



“Making history for the coming generation” – on the theological logic of Russel Botman’s commitment to transformation

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Abstract

The late rector of Stellenbosch University, Russel Botman, was widely known for his commitment to transformation. In the first Memorial Lecture to commemorate his legacy, it is argued that he had already been committed to transformation from early on in his life as student, minister, church figure and theologian and that this commitment was based on what he described as his “theological logic.” This logic is then explained in terms of four key notions in his life and work, namely vocational spirituality, responsible discipleship, complex obedience, and hopeful agency. It is shown how he developed this logic already in his doctoral dissertation, in creative engagement with Dietrich Bonhoeffer. From this encounter grew his own conviction that transformation is making history for the coming generation.

Keywords

Russel Botman; Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Discipleship; Ethics of Responsibility; Hope; Transformation

1. On his theological logic

Since this is the First Memorial Lecture in honour of Russel Botman, it may be appropriate simply to listen again to his own voice, rather than selecting a theme from his life and work to develop further, like memorial lectures mostly do. His departure was so sudden, the memories are still so fresh and his legacy is so rich that it may be opportune simply to linger somewhat longer and to listen, remember and reflect some more.

Within university circles – in and around Stellenbosch, but also further afield in South Africa, on the African continent, and in a more global academic

world – he was well-known for his commitment to transformation. The same, however, had already been true long before he joined Stellenbosch and before he joined university management as vice-rector, rector and vice-chancellor, serving director of Higher Education South Africa (HESA, the representative body of public higher education institutions) and vice-president of the Association of African Universities. He did not develop his views on transformation when he became rector, but he became rector because of his commitment to transformation.

He had already been committed to transformation as ecumenical figure, both nationally as President of the South African Council of Churches and internationally, serving the ecumenical church in many capacities, but also as leading figure in URCSA and the earlier DRMC, as public leader, as local minister and as UWC student. He spoke of transformation from early on, believed in transformation and was committed to transformation for theological reasons.

In his dissertation, *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, he described this theological reasoning – in his typically playful way – as “theo-logic”, or simply theological logic.¹ Although he refrained from explicit theological language in his public speeches as rector, there is no doubt that his deepest convictions and commitments were the

1 Botman, HR 1994, *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 9; also in “Discipleship and Practical Theology: The Case of South Africa,” in *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 2000, 4, 231–242. The fuller quote reads: “It was with the advent of the *Confession of Belhar* (1986) of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa that I was confronted with the theo-logic in the idea of *following Christ*. It states that in a situation of enmity and injustice, God is revealed in a special way as the God of justice standing with those against whom the injustice is being done and God calls the church to stand where God is standing ... Its true epistemological significance stems from the fact that it made ethical commitment central to faith, confession, and the unity of the church. The *Confession of Belhar* is a witness to the fact that this church understood its political and ecclesiastical task as a matter of faithfulness in following Jesus of Nazareth. As such, praxeology received confessional status within the church.” It was clear that Botman’s own theological logic was deeply formed by the *Confession of Belhar* and by the motif of following, obedience, and embodiment of the church’s confession. He often said that *Belhar* should be read and understood from the back, from the conclusion in which Jesus Christ is confessed as Lord – to follow, even at the cost of suffering. For this reason he preferred the term praxeology – for the theological logic – because it combined praxis with logic, ethics with doctrine, life with thought, and obedience with faith. In the dissertation he therefore consistently used praxeology to describe his own views of theo-logic or theological logic.

self-same theological logic that developed in his early years of formation. He increasingly translated the theological language so that everyone could understand the argument, and he stopped quoting theological sources and influences, but those who knew his earlier work could immediately recognise the background.

It is for others to draw and debate the practical implications of his thought for transformation in academic and public life. As theologian, I only remind us of the theological logic informing and inspiring his commitment to transformation, by allowing himself to speak.²

2. Vocational spirituality

The opening words of his dissertation, submitted late 1993, explained that he was not pursuing doctoral studies “for the sake of research or for intellectual satisfaction,” but rather as a response to a call by Beyers Naudé that South African churches “should be much more aware of the need for a vision of a future community.” Since our past of disunity should not determine our future, churches needed research on the meaning of the gospel for this crucial moment in our history. His own research was such an attempt “to serve a community searching for vision regarding their future, asking what the gospel means to them today.”³

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- 2 Over the years he used the word “transformation” in innumerable ways and contexts, for example in an interesting essay on nation-building at the time of transition called “Managing Endings and Transforming Continuities,” in Villa-Vicencio, C and Niehaus, C (eds). *Many Cultures, One Nation: Beyers Naudé Festschrift*, Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1995, 152-162; in an essay on leadership and dealing with diversity called “Dealing with Diversity,” in Buchanan, D and Hendriks, J (eds). *Meeting the Future: Christian Leadership in South Africa*, Randburg: Knowledge Resources, 163-174; in a very informative essay where he summarized his own understanding of transformation (working extensively with Bonhoeffer) and then applied it to practical and institutional challenges for the URCSA, in “The New Quest for Ecclesial Forms: The Story and Challenge of the Uniting Reformed Church in South African Reflection,” *Practical Theology in South Africa*, 1996, 11 (1), 1-13; for one of the most comprehensive and clearest discussions, see his “Theology after Apartheid: Paradigms and Progress in South African Public Theologies,” in Alston, WM (ed.). *Theology in the Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Thomas W Gillespie*, 2000, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 36-51; equally innovative and instructive, “Discipleship and Practical Theology: The Case of South Africa.”
 - 3 *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, iv-vii, 1, 16. By the time he enrolled for doctoral studies he was already a well-established church leader, well-known and respected both nationally and internationally, and had already

He explained how his search for a topic began with an intuition to study “vocational spirituality” – a spirituality that could inform, sustain and inspire such a communal life of calling in South Africa at the time.⁴ This search led him to discipleship, as perhaps *the* most central form of Christian spirituality, which again led him to the German martyr-theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the christology at the heart of Bonhoeffer’s project.⁵

In short, during those crisis years, Botman found his own answer to the call for a vision of a future community in the following of Jesus Christ. For him this meant a return to christology, since he had already earlier studied the christology of the influential 20th century ecumenical theologian Hendrikus Berkhof during his Master’s studies. He then argued that for Berkhof the key christological question, different from the classical debates in history, was about the relation between salvation and history, about how Jesus Christ is present in history. Although he agreed with this way of phrasing

experienced major personal and public trauma. The doctoral project was therefore not the normal phase of a student continuing with further studies as part of an academic career, but a deliberate choice by a senior church and public figure to pursue theological study in order to find answers to challenging questions.

