics of the Church, as they will be described in the coming paragraphs with two main perspectives, I would argue that they effectively cover Keller's six elements mentioned here before. The first main perspective is about discipleship, and its fundamental. The second main perspective flows out of that, as discipleship is meant to be lived out in the presence of others by being faithful, and thus live out the calling to be a faithful presence.[152]

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[149] It is intentional to use the metaphor of a threefold cord instead of a triangle for instance. Every metaphor has its own strengths and weaknesses, and limitations in what it can illustrate; nevertheless the reason to picture it like this is because Jesus is Lord of every area of life. Thus He is Lord of a reformational theology of ministry; He is Lord of contextualization of the Gospel to the context of the secular West; and He is Lord of missiology, and the missional Church. And although I readily admit this illustration has limitations in the conveyance of its meaning, in the setting of this research it is still deemed best to depict a threefold cord as an interrelational conceptual perspective, especially as it put an emphasis on the interrelational dynamic, and its interdependence to some degree as well.

[150] Timothy Keller, *How to Reach the West Again: Six Essential Elements of a Missionary Encounter* (New York: Redeemer City to City, 2020), 6–12.

[151] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 6–53.

[152] James D. Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 237.

First Things First

Jesus Christ taught: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). And along the same lines C.S. Lewis once wrote "You can't get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first."[153] There is an order, including to being missional, and not following that order has consequences. I would argue that being missional starts with acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Rom. 10:9–11), and being a disciple of Him (Luke 9:23–24, 14:27). And in that position you are not only qualified, but *called* to join in with the *missio Dei*, the mission of God.[154] A Christian mission is about "[acting] out in the whole life of the whole world the confession that Jesus is Lord of all."[155]

But what does it look like to be missional, and thus being a disciple of Jesus Christ? Bonhoeffer argues that it is the social context that is of importance here as "the Christian cannot simply take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians," but that they find their mission, their work so to speak, "in the midst of enemies."[156] And thus to be a follower of Jesus Christ is not a private matter; quite the opposite as Bonhoeffer contended that the missional Church can only develop further through communities of faith,[157] of which the Bible speaks with praise when it says: "Behold,

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[153] C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 280.

[154] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. *(*Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 18.

[155] Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 17.

[156] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 1.

[157] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, xxi.

how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" (Ps. 133:1b). The reality of

living this out means the need for spiritual love (instead of purely emotional love)

including the recognition of the true image of the other person (made in the image of

God),[158] and with "access to one another, joy in one another, community with one another

through Christ alone."[159] At the same time the essential part of being in community does

not exclude the fact that a community is made up by individuals, and individuals need

space for solitude as well; and from that and the sense of being alone with Christ,

strength can be found for complementing, and effectively strengthening the community

(and thus the mission of God).[160]

After mentioning the community, and then the individual within that community,

there is a third part to mention, which is about the community dynamic with a priority on

the inside, before going outside the community (Gal. 6:10). The dynamic this is about is

service to one another, and three kinds in particular that can grow love for one another, as

well as make one more into the image of Jesus Christ: the service of listening, active

helpfulness, and forbearance.[161] Finally, in the community there is the need for

confessing our sins to one another (James 5:16), and seeking reconciliation.[162] Besides

that it is essential for the well-being of the community, it is practically speaking also an

opportunity to show brokenness with acknowledgement of who one is in the sight of

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[158] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 1–21.

[159] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

[160] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 22–67.

[161] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 22–67; Gal. 6:2.

[162] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 87–97.

God.[163] But that is not all, because by subsequently including the communal celebration of the Lord's Supper commitments can be renewed, and "Here the community has reached its goal. Here joy in Christ and Christ's community is complete. The life together of Christians under the Word has reached its fulfilment in the sacrament."[164] And it is with the (communal) discipleship, as described in this paragraph, in mind, that the focus will be shifted to the second perspective in which this culminates through faithful presence.

Faithful Presence

Faithful presence is a theology that functions as a foundation for engagement within the world (in opposition to defensive against, relevant to, or purity from it).[165] Suggested by Hunter, a depiction of this engagement model can be found in the Bible:

> Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce.
>
> Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare (Jer. 29:4–7).

In line with the teaching of the Bible that Christians are "exiles in the world" (1 Pet. 1:1, 2:11), one may conclude that the situation in some regards does not differ from

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[163] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 87–97.

[164] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 97.

[165] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 276.

the time of Jeremiah, and thus gives a big picture of an implied theology of faithful

presence.[166] This "theology of faithful presence calls Christians to enact the shalom of

God in the circumstances in which God has placed them and to actively seek it on behalf

of others, [which] is a vision for the entire church."[167] What follows out of this is a

commitment of the community (or communities) of faith for human flourishing in a

society that is pluralistic. In particular, it is a commitment in the context of serving the

common good while maintaining the distinctiveness as a community of faith.[168] This

perspective on being missional comes of course with tensions, for instance within the

communities of faith itself, because only by a faithful presence of demonstrating grace

and love to one another *within* the community of faith, it becomes possible to extend this

outside the community of faith as well.[169] But that is not all, as there are also tensions

with the world; as it is essential for the community of faith to live with affirming and

antithesising in a dialectical sense; yet they are essential, healthy, and of critical

importance in order to prevent assimilation into a dominant culture, and thus loosing life-

changing power.[170] Nevertheless it is not first and foremost about trying to make the

world perfect, creating good values, nor establishing righteousness, etc.; but instead for

Christians it is about God Himself, and thus the most important task is to worship Him,

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[166] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 278.

