

eco-culture, religious culture, and culture of common life which have been dominating today's humans.

제 1강연

THE IDEA OF A REFORMED THEOLOGY OF CULTURE IN THE BEGINNING OF THE 21st CENTURY

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In the beginning of the 21st century the term "culture" and the phenomenon of culture elicits fascination and enthusiasm in the academy and in the media. No wonder that "theories of culture" become "a new agenda for theology", as the Chicago Theologian Kathryn Tanner put it in the title of a recent book.⁷⁹⁾ No wonder that Paul Tillich's vision of a "theology of culture" is mentioned and tested again. In the question that you gave me with the title of this lecture (The idea of a Reformed theology of culture in the beginning of the 21st century) you even move beyond these general interests and concerns. You want to explore, whether and in what way a theology with a specific confessional heritage and profile, namely the Reformed theology, can relate to culture fruitfully, constructively and certainly in a theologically responsible way. Wisely enough you speak of "the idea of a Reformed theology of culture"; you could also have spoken of "the project of a Reformed theology of culture". On this basis we have to ask: Is a theology of culture a good idea? Is a Reformed theology of culture a convincing project?

In the following presentation I want to ponder your question although I am fully aware that it is easy to block and resist it right from the beginning. Theology should deal with God and speak of God. A "theology of culture" seems to either confuse theology with a theory of culture or it even seems to worship an idol. We have to keep these objections in mind but we will nevertheless reflect on how theology in general and Reformed theology in particular can and should relate to the phenomenon of culture. We will first unfold the many meanings of the term "culture". In a second step we will reflect the different types of theology correlated with the most important of these meanings. We will ponder what the potentials and profiles of Reformed theology might bring to this complicated task. Finally, we will reflect on the particular threats of what is called "media-culture".

1. The Many Meanings of the Term "Culture"

There are many different definitions and theories of culture. Already in antiquity we get the broad spectrum of definitions reaching from "husbandry" over "tending of natural growth" to "protecting" and "worshipping". The Oxford Professor of English Literature Terry Eagleton in his most helpful book "The Idea of Culture"⁸⁰⁾, notes that "culture" focusses on an interaction with reality, thus offering a "realist" and a "constructivist" dimension: "cultures are built out of

79) Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture. A New Agenda For Theology*, Fortress: Minneapolis 1997.

80) Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, Blackwell: Oxford 2000.

that ceaseless traffic with nature which we call labour ... suggest(ing) both regulation and spontaneous growth".⁸¹⁾ Eagleton shows that very many duals are questioned by the phenomena of culture, because culture always includes "both sides": "culture" can be a descriptive and an evaluative, even a normative term. It includes the aspects of "making and being made, rationality and spontaneity", "growth and calculation, freedom and necessity". It includes the actual and the desirable, a notion of reality and--in an at least quite cloudy way--a vision of perfection. This explains why "culture" can become a fascinosum and why it is scholarly and academically hard to handle. But the complexity of the term and of the phenomenon is even higher.

In the course of history the main meanings of culture become extremely extended. Culture is not only seen as a complex human activity but as a complex state of actual and possible human affairs. These human affairs concentrate not only on natural reality but also on spiritual and symbolic reality. As Raymond Williams has shown, in the 18th century "culture" becomes equated with "civilization" and correlated with all sorts of modern progress.⁸²⁾ The differentiation and even opposition of civilization and culture in the 19th century connects culture with tradition (over against civilization and the progress of modernity) or with the treasures of true value. It is most interesting to see that the term "culture" can become associated with tradition and with resistance. It starts to carry conservative and progressive, even revolutionary, connotations. "Culture" becomes associated with the patrician, aristocratic and elite--and with the "people" and even the "mass".