- 4 *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 43, footnote 128. The theme of vocation, call and calling runs consistently through the dissertation, but also appears in his later work, for example: “The most central quest in Calvinism lies in coming to terms with the calling of God within the concrete context,” in “Dutch’ and Reformed and ‘Black’ and Reformed in South Africa: A Tale of Two Traditions on the Move to Unity and Responsibility,” in Wells, RA (ed.) 1996, *Keeping Faith. Embracing the Tensions in Christian Higher Education*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 87; also “A Cry for Life in a Global Economic Era,” in Alston, WM and Welker, M (eds). *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, 2003, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 375-384.
- 5 He seldom used the term spirituality in his work, and almost never wrote about his own spirituality, except perhaps where he describes his own spirituality as a “confessional spirituality,” referring to the importance of the *Confession of Belhar* in his life, *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 9-10, 152-156: “I have admitted that I am bound to opt for a confessing position in describing the role of believers in a society in transformation. I am very much an offspring of the *Confession of Belhar* (1986). My study of Bonhoeffer underlined the significance of this notion. *Answering penultimate questions in the light of confessing ultimacy is indeed meaningful*. The focus on a responsible citizenship of a confessing nature should be intensified when the shadows of non-responsibility, non-cooperation, non-compromise and non-collaboration fall on the democratic fibre of society ... The confessing commitment of the *Confession of Belhar* (1986) to stand with the oppressed, exploited, victims and those against whom the injustices are directed will remain an important cornerstone of the *vocatio-spirituality* proposed here. In fact, in this sense it is a *confessing spirituality*”, 152, 155.

the question, he did not find Berkhof's own answers convincing.⁶ He now had the opportunity to return to this question by engaging Bonhoeffer.

For Bonhoeffer, the key question concerning Jesus Christ is no longer “how?” or “what?” questions, but a “who?” question, namely the question “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?,” which implies similar personal questions about us, namely “Who are we?” and “Whose are we?,” “For whom do we live?” and “Whom do we follow?” Botman would use such questions again and again to reformulate issues in his often surprising and challenging ways.⁷

He studied Bonhoeffer “as a theologian of transformation,”⁸ he said, calling his own study *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*. He described his dissertation as “an christological adventure with socio-ethical concerns in a changing South Africa” – with all three terms being important. It was deeply conscious of its context in a changing South Africa, it was born in socio-ethical concerns about the future, and it was – again expressed in his typically playful way – for him an christological adventure.⁹

It was no coincidence that he was drawn to the terminology of transformation. Several factors probably played a role in this choice, including the Pauline

6 Botman, HR 1984, *Jesus, nóg God, nóg mens? 'n Kritiese evaluering van die evolusionêre verbondmatige Christologie van H Berkhof*, unpublished Master's thesis, Bellville: Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland.

7 See particularly *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 80-94, although it runs like a continuous thread through much of his work, see for example also “Who is ‘Jesus Christ as Community’ for Us Today? The Quest for Community: A Challenge to Theology in South Africa,” *JTSA* March 1997, Vol 97, 30-38. All these questions obviously call for answers of discipleship, praxis, community and belonging. An interesting example was the way in which he turned the theme of the International Bonhoeffer Conference in Cape Town (are we still of any use?) around in his closing comments and asked “Is Bonhoeffer still of any use in South Africa?” by asking “To whom are we called to be of any use?,” in his “Afterword: Is Dietrich Bonhoeffer Still of any Use in South Africa, in De Gruchy, JW (ed.). *Bonhoeffer for a New Day: Theology in a Time of Transition*, 1997, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 366–372; for a very creative application, see “Anchored by a Tattoo? Globalization and Church Structures,” in Mateus, OP (ed.), *Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Times of Global Transformation*, 2004, Geneva: LWF & WARC, 61-67; finally, again in Princeton when receiving the Kuyper Prize in 2013, see “Dread, Hope and the African Dream: An Ecumenical Collage” (unpublished paper, available on web).

8 *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 174.

9 *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, vi.

ethics of the New Testament.¹⁰ Already in 1988 he meditated on the key passage in 1 Cor. 7:29-31 where Paul argues that believers should live “as if not” – should marry, work, possess, use this world “as if they are not possessed by these” – because, in Paul’s logic, in Christ “the form of this world is passing away.”¹¹ In words from Bonhoeffer’s *Ethics*, all these engagements are penultimate, not ultimate, indeed important, but not so important that their present form should claim and dominate, define and determine us, as if they possess us.¹² Pauline ethics is eschatological ethics, explained Botman, the form of this world is passing away, it is being transformed.

This places the Christian in a critical relationship to the ‘passing’ form of the world or the passing status quo. This critical relationship is known in theological circles as ‘critical distance’ or ‘critical reserve’; a Christian shall neither attempt to escape the realities of this status quo nor to accept it ... When the Christian says ‘no’ to the sinful world, the Christian simultaneously shouts ‘yes’ for the new creation that is becoming a visible reality in our midst and times.¹³

At the time in Reformed church circles in South Africa, this was a theological logic with explosive potential. Quoting his mentor JFF (Jaap)

10 See for example his theological logic in the meditation on Romans 12:9-21 in Botman, HR, “Rom 12: 9-21,” *Woord teen die lig III/1. Riglyne vir prediking oor vrede*, Kaapstad: Lux Verbi, 1990, 167-172.

11 Botman, HR & Smit, DJ, “1 Corinthians 7:29-31 ‘To live ... as if it were not!’”, JTSA 1988, Vol 65, 73-79. He would often again refer to this meditation and to the lasting influence of these ideas in his own life and thought, see for example his “Theology after Apartheid: Paradigms and Progress in South African Public Theologies,” 47; also Smit, DJ, *Om te leef asof nie. Meditasies opgedra aan Russel Botman*, Wellington: Bybel Media, 2014.

12 See especially Bonhoeffer, D 1978, “The Last Things and the Things before the Last,” *Ethics*, London: SCM, 98-160: in the new edition and translation, Bonhoeffer, *Ethics. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 6, 2005, Minneapolis: Fortress, Clifford Green, editor of the English Edition, 146-170.

13 “To live ... as if it were not!”, 77. On occasion he would motivate the longing for transformation in terms of the “no”, the suffering and the negative that people experience, but more often he would argue that the ultimate need for transformation is the “yes”, the promises and the positive, also already experienced, in which Christ takes form in reality and the present form passes away.