[167] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 278.

[168] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 278–279.

[169] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 279–281.

[170] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 281; Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 23–24.

and glorify Him in *all* they do, which includes a faithful corporate (and individual) presence by the Church.[171]

Summary

In this chapter the starting point was missiology, and what that is about, as it is fundamental in order to understand the vital connection it makes between the reformational theology of ministry and the secular context of the West. That connection is effectively made by a missional Church, of which this chapter was an attempt to answer the third subquestion of the research, namely: "What characterizes the missional Church?" By using the idiom of walking a rope, which consists of the three cords representing the three topics of study in this thesis, challenges need to be encountered missional. And in order to describe what characterizes the missional Church, two perspectives have been used in this chapter: discipleship, and faithful presence.

The first one, discipleship, lies at the core of the missional Church as the Church can only be missional if its members are obedient to their call to follow Jesus. This call to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior then sets the stage for what it looks like to be a disciple of which this chapter made clear that this is not merely a private affair, but one that belongs to be rooted in a community of faith. And in order to have such a community flourishing it is of great importance that there is not a limited emotional love, but moreover a spiritual love for one another. This goes hand in hand with proper and balanced solitude for all the individuals that make up the community. With that as the

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[171] Hunter, *To Change the World*, 285–286.

basics it goes further with the need for confession of sins to one another, and reconciliation, of which celebrating the Lord's supper in the community makes it fulfilled.

The second perspective to characterize the missional Church is faithful presence, because the community of faith should not be isolated from society, but rather function in the public sphere as light upon a stand (Luke 8:16). This theology that is foundational in engaging with the world, is a Biblical one, and leads to a commitment of the community of faith for serving the society in such a way that it promotes human flourishing while at the same time maintaining the distinctiveness that the community of faith has. Of course this comes with challenges, of which wisdom is necessary, but in the end it is not the purpose to try to do it perfect, but rather worshipping God, and glorifying Him through all that is done by the (individuals that make up the) community of faith.

In the next and final chapter, before the main research question will be answered, there will first be the dealing of the fourth subquestion that in itself is an endeavour to connect the dots between the missiological elements and how it influences a reformational theology of ministry (in the secular context of the West).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This is the final chapter of the thesis, which will summarize the findings in the next paragraph. It will also address the fourth (and last) subquestion. Then follows the conclusions and ramifications, of which the main research question will be guiding that final section.

Summary of Findings

Starting with the review of literature in the first chapter it was found that a worldview is foundational in understanding a theology of ministry, and not surprisingly it is a reformational worldview that anchors a reformational theology of ministry. This theology of ministry with a scripturally informed worldview originates from (Dutch) neo-Calvinism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but also inspired, and guided Tim Keller. It was he who argues that ministry expressions are related best to a worldview through a theological vision, or in other words a theology of ministry. With his own reformational worldview in mind, this leads to three necessary principles if it comes to a reformational theology of ministry, and of which the second chapter goes into more detail: Gospel, Culture, and Movement. The findings continue with the address of secularism, and how it characterizes the West. Using the perspective of Charles Taylor to define and describe it in the literature review, it is then deepened in the third chapter on the subjects of the distinctiveness of the West in comparison to the East; and of post-Modernity and post-Christian being secular traits in the West. The final part of the

literature review is about missiology, and in particular the missional Church, which has a focus on being missional. The implications of that are further described in the fourth chapter, including the elaboration on discipleship and faithful presence.

Now that the findings of the thesis are summarized, the next step is an attempt to answer the fourth subquestion: "What characterizes the missional Church in the secular West?" The way to go about this is by using the six basic elements (that were also briefly mentioned in the last chapter and) that Keller argues for as missiologically essential.[172] It is these elements that fit the context of the secular West, and come forth out of a reformational theology of ministry. The first one is a Christian high theory, in which the Gospel is used in public engagement to the late modern secular view, to question the claims that the culture has on neutrality, objectivity, and universality.[173] After that such a theory first exposes the main issues in the narratives of the culture, it must then point to the truth and beauty "of the Gospel as the fulfilling counter-narrative."[174] The second element is that of a truly post-Christendom evangelistic dynamic, and in that it is about the discovery of a late modern version of the dynamic that was in the early Church.[175] That dynamic should include attention, attraction, demonstration, and conviction.[176] The third element is a social vision that defies categories, just like the early Church was muli-racial and multy-ethnic; committed to care for marginalized people including the poor;

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[172] Timothy Keller, *How to Reach the West Again: Six Essential Elements of a Missionary Encounter* (New York: Redeemer City to City, 2020), 12–50.