The Writings of Johann Gottfried Herder document a second most important shift in the notion of culture and its basic meanings.⁸³⁾ Herder uses "culture" in the plural. "He is out to oppose the Eurocentrism of culture-as-universal-civilization with the claims of those 'of all the quarters of the globe' who have not lived and perished for the dubious honour of having their posterity made happy by a speciously superior European culture."⁸⁴⁾ The conscious pluralization of the notion of "culture" challenges the modern paradigm. Contextual, indeed poly-contextual thinking emerges. Abstract theorizing about culture in general and the treatment of specific cultures become differentiated. The latent transport of norms and values with the term "culture" becomes obvious and is questioned. A great interest, even an enthusiasm for the cultures of people formerly called "exotic" or "savage" arises and is nurtured by a fast specialization in the sciences. The critique of the own culture (Kulturkritik) becomes a standard topic. The transformation and shift of the own culture and of other cultures in history becomes an expanding field of ongoing research. The question arises whether we can rightly speak of one culture in one nation or whether we have to pluralize the term even in this respect. The twentieth century will experiment with such terms as "sub-culture" and "multicultural" in order to do justice to radical differentiations in one culture. Both, the differentiation of the social systems and the differences of religion, class, language and ethnic background lead to an inflation of differentiations and specifications of term culture: economic and political culture, protestant culture, upper class culture, hispanic culture, urban culture etc. etc.

81) Eagleton, 2 and 4; cf. 5.

82) Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, London 1976, 76ff

83) Johann Gottfried Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, 1784ff.

84) Eagleton 12, with references to Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire*, London and New York 1995; John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, London 1989; Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London 1993

This endemic pluralization continues until today and finally equates "culture" and "a way of life". Over against this the term "culture" is still used as "a normative way of imagining" a society.⁸⁵⁾ The question is: on what grounds? The Romantics of the 19th century proposed the arts as culture-orienting and culture-shaping power. But the hope, that the arts (together with human love) could counter the dominant characteristics of modern society, that they could work "against the economic necessity of work and exploitation, against regulations by the state, against research with its drive towards technology," this hope has turned out to be a failure.⁸⁶⁾

The period between the late fifties and the late sixties saw intensive debates in the social and cultural sciences concerning the possibility of gaining a theoretically founded common concept of "culture"-*the culture*.⁸⁷⁾ After these efforts all theories and definitions of culture seem to share a certain helplessness with respect to their subject. This helplessness is best grasped in the tendency to proffer summarizing formulas for what a culture really is: we get many listings, from the symbolic foundations of human action to the most important human artifacts. Values, symbols, rituals and institutions are named in one sentence or the "sum of the spiritual properties of a community" is ciphered.⁸⁸⁾ Terry Eagleton notes laconically: "the complexity of the idea of culture is nowhere more graphically demonstrated than in the fact that its most eminent theorist in post-war Britain, Raymond Williams, defines it at various times to mean

a standard of perfection,
a habit of mind,
the arts,
general intellectual development,
a whole way of life,
a signifying system,
a structure of feeling,
the interrelations of elements in a way of life,
and everything from economic production and the family to political institutions."⁸⁹⁾

Most of the definitions and theories of culture, however, seem to agree explicitly or implicitly on the fact that cultures serve the communication of human beings via memories and expectations. With the help of our culture we develop astounding abilities to connect and disconnect, to share and to differentiate our memories and our expectations. We anticipate, reproduce and reconstruct in our memories and imaginations what others remember, anticipate and expect. Moving in the realms of memory and imagination we attune our emotions, thoughts and practices in very powerful ways. We do not have to talk to each other, to see each other and to touch each other all the time. We can, so to speak, manage most of our communication by flying above physical reality and concrete person to person encounters, with only occasionally

85) Eagleton, 25

86) Niklas Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt/Main 1997, 987f

87) To mention only Parsons, Kroeber, White and others; see DNM or the time before these debates cf. Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Cambridge 1952.

88) Andreas Schwanne first called my attention to this fact, quoting a UNESCO declaration on culture of 1995 and its reception: *Person und Kultur*, *EvTh* 60, 1-2000, 59ff, 64; cf. also Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, London 1975, 5; Raymond Williams, *Culture*, Glasgow 1981, 13; John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*, Oxford 1995, 3; Geoffrey Hartman, *The Fateful Question of Culture*, New York 1997, 30; Tanner, chapter 1.