Durand,¹⁴ he explained that the Christian ethical stance over against the status quo is therefore based on the realisation that there is nothing absolute or definitive in or about the status quo because in Jesus Christ, on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we have been allowed to see that ‘the form of this world is passing.’ For Christians, therefore, “whatever exists is continuously relativized by that which can be and that which must be and that which undoubtedly shall be,” he said, in a phrase that he would repeat four times in this meditation, as a kind of motto.¹⁵

This motto was indeed an expression of the theological logic ultimately behind his life and work of transformation. In Bonhoeffer he would find this conviction not only affirmed, but indeed developed in penetrating ways. Even the terms – form, formation and transformation – were central for Bonhoeffer. In his *Ethics*, essays written in prison, he wrote about “ethics as formation” and explained how Christ himself takes form in history and in the world, through the formation and transformation of the church,

14 He often acknowledged that Durand played an important role in his own formation and particularly in his theological logic. In many of his speeches and essays he recounted one specific incident in a class at UWC that had a lasting effect on his theological identity and life, when Durand challenged them to reflect about the theological reasons behind their opposition against apartheid, see for example Botman, HR, “A Testimony on the Decisions of the Dutch Reformed Church,” in Reamonn, P (ed). *Farewell to Apartheid? Church Relations in South Africa*, Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1994, 42-47; also in his “Narrative Challenges in a Situation of Transition,” in Botman, HR and Petersen, R (eds) 1996, *To Remember and to Heal. Theological and Psychological Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation*, Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 39-40; again in “Gereformeerdeheid en die Belydenis van Belhar (1986), in Boesak, WA & Fourie, PJ (eds) 1998, *Vraagtekens oor Gereformeerdeheid*, Belhar: LUS, 94-111; so too in “A Cry for Life in a Global Economic Era”; “Gospel and Culture: Circles of Embrace or Lines of Exclusion,” in Oduyoye, MA and Vroom, HM (eds). *One Gospel – Many Cultures: Case Studies and Reflections on Cross-Cultural Theology*, 2003, Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi BV, 149-171; as well as in “Barmen to Belhar: A Contemporary Confessing Journey,” *NGTT* 2006, Vol 47 (1 & 2), 240-249. Of special importance was the plenary address which he gave to the Synod of the Reformed Church in America, in Pella, Iowa, on June 10, 2007, in which he also spoke at length about his personal journey with *Belhar* as “a message of hope”, under the theme of “our common future,” see “The Confession of Belhar and Our Common Future,” unpublished but available on websites. In his own contribution to the *Festschrift* for Durand on the occasion of his 75th birthday, he again included this memory, see “Oor eenheid, geregtigheid en versoening by Jaap Durand,” in *Discerning God’s Justice in Church, Society and Academy. Festschrift for JfF Durand*, Conradie, E & Lombard, C (eds), 2009, Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 51-58.

15 Botman, HR & Smit, DJ, “1 Corinthians 7:29-31 ‘To live ... as if it were not!’”, *JTSA* 1988, 65, 76-79.

Christ existing as community in the world.¹⁶ Transformation meant for Bonhoeffer that the form, the *Gestalt*, of Christ was taking form in reality itself, where the form of the world was passing.

Botman's dissertation became an in-depth investigation how these views developed in Bonhoeffer's life and works, from his earliest academic theses, through his *Lectures on Christology* and his study of the Sermon on the Mount called *The Cost of Discipleship*, to his essays on *Ethics* composed in the dark days of imprisonment to his posthumously published *Letters and Papers from Prison*, although it may be even better to describe his dissertation as a deeply personal engagement, an existential encounter and sometimes struggle with Bonhoeffer's life and work, with a view to the calling of the church in his own times. In an uncommon move for a dissertation, he even concluded with a section on "Bonhoeffer and I!"¹⁷

Years later, speaking about the church's role in the public arena under the title "Ethics and Socio-Political Transformation," he still proposed "that we return to Bonhoeffer's 'ethics of formation,' because Bonhoeffer 'discovered the link between ethics and transformation.'" The link is that Christ himself is taking on form in this world, in and through us.¹⁸

For Botman this was a key insight. Transformation is not about our plans and our activities. We are not the ones transforming the world. Transformation is not about human initiatives and human achievements. Rather, for Botman as for Bonhoeffer, transformation meant that in Christ the form of this world is passing away and Christ's own form is taking shape in community. Precisely this was his objection against many other proposals that were presented at the time for social and political renewal, for liberation and reconstruction.¹⁹ He found them all too closed and too

16 Bonhoeffer, D *Ethics. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 6, 2005, Minneapolis: Fortress, Clifford Green, editor of the English Edition, 76-102.

17 *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 174.

18 See his "Ethics and Socio-Political Transformation: Towards a Model for Partnerships in the Public Arena," *Scriptura* 72 (2000), 97-104, in which he uses the argument of his dissertation again and applies it to new questions and challenges.

19 In Part One of *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation* he discusses and critiques several other theological proposals in South Africa at the time, and in the following years he would often return to these discussions, in order to clarify his choice for a theology of transformation over against these other possibilities.

self-assured, too certain and too mechanical, too legal and too activist. For him, as for Bonhoeffer, transformation was Christ taking on form and our proper response was rather one of discipleship, one of faith and obedience, one of responsibility.

3. Responsible discipleship

For Bonhoeffer, responsibility was also a central notion and also for him it had everything to do with the future. His ethics is often described as an ethics of responsibility.²⁰ A well-known quote from his *Letters and Papers from Prison* illustrates his views very well. He is writing about success, answering – for himself, in prison – the question what a successful life really means.

The ultimate question that responsible people ask themselves is not, how can I extricate myself heroically from the affair? But, how is the coming generation to live? It is only in this way that fruitful solutions can arise, even if for the time being they are humiliating. In short it is easier by far to act on abstract principles than from concrete responsibility. The rising generation will always instinctively discern which of the two we are acting upon. For it is their future which is at stake.²¹

For Botman, an ethics of transformation is an ethics of concrete responsibility, and it is hard to describe his own views better than with these words from Bonhoeffer, which he often quoted.²² He was particularly

20 For this reason he had deep appreciation for thinkers who also developed an ethics of responsibility, like Paul Lehmann, a friend of Bonhoeffer, and particularly like Wolfgang Huber, a German ethicist, leading international Bonhoeffer scholar and later also church leader whose person and work played an important role in Botman's own life.

21 Bonhoeffer, D 1971, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, London: SCM Press, 138-139. Botman often used this quote in his own arguments, for example "Die bevryding van Kain? Etiese nadenke oor die dader in die versoeningsproses," in *Scriptura* 69(1), 111–124.