[173] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 15.

[174] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 16.

[175] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 17.

[176] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 18–25.

non-retaliatory and committed to forgiveness; against abortion and infanticide in a strong

and practical sense; and bringing revolution to the ethics of sex.[177] The fourth element is

a (counter-)cathechesis for a digital age, meaning that churches have to instruct and form

Christians to become shaped by the Bible and Christian teaching (instead of by the

world).[178] By emphasizing the doctrine of the Bible, the beliefs of culture can be

deconstructed and the questions of the human heart can be answered.[179] The fifth element

is faithful presence in public spheres,[180] which is also the deepened second perspective on

the missional Church in the chapter before. This element, of what the Bible calls "[to be]

the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13a), is thus not only part of the characterization of the

missional Church, but also can be taken directly as an essential basic element for

encountering the context of the secular West. The sixth, and final element is grace to the

point, and in contrast with religious moralism.[181] Keller made this clear by saying that

> When we lapse back into thinking that we are saved by our moral efforts,
> we become enmeshed in both pride and fear—pride because we may think
> God and the world owe us acclaim; fear because we can never be sure
> we've lived truly good-enough lives. And so, when we lose the existential
> (or the doctrinal) grasp on the truth that we are saved by faith alone
> through grace alone because of Christ alone, we not only lose our joy and
> fall into fear, but we also lose our graciousness and fall into pride. The
> world, of course, is quick—too quick—to find fault with the church and
> thus justify its dismissal of the gospel message. And yet it is quite right to
> do so. If the church continually moves toward dominate and control rather
> than love and service, it shows that it doesn't really believe the gospel it

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[177] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 25–30.

[178] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 37.

[179] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 37.

[180] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 45–50.

[181] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 51.

preaches. If the church doesn't believe the gospel, why should the world?[182]

Conclusions and Ramifications

This paragraph is guided by the main research question: "How does reformational theology of ministry influence missiology in the secular West?" Answering this question is done with the help of the answers to the four subquestions, which are effectively the building blocks of the complete answer, which sounds as follows. First of all a reformational theology of ministry is a particular set of ministry emphases that is based upon a reformational worldview,[183] and its characterization is presented with three axes that represent the three principles of Gospel, Culture, and Movement.[184] Next to that is the connection with the secular West, which is the context of the study of the main theme. With secular is meant that not believing (or religious belief) in God is a real option among other (contested) options, and amidst a so-called secular age.[185] The West is secular, and as far as there is secularism in the East, it is specified what it looks like in the West, where secularism also has its roots through the enlightenment. Two significant characteristics to describe that context are post-modern and post-Christian. Thirdly, the way to understand missiology is by understanding the Church to be missional, and it is the missional Church that effectively makes the connection between the reformational

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[182] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 51–52.

[183] Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 21.

[184] Keller, *Center Church*, 23.

[185] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

theology of ministry and the context of the secular West. But in order to be, and make

that connection the missional Church has to have Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior as the

number one priority, and thus Christians should obey the call to follow Jesus. This

following is not just a private affair, but one that belongs to be rooted in a healthy

community of faith. Second (in order, but not of less importance) is the call for the

community of faith to be faithfully present. And that latter one is at the same time also

one of the missiological means that are influenced by a reformational theology of

ministry. The other five ones, as also described in the summary of findings, are a

Christian high theory, a truly post-Christendom evangelistic dynamic, a category-defying

social vision, a counter-catechesis for a digital age, and grace to the point.[186]

So what is the answer to the main question? Well actually the epigraph at the

beginning does a great job answering it as it argues that religion is reasonable, and

worthy of reverence and respect, which can be done by using a reformational theology of

ministry.[187] It also mentions the need for making it attractive, of which missiology comes

into play. And at the beginning it speaks of the despising of religion, which fits pretty

well with the secular age as well, but then it needs to show (at the end) that it is true, and

that connects to the key word in the main research question: "How." This "how" has a

long, and a short answer. The long one is effectively this whole thesis, as it goes step for

step through the big picture of what ministry looks like if it wants to be fruitful in the

secular context of the West. And the short answer can be given by taking into account the

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[186] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 6–53.

[187] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1958), 52.

six basic elements of a missionary encounter, as argued by Tim Keller, as that is effectively *how* a reformational theology of ministry influences missiology in the secular West.[188] But either way, long or short answer, let us be clear that both of them can be (metaphorically) seen as a person standing on two legs, of which it needs both legs to walk properly (and not limp). Those two legs are then reflecting two foundational commissions given by God.[189] First the commission God gave at Creation, when he said: "'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (Gen. 1:26). Secondly, the commission as Jesus Christ has commissioned it before he ascended into heaven: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18b–20). And obeying the complete calling for Christians, so taking proper care of the world *as well as* making disciples, can be seen as the short (but Biblical) answer to the main research question of how reformational theology of ministry influences missiology in the secular West.

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[188] Keller, *How to Reach the West Again*, 6–53.

[189] Thanks to Rev Ranald Macaulay for this illustration.

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