89) Eagleton, 36; quote as a listing M.W.

illustrative landings. The complex entity "culture", which one sociologist has called the "brain of the society,"⁹⁰⁾ makes this possible.

Part of the particular power of our current cultures is that they provide high degrees of secure common memories and expectations, although they can host very different sets of values and virtues. We can put ourselves into others' shoes although we in fact do not share exactly the same hierarchy of values and virtues. This ability is greatly enhanced and cultivated in late modern pluralistic societies and cultures. Different "societal systems", as sociologists say, operate with different symbol-systems and rationalities: law, politics, the market, the sciences, education, the arts, religion - they do not follow one common code. And most of these systems or spheres are highly differentiated in themselves, as for example a look at the sciences and the humanities, at the differentiated system of the markets, at the highly patterned world of media and infotainment and at the ecumene of the Christian churches can tell us. We live in a complex world that does not exhibit a one-hierarchy-order, but rather a multihierarchical texture. And our cultures allow us to navigate in this world with some trust and some success.

What are the tasks of a "Theology of Culture" when we face this complex background? What can the Reformed theology contribute to this task?

2. "Culture" as a Topic and a Task of Reformed Theology

If cultures serve the communication of human beings via memories and expectations they are indispensable to human beings. They are as self-imposing and as indispensable as morals and as common sense are. Human beings cannot live without them. On the other hand, cultures are no innocent creatures. They can be shaped by good and evil norms and values, and they can mediate and convey good and evil norms and values. An honest diagnosis of the specific culture and the will to gain a non-illusionary and critical perspective on it is mandatory for every relation of theology to culture. We could term such a theology a "critical contextual theology". Such a critical contextual approach united more than thirty Reformed theologians from all over the world, who in 1998 came together in Heidelberg for a conference on "Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity." Wallace Alston and Michael Welker, *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, Eerdmans 2001. A strong communality existed not only in basic Christian beliefs but also in a high contextual sensitivity and in the understanding that we have to gain theological orientation in the midst of a pluralistic setting and in the midst of rapid cultural transformations. Predominant factors in these developments are

- shifts from modern to postmodern paradigms and mentalities;
- the crisis of the nation state;
- the enormous power of market, media and technology and its threat to destroy cultural and societal pluralism;
- the weakening of cultural and canonic memory;
 - a constant crisis of common orientation;
- massive injustice, poverty and ecological destruction on this planet;
- the threat of relativism, cynicism and apathic moods;

90) Niklas Luhmann, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik IV*

- and a dissatisfaction with theologies and churches which have difficulties in providing leadership and giving guidance.

The will to a critical contextual awareness of the global and local situation we are in and the will to fine-tune this awareness in respect to our specific cultures is only one dimension of the theological task connected with the phenomenon of culture. The ubiquity and multifascetness of culture and the fascination it brings with it, call for the iconoclastic task, which has been so strongly developed in many Reformed theologies. The threat that culture in general and a specific culture in particular can turn into an idol or that it can even gain a quasi-religious aura must be taken seriously. Terry Eagleton states: "If religion offers cult, sensuous symbolism, social unity, collective identity, a combination of practical morality and spiritual idealism, and a link between the intellectuals and the populace, so does culture." He adds: Culture offers only a "lamentable alternative" to religion. His argument is: "the more practical culture becomes, the less able it is to fulfil a conciliatory role, and the more conciliatory it is, the more ineffectual it grows." Eagleton, 41.

Christian theology will have to go beyond such a pragmatic argument, not only critically but also constructively. The "conciliatory role" of religion of which Eagleton speaks has to be clarified. What does Christianity bring to the culture that gives a form and shape to it that the arts could and can not provide? The answer of Reformed theology to this question is: the law of God gives such a shape to human cultures. Reformed theology with its strong biblical rooting also in the Old-Testament traditions, with its strong interest in a realistic and public theology Cf. M. Welker, *Theology in Public Discourse Outside Communities of Faith? in: Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham-Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Luis Lego, introduction by Max Stackhouse, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 2000; see also: *Security of Expectations. Reformulating the Theology of Law and Gospel*. *Journal of Religion* 66, 1986, 237-260 and *Gottes Geist, Übersetzung ins Koreanische von Joon Ho Shin*, The Christian Literature Society of Korea: Seoul 1995.