22 See for example the conclusion to his argument in "The Offender and the Church," in Cochrane, J., De Gruchy, JW and Martin, S (eds). *Facing the Truth: South African Faith Communities and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, 1999, Cape Town: David Philip, 126-131.

intrigued by the notion of the coming generation and their future.²³ In fact, for this purpose he would use a different quote from Bonhoeffer in which one probably finds the heart of Botman's own beliefs.

He dedicated his dissertation, with remarkable words, to their own children and all the other children who will know apartheid only by hearsay. These remarkable words were actually his own creative adaption of a reference which Bonhoeffer made, almost in passing, in a lecture on ethics in Barcelona, in 1929. It was as if these words captured Botman's heart and mind.²⁴

When he would, decades later, as rector often plead for a mind-shift “from success to significance,”²⁵ perhaps it was this plea by Bonhoeffer – for concrete responsibility, looking for significant contributions and fruitful solutions now, so that the generation to whom the future belongs will be able to live, even if such contributions may seem humbling to ourselves, rather than longing for our own success – which still motivated his own rhetoric?

For Botman, these words indeed encapsulated his own passion. He cared about the future of the coming generation, about the challenge what we should do now so that “the generation to whom the future belongs” would

23 See for example “Who is ‘Jesus Christ as Community’ for Us Today? The Quest for Community: A Challenge to Theology in South Africa,” *JTSA* March 1997, Vol 97, 35; also: “We cannot escape our theological responsibility to ‘those to whom the future belongs’ in obedience to God. The very existence of the generation of the future constitutes an ‘ethos of responsibility’ defined in terms of the future. The theological quest of any generation must never forget the generation to whom the future belongs,” in “‘Dutch’ and Reformed and ‘Black’ and Reformed in South Africa,” 103-104; similarly in “Afterword: Is Dietrich Bonhoeffer Still of any Use in South Africa,” 372; also in “Towards the Embrace of Political Reconciliation,” *The Way: Review of Contemporary Christian Spirituality*, 1999, 39(4):338–348; again in “Human Dignity and Economic Globalisation,” *NGTT*, Vol 45 (1&2), 326.

24 Bonhoeffer was referring to different populations groups in Germany at the time, including a group of younger people who knew only by hearsay about the First World War, see *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 55. This is a quote from Bonhoeffer, D “Basic Questions of a Christian Ethics,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Barcelona, Berlin, New York 1928-1931. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 10*, Editor of the English Edition Clifford J Green, 2008, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 359-378.

25 Botman, HR, “A Multi-Cultural University with a Pedagogy of Hope for Africa. Speech on the Occasion of his Installation,” 2007, unpublished, but available on websites.

be able to live – in a better world than the one we knew and still know. For him, this was the challenge of an ethics of responsibility, an ethics of transformation, an ethics of responsible discipleship.

It was clear to him, from early on, that such responsible discipleship takes place in the world, in public life, in politics, in the political sphere, also in the relationship between church and state. Like many other church leaders and theological figures in the struggle, he was therefore searching for the proper forms for such responsible discipleship in the world of politics, power and public life.

Learning from Bonhoeffer, he expressed this search in the form of questions regarding the responsible relationship between being disciples and being citizens.²⁶ Particularly in the early years of transition to a democratic society, the conviction that Christians were called not only as disciples but precisely *as* disciples also called as responsible citizens was an appealing and constructive suggestion to many. Botman was a leading voice in this regard and when he was accepted as Fellow at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton he formulated the theme for his research project during his stay as “Discipleship and Citizenship.”²⁷

Years later, looking back on his own life when he received the prestigious Abraham Kuyper Prize in Princeton, he told the story how he realized, during their first week at the CTI in Princeton, working in the library, that this was the wrong theme, that his topic and his question were too small, that the world in which disciples are called to an ethics of responsible

26 See for example *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 118-124.

27 At the time, he was also interested in questions of nation-building, and several of his contributions raised the issue, but together with his growing insight that the challenges were broader than merely South African, he increasingly wrote less about nation-building and citizenship. For some of these earlier essays, see for example “Managing Endings and Transforming Continuities,” in Villa-Vicencio and Niehaus, *Many Cultures, One Nation*, 152-162; “‘Dutch’ and Reformed and ‘Black’ and Reformed in South Africa”; his paper at the International Bonhoeffer Conference in Cape Town, in which he actually entertained the notion of “discipleship as nation building,” published as “Who is ‘Jesus Christ as Community’ for us today? The Quest for Community: A Challenge to Theology in South Africa,” *JTSA* March 1997, Vol 97, 30-38; extremely interesting and clear was the short paper on “Towards a World-Formative Christianity in South Africa,” in Guma, M and Milton, LL (eds). *An African Challenge to the Church in the 21st Century*, 1997, Cape Town: Salty Print, 72-79.

transformation is much larger and much more complex than merely politics, church-state relations and citizenship.²⁸

The challenge was not how to be church and citizens in South Africa, but how to be human in our globalising world.²⁹ It was in these years that he would increasingly think about and often speak and write about the *oikos*.³⁰ *Oikos* literally means household and it is the root still found in words like ecumenism (for the whole church of the whole world), economy (for the laws of the household, the ways in which the household is administered and cared for) and ecology (for the integrated and mutually dependent life-systems of the whole of reality, intimately belonging together as one). In the Greek New Testament the term is well-known for the household of God and in fact for the divine economy, by which the Triune God administers,

28 See his acceptance speech, “Dread, Hope and the African Dream: An Ecumenical Collage,” 18 April 2013, available on the internet. See also an earlier account in “A Cry for Life in a Global Economic Era,” 379-381.

29 From early on, he was in agreement with the Calvinist philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff who described the Reformed faith and tradition as “world-formative Christianity,” see *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 151-152: “The focus on formation made by Bonhoeffer coincides with Wolterstorff’s findings regarding the nature of Christianity ... The Reformation of the sixteenth century ... brought, what Wolterstorff calls, world-formative Christianity onto centre stage. He then proceeded to argue elaborately and convincingly in favour of the idea that Christianity is by nature a world-formative religion. Bonhoeffer’s ‘who?’ question is a world-formative question.” See also Botman, “Towards a World-Formative Christianity in South Africa,” 72-79.