- rarely joined other theologies in caricaturing or even demonizing the law. When other theologies confused "the law" and "the law under the power of sin" and understood the law only as "imperative" or "accusation", when other theologies reduced the law to the ten commandments, Reformed theology offered a broader view. We need this subtle and broad view on the law when we want to understand how Christian heritage and Christian values shaped many cultures on this planet.

The biblical traditions challenge us to see the law of God in at least five dimensions. First, the law as tora, as a complex guidance for a life in the covenantal relation to God. The law shapes basic individual and communal memories and expectations. It gives a shape to our history and our culture, because it roots our collective and cultural memories in the canonic memory, shaped by the biblical traditions. Cf. M. Welker, *Was geht vor beim Abendmahl?*, übersetzt von Lim Geul, Handl Verlag: Seoul 2000; *Resurrection and Eternal Life. The Canonic Memory of the Resurrected Christ, His Reality, and His Glory*, in: J. Polkinghorne und M. Welker (eds.), *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Theology and Science on Eschatology*, Trinity Press: Harrisburg 2000, 279-290.

Second, the law of God connects three normative forms in a way, that provided a backbone, if not the backbone to Jewish and Christian cultures and morals in this world. From the book of the covenant through Deuteronomy to the legal texts of the Priestly writings, the law connects

the normative striving for justice with a normative striving for mercy, for the care for the poor and the weak. And it connects both, the striving for justice and for mercy, with the search for truth in the encounter with God in the cult. This connection of normative forms in the law of God is extremely powerful. The connection of justice and mercy give a reglative to all legal and moral developments. I makes shure that the law does not become a defence for the happy few and that we constantly expand and institutionalize our forms of social care. The search for truth in front of God leads to a continuous critique and revision of our legal and moral achievements and fosters mentalities that affirm the great values of justice and mercy deep in their hearts and minds. ¹ For more details see M. Welker, *Recht in den biblischen Pöerlieferungen in systematisch-theologischer Sicht*, in: H.-R. Reuter et al. (Hg.), *Das Recht der Kirche*, Bd. I, 1997, 390-414; *Travail and Mission: Theology Reformed According to God's Word at the Beginning of the Third Millenium*, in: Michael Welker and David Willis, *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology. Tasks, Topics, Traditions*; Eerdmans: Grand Rapids 1999, 136-152.

Third, the law of God in the Decalogue provides an ethos for the individual and the community which connects the covenantal relation to God and a good-neighborhood morals. The God who led Israel out of Egypt and who frees us from bondage gives us a law to keep and preserve this freedom before God and in community.

Fourth, particularly in the wisdom traditions, the law of God encounters us as the source and guide to lead our life in the fear of God. The fear of God leads to wisdom and to an insight into the good laws and rhythms of life, but also to the readiness to question and to improve these laws and rhythms in the light of God's Word and to seek the guidance of God's Spirit.

Fifth, this constant revision and this saving guidance are badly needed, because the good law--in all its dimensions and despite its wonderful inner dynamics--can come under the power of sin and can become totally corrupted by this power. Here the important differentiation of law and gospel and law and Spirit become crucial. A critical awarenes of our culture, our morals and even our religion becomes necessary. As the cross of Christ reveals: all these powers can fall under sin. In the name of religion, politics, two forms of the law, in the name of public opinion of Jews and gentiles, friends and foes, rulers and ruled Christ was crucified. This most important theological insight, so central for the Reformation, should not lead to a neglect or a depreciation of the law of God. Without a clear awareness of the law of God we are not able to see the shaping powers in the depth of our cultures, which have their roots in the biblical traditions.

Reformed theology, with its mostly more balanced and subtle view of the law of God is better equipped than many other theologies to serve in a diagnosis of the culture-shaping and culture-transforming powers of biblical traditions. The enormous task to keep these traditions alive in our cultures and our churches becomes clear when we finally focus on the most dramatic shift that most cultures of the world have experienced in the last few decades.