It is no coincidence that Botman studied the work of Abraham Kuyper after he made this discovery in Princeton, since Kuyper was a formative influence on Wolterstorff and an important example of this kind of world-formative understanding of the faith, see for example “‘Dutch’ and Reformed and ‘Black’ and Reformed in South Africa: A Tale of Two Traditions on the Move to Unity and Responsibility,” in Wells, RA (ed) *Keeping Faith*, 85-105; in most detail in “Is Blood Thicker than Justice? The Legacy of Abraham Kuyper for Southern Africa,” in Lugo LE (ed). *Religion, pluralism and public life: Abraham Kuyper’s legacy for the twenty-first century*, 2000, 342–359. Michigan: Eerdmans, 342-359; also in “Belhar and the White Dutch Reformed Church – Changes in the Dutch Reformed Church: 1974-1990,” in Weisse, W and Anthonissen, C (eds), *Maintaining Apartheid or Promoting Change? The Role of the Dutch Reformed Church in a Phase of Increasing Conflict in South Africa*, 2004, Münster: Waxmann, 123-134 (= *Scriptura* 76 (2000), 33-42).

30 For a good introduction to his thought, see for example Botman, HR, “The *Oikos* in a Global Economic Era. A South African Comment,” in Cochrane, JR & Klein, B (eds), *Sameness and Difference*, 2000, Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 269-280. He did use the notion of household already in earlier essays, for example “Dealing with Diversity,” 167-169, but now he developed it more fully and in greater detail.

cares for, blesses and saves the whole of creation, although this root is often completely translated away in modern languages.

In theological circles, Botman became one of the leading thinkers who rediscovered and popularised this notion, arguing for an ethics of discipleship as responsible transformation in the ecumenical church, the global economy and the threatened ecology. His many and lasting contributions in this regard are well-known and widely respected.

4. Complex obedience

For him, however, the question how the coming generation, the generation to whom the future belongs, will live, now suddenly became much more challenging and complex than it might have seemed before.

In his speeches he now started to argue for what he called “complex obedience” and in his activities, in his planning and his initiatives, he started to work for such a complex obedience – but once more this was a notion that he had already developed much earlier, in his dissertation and in his engagement with Bonhoeffer.³¹ In fact, he coined the phrase himself, in order to describe “what I discovered in his *Ethics*,” namely that Bonhoeffer also developed from a position of “simple obedience” to one of “complex obedience.”³²

In other words, the complex obedience, which became such a key instrument in Botman’s endeavours as university manager to involve and inspire the wide-ranging knowledge of the whole academic body across the spectrum of faculties and disciplines, had its roots once again in the theological logic of his earlier formation.

He showed an often surprising appreciation and respect for the complexity of life – the complexity of people, their biographies, personalities,

31 For an extensive discussion of his understanding of obedience, see his “Gereformeerdheid en die Belydenis van Belhar (1986)” in Boesak, WA & Fourie, PJA (eds), *Vraagtekens oor Gereformeerdheid?*, Belhar: LUS, 1988, 94-111.

32 “Although Bonhoeffer continued to speak of obedience as abandonment to God, he actually moved from simple obedience to, what I call, complex obedience in his *Ethics*. This is what I discovered in his *Ethics*,” *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 112.

backgrounds, motivations, and actions; the complexity of conversations, meetings, encounters, occasions, and their tensions and possibilities; the complexity of groups and interactions, of social and public life, of politics and power; the complexity of reality, of the world in which we live with its opportunities and challenges, studied by so many disciplines and sciences, with their rich diversity of insights, contributions and achievements; yet also the complexity of personal human life itself, of suffering and joy, of hardships and happiness, of failure and flourishing, and therefore also of faith and obedient following of Christ.

For this reason, he so often surprised many who knew him or worked with him with his openness and his ability to overcome tensions and conflicts, to listen and to accommodate, to include and to welcome. He refused to let his actions be determined by the past and its simple solutions and hard lines of division, he was always looking for a complex obedience, that would open new avenues and make new futures possible.

For this reason, also, he was so enthusiastic about the constructive and transformative role that the complex world of scholarship, research and science could play. This was the reason why he was willing to become vice-rector and rector. He was convinced of the transformative potential of education, scholarship and research with a view to the future.³³

33 He would often underline, in different ways that transformation is about new futures and not merely about redressing the past, see for example, “Broad transformation is itself not a panacea. At some point the realisation emerges that it must be followed by deep transformation. The country must also seek a deepening of the transformation so that the dignity is restored to those who struggle to make a living in the remotest village of our country. It points to the need for a deepening of equality so that the daughter of the farm worker would have the same opportunity to success as the son of the farmer,” in his “Human Dignity and Economic Globalisation,” *NGTT*, Vol 45 (1&2), 320, although he would often use this image of the daughter of the farm worker and the son of the farmer who should have opportunities to attain the same future.

In the Installation Speech as rector, for example, he said that it was his endeavour to gear up the University to be an institution in Africa which was not only significantly different – because that was indeed also crucially important, as prerequisite – but significantly better, and he qualified this by adding “as viewed against our commitment with regard to the future of the people of our country and the continent.” Making a difference to the future of the country and the continent was the real purpose, the real content of the vision and the real purpose of the pedagogy of hope. The internal transformation of the university as institution was crucially important, but in itself it was not the purpose of the transformation, because it was still necessary to redress the

One only has to read some of his many public speeches as rector to get a sense of this almost child-like enthusiasm. This is why he was so excited about the University of Stellenbosch's 2000 Strategic Framework for the Turn of the Century and Beyond, why he appealed to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope*,³⁴ why the University Council decided to help pursue some of the United Nations Millennium Developmental Goals, why the University launched the HOPE Project in July 2010,³⁵ and why he could describe all of this as "a dignity-enriched humanism essential for the transformation project at a time when it is in danger of losing its humanist core."³⁶ In his own words, this was "science in the service of society" – and because our global and ecological society is so complex, the obedience needed to

wrong of the past, while the real purpose of transformation was the new and better future for all, especially the coming generations, on the whole continent and globally.

Speaking during an Annual Gala Dinner of the Stellenbosch Business School in March 2011 on "Social Responsibility and Relevance in Higher Education" (unpublished, available on website), he stressed that the agendas should not be determined by the past, but by the future: "We are not in the past anymore ... And that's why it is wrong to try and fix what is wrong in the present by placing too much emphasis on the past. We have to be forward-thinking. We have to try and build the kind of society we want to become and not try to reengineer the past ... And that is where the HOPE Project comes from. It is essentially the practical realisation of the University's moral decision to break with the past and help build a better future for everyone ... We realised that as one of Africa's leading universities, it was our duty to use our strengths – our academic excellence and cutting-edge research – to be of service to society ... We want to be seen to have played a role in realising this vision. ... Now is the right time for hope. Future generations deserve nothing less."

- 34 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, London: Bloomsbury, 1994, is a reworking of his earlier *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum, 1970/1982 (with a foreword by the Princeton theologian Richard Shaull).
- 35 This story has often been told in many different policy statement and speeches, many of them available on the internet, including for example Botman, HR, "Hope in Africa. The Role of Universities in Times of Political Transition, particularly in the Context of Democratisation," Talloires Network Leaders Conference, Madrid, 14-16 June 2011; also in "Taking Africa beyond the MDGs. The Role of Higher Education in Development," in Wilkinson, R & Hulme, D (eds), *The Millennium Development Goals and Beyond. Global Development after 2015*, London: Routledge, 2012, 209-224; also in the clear and instructive overview in Botman, HR, "The Case for the Relevant University," *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 25 (1), 14-21, in which many of these ideas are helpfully woven together, until the last words: "By using science in the service of society, we can help make the world a better place. Future generations deserve nothing less," 21; see also his "Transforming Pedagogical Values," Speech at the World Innovation Summit for Education, Doha, Qatar, December 2010.
- 36 See his very instructive contribution to the STIAS Humanist Project called "A Dignity-Enriched Humanism," in *The Humanist Imperative*, De Gruchy, JW (ed), Stellenbosch: Sun Press & STIAS, 2011, 243-246.

serve the future of this *oikos* could only be such a complex, communal and collaborative obedience.

For this reason, also, he often defined transformation as “making history for the coming generation.”³⁷ This description also dates back to the theological logic of the dissertation – although he would continue to use these words as rector without any reference to theology.

5. Hopeful agency

At the heart of this was his theological understanding of hope. Again, it took shape in his engagement with Bonhoeffer. He often quoted from a meditation by Bonhoeffer called “Thy Kingdom Come.” He was particularly fascinated by two sections.

No-one can pray for the kingdom ... who thinks up a kingdom for themselves in terms of boldly conceived utopias, of dreams and hopes, who live for their own world-view and know a thousand programs and prescriptions by which they would like to cure the world. None of us know what it is we really want.³⁸

Again and again he would repeat these words by Bonhoeffer.³⁹ The hope revealed in Christ and the prayer for Christ’s reign should never be equated with any human projects, programs and prescriptions, identified with our own dreams and hopes. When Botman was invited as fellow to an international research project in Atlanta where inter-disciplinary and global perspectives on hope were shared and debated, he again used these

37 “The ultimate question for the responsible person is a commitment to history: how is the coming generation to live? Thus the central quest for discipleship is now expressed in transformational terms. Transformation means making history for the coming generation,” *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 120-121.

38 *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 100. This is a quotation from Bonhoeffer, D “Thy Kingdom Come,” in *Berlin 1932-1933. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 12*, ed. of English Edition L Rasmussen, 2009, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 285-297, see 289.

39 See for example “The *Oikos* in a Global Economic Era. A South African Comment,” in Cochrane, JR & Klein, B (eds), *Sameness and Difference*, 273.

words as motto for his own contribution with the title “Hope as the Coming Reign of God.”⁴⁰

Bonhoeffer’s concluding words in this meditation were equally important to him. He closed his dissertation with a long section from the meditation and later often again used this reference. It was so central to his life project that it is worthwhile quoting at length.

I want to conclude with the last words of Bonhoeffer’s sermon on “Thy Kingdom Come”. He reminds people that are in situations of transformation and reorientation about a strange story from the Old Testament. Jacob fled from his home and lived for many years in a foreign country in a state of enmity with his brother. Then the urge to return home and to his brother became insistent. He discovered later that it was only a small river that separated him from his brother. As he prepared to cross the river, he was stopped. A stranger wrestled with him. From this struggle a blessing was born: the sunrise!

“Then the sun rises on Jacob, and he proceeds into the Promised Land, limping because his thigh had been put out of joint. The way is clear; the dark door to the land of promise had been broken open. The blessing has come from out of the curse, and now the sun shines upon him.

That the way of all of us into the land of promise leads through the night; that we also enter it as those who are perhaps curiously scarred from the struggle with God, the struggle for his kingdom and his grace; and that we enter the land of God and of our brother (and sister) as limping warriors – all these things we Christians have in common with Jacob. And we know that the sun is destined also for us, and this knowledge allows us to bear with patience the time of wandering and waiting and believing that is imposed upon us.

40 The invitation was to be part of the Campbell Scholars for 2000, together with people like Walter Brueggemann, Douglas John Hall, Damayanthi Niles, Ofelia Ortega and Janos Pasztor, on the theme “Mission as Hope in Action.” Botman delivered an initial paper on “South Africa and the Confession of Belhar: A Contemporary Confessing Journey toward Mission,” and a final contribution on “Hope as the Coming Reign of God.” Both were published in Brueggemann, W (ed.), *Hope for the World. Mission in a Global Context*, 2001, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, respectively 31-34 and 69-82.

But beyond Jacob, we know something else. We know it is not we who must go; we know that He comes to us ... That is why we pray, “Thy kingdom come to us”.⁴¹

In these words, many of the central themes of Botman’s theological logic are woven together.⁴²

Particularly after his participation in the project in Atlanta – of which the outcome was published as *Hope for the World* – hope increasingly became the central motif in his life and work. He used it as theme for his inaugural lecture as professor in Stellenbosch,⁴³ he taught a master’s module in social ethics at UWC and at UPE on “imagining social hope”, he spoke on hope for the city when he addressed church leaders on turning the tide in Cape Town,⁴⁴ he spoke on hope when he addressed the General Council of the WARC in Accra,⁴⁵ he spoke on rejoicing in hope during an international consultation on Reformed scholarship,⁴⁶ the list of speeches and papers on hope during these years is endless – and then came the phase of his life in university management, where he developed his pedagogy of hope and