¹ DBO

² DNM

³ DBO. The Loss of Cultural and Canonic Memory in a Media-Culture ⁴ DNM

⁵ DBO. In the past decades a radically transformed attitude towards the world has developed

¹ DNM. This new attitude towards the world arises in tandem with the spread of the electronic media, especially in connection with the rapid and global spread of television and now the internet. Attendant on this worldwide spread of television and of the internet is a ² DBO fundamental twofold devaluation of "cultural memory" ³ DNM of the hierarchy of the classics, of what is canonical, and of the idea that historical memory can provide orientation in contemporary crises. The first devaluation of cultural memory is connected with the fact that the new media are bringing the huge inflation of a river of data that constantly demand our attention. ⁴ DBO. The concentration required to grasp the world of today and of the proximate future is increasing enormously. The "inhabiting" of the past and the shared "bringing to life" of the past are diminishing drastically. ⁵ DNM. The individual and shared activity of remembering and reconstructing the past, of citing traditional texts and of working on a formative continuum are being replaced by another type of "world formation" and "self-formation". The formula "detemporalization of the world and spatialization of the world" has been used in an attempt to grasp this process. ⁶ DNM. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* ⁷ DNM Blackwell 1990.

In any case, the extremely intensified and exhaustive collective attention to the present and the proximate future is suppressing the cultivation of "cultural memory." A continuous stimulation and excitement go hand in hand with the requisite attention to the present and the proximate future. This stimulation masks the fact that ⁸ DBO. The suppression of shared remembrance and of cultural memory leads to a "cooling off" of human life together. ⁹ DNM. The Heidelberg Egyptologist Jan Assmann has further developed insights of Claude Lévi-Strauss and distinguished between "'hot' and 'cold' memory". ¹⁰ DNM. Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* ¹¹ DNM Munich: Beck 1992; Cl. Lévi-Strauss, *Das wilde Denken* ¹² DNM Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1970, 270. "Cold memories" remove what is unique and extraordinary from past events. They remove the history-shaping power from events, and from the society that both is affected by these events and attributes these events to itself. Or they do not even allow this power to be developed. History from the perspective of "cold memory" is no longer "inhabited." ¹³ DNM. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* ¹⁴ DNM 70 a.o. It no longer a shared realm of experience amenable to ongoing formation. The media abound in stimulations for "cold" memory, since the media are continually offering past events and interconnected sets of events to our attention. The abundance of memories, the way in which they are presented, and the dominance of attention to today and tomorrow are responsible for a continual cooling off of remembrance, indeed for a continual expulsion from "inhabited" history.

The second devaluation of cultural memory intensifies and accelerates the first, and is in turn intensified by the first devaluation. ¹⁵ DBO. The media's presentation of the world calls the naive "unity of history" and the naive "unity of the lifeworld" radically into question. ¹⁶ DNM. Previously it was the preserve of science and art to call these cultural "self-evident assumptions" into question. ¹⁷ DNM. Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft, Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* ¹⁸ DNM Frankfurt: Suhrkamp; Wilfried Hülbe, *Dogmatik* ¹⁹ DNM Berlin 2nd ed. 2000, 168ff. Now so-called common sense also does so. The otherness, indeed the foreignness of forms of life, of holistic conceptions, and of appeals to tradition in other regions of the world becomes strikingly clear on a daily basis. Wonder is becoming routine. We are becoming familiar with the experiences of foreignness, with lifeworlds that we ourselves can not inhabit. The knowledge of the particular values and good impulses that emanate from

foreign traditions and lifeworlds leads not only to the enrichment of one's own lifeworld, but also to broken and distanced attitudes towards one's own lifeworld. These effects are heightened by mass tourism.

The way in which the media sensitize us to foreign lifeworlds and traditions transforms not only our relation to the world as a whole. It also leads to human beings becoming sensitive to differences of lifeworlds and of ways of connecting to tradition within their own culture. In the midst of what seems to be familiar, that which is foreign becomes evident. The distance to "foreigners" can diminish, while the distance to some relatives, neighbors, and members of one's "own people" can increase. This differentiated and complicated view of the world requires a new orientation. It no longer seems advisable to let one's own tradition and one's own "classics" exercise a monopoly in providing orientation. The situation seems to call for uncertainty, experiments with identity, caution in making commitments, and in any case a rejection of overly strong attachments to every form of "cultural heritage." If memory is to be cultivated at all then let it be as "cold" as possible!

This attitudinal change has repercussions for many other apparently self-evident cultural assumptions. And all of them affect religion deeply. The cultural evaluation of the relation between old and young is changing. The complex world with its rapidly changing "today and tomorrow" no longer requires primarily "life experience" and the calm, sober wisdom of maturity. It requires the ability to pick things up quickly and nimbly; it requires an intelligence capable of change and adaptation. The "old world" is relegated to specialists and museums. The real world belongs to youth!

But the concept of educational formation is also changing. ^{DBO}the educational ideal is shifting from the acquisition and cultivation of ordered knowledge to a skillful selectivity that is adequate to the situation and function in question. ^{DNM}The laptop with internet access seems to make it superfluous to have one's own familiar collection of books, and indeed for there to be libraries at all. When kindergarten and school--at least in Germany--expect children to memorize something, the requirement acquires a bad reputation as burdensome. Indeed it almost attains the level of bodily injury. ^{NIP}For the American situation, see Allen Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*. ^{DNM}Flexibility of attention must not be disturbed by tying memory down.

The worldwide spread of the electronic media is transforming views of the world and perceptions of reality. These transformations go hand in hand with a worldwide intensification and acceleration in the transport of both freight and persons. The world's conversion to automobiles and paved roads, the intensifications of maritime shipping and of rail transport, but especially the explosive development of air travel run parallel to the development of the electronic media. The two developments are mutually reinforcing. Both lead to an acceleration, intensification and globalization of economic developments. ^{DBO}the economy and the media appear as the leading factors in shaping the world and reality. ^{DNM}

The global spread of the electronic communications media and of the transportation system goes hand in hand with a triumphalistic development of new consumer technologies. New consumer technologies intensify the flow of economic communication, and at the same time increase the need for new economic goods. As economic communication intensifies, so does

electronic communication, which in turn increases the need for new technologies and economic goods. ^{DBO}the political system, the education system and the family must adjust themselves accordingly. Where they--with law and religion--oppose the dynamic of the market, they are put hopelessly on the defensive. A litany of laments has accompanied consumerism, the routinization of both parents working outside the home, and the attendant stress on families, the school system and the health care system--all developments that would lead to the destruction of the nuclear family and to the functionalization of the education system. ^{DNM}The religion and churches that had specialized in the religious stabilization of the nuclear family and had depended on the support of the classical education system tried helplessly to catch up to these developments. With each acceleration of the circulatory system of economy-technology-media, that religion and those churches--always a day late--lost influence and possibilities to play a formative role.

The global circulatory system of technology-economy-media is changing not only the worldview of individual human beings, along with their attention, their memory and their expectation, and their evaluation of tradition, age and education. ^{DBO}his global circulatory system has also changed the fixed orientation of individuals and of societal subsystems towards the nation-state and towards politics. ^{DNM}Religion and churches, politics and society have not only been required to experience the enormous weakening of historical orientation and of "hot" memory. They have also lost the dualistic worldview that had long been cultivated in phrases such as "church and state" or "church and society."

I wish I could conclude with strong words about how well Reformed theology is equipped to face the challenges of the media-culture and the constant weakening of cultural and canonic memory connected with it. From my experiences in Germany and North America I can not report encouraging perspectives. Your intention to make the topic of culture a topic in theology is--despite the difficulties and even the dangers we mentioned--an encouraging step in the right direction. Reformed theology, with or without calling itself a "public theology", was always interested in the legal and political dimensions of life. Today we will have to expand the scope. A broader social and cultural analysis is required if we want to remove the obstacles to our witness to God, and if we want to appreciate the treasures that are given to us in God's Word.