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- 41 *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 234-235. This is a quotation from Bonhoeffer, D “Thy Kingdom Come,” in *Berlin 1932-1933. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 12*, editor of English Edition Rasmussen, L, 2009, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 296-297.
- 42 He would often return to this quotation, in different contexts and arguments, see for example “Narrative Challenges in a Situation of Transition,” in Botman, HR and Petersen, R (eds), *To Remember and to Heal*, where he spoke of “the rising sun of reconciliation,” 42-43; also “Towards the Embrace of Political Reconciliation,” 347-348.
- 43 “The End of Hope or New Horizon of Hope? An Outreach of Those in Africa who Dare to Hope,” Inaugural Address: Prof H Russel Botman, February 2001, Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch; also in *NGTT* 2002, 43 (1&2), March and June, 22-31.
- 44 “Turning the Tide of the City: An Ecumenical Vision of Hope,” *NGTT*, 2004, Vol 45 (3&4), 508–517. In this keynote speech to the Conference of Churches in the Western Cape entitled “Turning the Tide of the City” he interpreted the moral crisis of the city as in fact a crisis of hope. Hopelessness, he said, is the mother of apathy and dependency. He then made proposals for recovering a spirituality of “social hope,” once again telling the story of 1 Cor. 7:29-31 and saying that “transformative living is living in the presence of the future inaugurated by Jesus Christ,” 513.
- 45 “Globalisation’s Threat to Human Dignity and Sustainability” at the WARC 24th General Council in Accra, Ghana, unpublished paper.
- 46 “Rejoice in Hope: The Bible and the Current Crisis of Despair,” in Alston, WM Jr and Welker, M (eds). *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity II: Biblical Interpretation in the Reformed Tradition*, 2007, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 66-73.

initiated the Hope Project and searched for concrete ways to embody this theological logic.

Meditating on Paul's description of the triad of faith, hope and love in 1 Cor. 13, he could argue that in some historical contexts faith is foregrounded, in some historical moments love is foregrounded, but in some historical situations hope should be foregrounded – and that this was the case in our global world today.⁴⁷

For him, the logic of this transformative hope meant that it was this-worldly hope over against all forms of other-worldliness; it was empowering hope over against all forms of despair; and it was modest and self-critical hope over against all forms of false hope. All three these characteristics of transformative hope were of importance to him.

The fact that it was this-worldly hope meant for him that it should not lead to idle waiting⁴⁸ and become a form of escapism, but rather that it should inform and inspire concrete actions, practical engagement in the

47 See "Dread, Hope and the African Dream: An Ecumenical Collage": "Within a *kairos* of dread we need to shuffle around the triad once more, we now need hope."

48 See for example "Rejoice in Hope," where he appeals to Bonhoeffer (with Calvin and Barth) to make this point, "Always, give account of the hope that is in you, because that hope is not your possession – it belongs to the world, it is hope for the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls us to distinguish between the myth and the hope of redemption. The myth of redemption presents the resurrection in a mythological way, which has real meaning only after death. Such a claim allows death to draw the boundary for Christian hope to be realized. Redemption, indeed, means redemption from cares, distress, fears, sin and death, but it has effect only after the grave (death as perimeter) in another world (called heaven), in another time (called eternity) for one's soul. This mythological understanding of the meaning of redemption and liberation is less than biblical. 'The difference between the Christian hope as resurrection and the mythological hope,' states Bonhoeffer, 'is that the former sends a person back to their own life on earth in a wholly new way ...'", 72.

fullness of human life,⁴⁹ hopeful agency in the utterly serious realities of

49 This issue was of extreme importance, both for him and already for Bonhoeffer. At stake was the typical Protestant concern regarding faith and works, and the self-critical awareness that the stress on obedience, discipleship, sanctification, calling, and agency may in fact threaten grace and become meritorious. This led Bonhoeffer, looking back later in life, to question whether it had indeed been wise of him to write *The Cost of Discipleship*. In the case of Botman, he was extremely conscious of this theme by the time of the dissertation, and he was struggling with the relationship between faith and obedience right through the whole document. In later years he would often return to this theme, sometimes with very bold formulations.

Commenting on the *Confession of Belhar* he could for example claim that “its true significance stems from the fact that it made the ethical commitment to justice central to faith, confession, and the unity of the church. The Confession of Belhar is a witness to the fact that this church understood its political and ecclesiastical task as a matter of faithfulness in following Jesus of Nazareth.” For this reason he disagreed with other commentators who claimed that Belhar was about ecclesiology, since for him it was about nothing less than the knowledge of Godself, “To my mind it is theology (the contextual question of God) as it relates to Christology (the contextual question of Jesus Christ) that forms the central matter of the Confession of Belhar. Indeed, this Christological focus is related to the issue of church unity, but the latter does not form the center. The actual dynamic of the Confession of Belhar is the establishment of a direct connection between the reconciling, uniting, and liberating acts of God in the praxeology of the believers ... It is my understanding that Belhar must be heard as a herald of the deed (praxis) and not as an affirmation of an orthodoxy. The final word of the confession is not about ‘the right belief.’ The ultimate language of Belhar is the language of obedience and the following of Jesus of Nazareth (discipleship) ... The call to discipleship is praxeological in intent and content. The conflict is wrongly regarded as the struggle between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. The direct biblical relationship between faith and praxis subverts such juxtapositioning. However, from the interrelatedness of faith and praxis emerge the doxological needs to put it in words,” in “‘Dutch’ and Reformed and ‘Black’ and Reformed in South Africa, 91–93.

This was also the reason why he preferred the term “praxeology” (especially at the time of the dissertation) to describe his own theological logic. It underlined for him the intimate relation between praxis and the knowledge of faith. This conviction also came to the fore in other interesting ways. He served, for example, as the Reformed co-chairperson of the dialogue commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. After the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was signed between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, the Methodist and Reformed communions were also asked to join. The Reformed commission, however, decided against that. Botman also delivered a paper during the consultation, called “Should the Reformed join in?” in which he argued – referring to “the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s strong argument for a close relationship between the doctrine of justification and discipleship” that it would be a scandal to postpone discussions on the relationship between justification and justice, treating the latter as merely a matter of ethical application. It is a pity that the Joint Declaration did not learn from earlier discussions that the separation of doctrine from ethics breaks a connection which should never be broken, he claimed. “To affirm a doctrinal statement that relinquishes the *doctrinal* connection between justice and justification would be a betrayal of everything that Christianity has learned about justification after Auschwitz and apartheid,” he said. This connection is rooted

the penultimate.⁵⁰

The fact that it was empowering hope was for him of great importance. He often warned against despair.⁵¹ He could ignore negativity and pessimism

in the Reformed tradition, he argued, and, quoting John de Gruchy, claimed that “in Reformed faith, grace is ‘liberating grace’” and “liberating grace, the evangelical core of Reformed theology, remains at the centre of the ferment created by the gospel, it remains the motivating power for prophetic witness and struggle,” Botman HR “Should the Reformed Join In?,” *Reformed World* 2002, Vol 52/1, 12-17, especially 15-16.

- 50 This logic has major implications for Botman’s views on our responsibility regarding socio-ethical issues like finding freedom, peace-making, pursuing restorative justice, practicing reconciliation, attaining sustainable development, working against climate change and ecological destruction, striving for visible church unity, giving and receiving forgiveness, making poverty history, serving humanity and human flourishing, respecting human dignity and protecting human rights. He spoke and wrote on all these issues, and again and again the same theological logic was applied to demonstrate the concrete implications.

For example, reflecting on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s work, he considered the potential of reconciliation as “a liberating metaphorical device” and said, “The pregnant meaning of the word itself aroused hope, gave birth to prayers for the end of apartheid in the interest of a reconciled future,” “Narrative Challenges in a Situation of Transition,” in Botman, HR and Petersen, R (eds) 1996, *To Remember and to Heal*. See also his paper on “Justice that Restores: How Reparation Must be Made,” *Track Two: Constructive approaches to community and political conflict*, 1997, 6 (3&4), 17, 38.

Yet another illustration of his theological logic in this regard may suffice, from his meditation on Rom. 12:9-21 and his comments concerning (eschatological) peace and (historical) peace-making. Referring amongst others to Bonhoeffer, he argues: “Vrede is ten diepste ’n eskatologiese begrip. Die Gees omskep die eskatologie in ’n sosiale etiek deur op ons lewens beslag te lê en sy vrug te laat voortbring. As sodanig is vrede nie ’n saak wat deur ons gewen moet word nie. Intendeel, dit verteenwoordig ons roeping in ’n saak wat in Jesus Christus reeds gewen is ... As sodanig is die kerk se vredespoegings en -inisiatiewe ten diepste die navolging van Jesus ... Op grond van hierdie geloof praat ons van die *hoop* as teologiese aangeleentheid en nie as ongekwalifiseerde antropologiese of sosiale vooruitgang nie. Die hoop op vrede wat ons reeds toekom en ook heerlik op ons afkom, sny die berustende konformisme af, bewaar ons van idealistiese aktivisme en roep ons om onself daaraan oor te gee en om dan ’n transformerende lewenswyse te beoefen,” Botman, HR, “Rom 12:9-21,” *Woord teen die lig III/1. Riglyne vir prediking oor vrede*, 170.

- 51 See for example “Rejoice in Hope: The Bible and the Current Crisis of Despair,” in Alston, WM Jr and Welker, M (eds). *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity II: Biblical Interpretation in the Reformed Tradition*, 66-73; also in “Hope as the Coming Reign of God,” in Brueggemann W, (ed.), *Hope for the world: Mission in a Global Context*, 2001, Louisville: John Knox Press, 69-81; also “The End of Hope or New Horizon of Hope? An Outreach of those in Africa who Dare to Hope”; as well as “Rejoice in Hope” in which he spoke about “global social despair” and about “the world engulfed in an unprecedented crisis of hope,” 68-69. In the opening paragraphs of the dissertation he already warned that “from the volcano of transition the lava of disillusionment may flow,” *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 3, which was quite remarkable

in ways that surprised many. He refused to be held captive by the past – with its legacies, divisions, hurt and bitterness. He would often remark that many of his peers and people from his generation were not ready for the future, for the transformation and the hope, because they remained captives of the past and the future was coming too soon for them.⁵² For

if one takes into account that the date was late in 1993 and many who had resisted apartheid were already expecting much positive from the “volcano of transition.”

- 52 In his foreword to Johan Botha and Piet Naudé’s *Good News to Confess*, Wellington: Bible Media, 2011, 11-13, he makes this claim in a moving way: “The Belhar Confession was ahead of its time ... My generation and its fellows in all communities in South Africa still find ourselves in the grip of bygone political and church conflicts ... Our generation is saturated with conflicts from the past ... The dark glasses of our opposing views and our stubborn aggression distort and darken the light that shines on Belhar ... Even for us, Belhar came too early. We do not always know how to practise simple obedience. We struggle with past and present conflicts. We are no better than anyone else of our generation. We share in the disobedience of an entire generation ... Precisely for this reason the Belhar Confession will perhaps one day be remembered as the gospel word that came too early for my generation, but that was joyfully heard by the faithful of the next generation ... As I come to know the upcoming generation better, I have no doubt that Belhar will be a staff for them. Jesus is Lord!”

He said the same however, in a more general way, of his whole generation. In a brief but insightful essay called “Revolution, Education and Religion,” in Hansen, L, Koopman, N & Vosloo, R (eds), *Living Theology*, Wellington: Bible Media, 2011, 601-606, he argued that “revolutions, education and religion share a common destiny: They focus on the future of the youth, the next generation, and their natural demand for the future as a sphere to transform the public good ... *The most crucial challenge for the future is to create a world that is better than the one we created in the twentieth century.* The twenty-first century must see a better world; it must be a world of greater opportunities, a greener world, where wealth is shared, where we do not fight each other at every opportunity, and it must be a world where we learn to deal with conflicts and disputes in ways other than litigation and warfare. *The difficulty is that we are still very much the products of that century.* A better, next generation will follow. However, *the question remains whether we are able to begin to imagine what the world of the next generation could be like* and what theological guidance they will have ... We should, therefore, ask ourselves how we may ensure that ... the next generation will be different and better than ours. This is indeed a difficult question. If we want to make sense of this challenge that faces us, we have to look anew at the notion of hope, which – for me – brings us closest to the future generation. *To work with the notion of hope is to pick up the telescope and focus it on a better future, and imagine that it is here already and to work as though it is just around the corner.* It is not yet here but once we have seen it, it becomes a generator of action,” 601, 605.

He said the same even more generally, of the times in which we live, in “A Dignity-Enriched Humanism”: “(W)e shall learn to serve the dignity of people, the dignity of future generations and the integrity of their environment. This is the challenge of a generation in transition at the turn of the 21st century. But can humanity hold governments to the values they are beginning to share, to the vision of future that they see together and to the mission of standing for the rights of future generations and the environment they know they can hope for in the 21st century? And, can they hold on to

him, hope meant that Jacob could see that the river separating him from his brother, which seemed so huge and impossible to cross, was in fact “only a small river.” For him, this hope made all rivers small.

The fact that it was modest and self-critical hope meant for him that these transformation processes – all these attempts to make history for the coming generation – remained provisional and penultimate, never to be confused with the ultimate.⁵³ He liked to say that all transformation takes place “on shifting ground”.⁵⁴ We partake in making history as limping people, dependent on grace, on gifts, on surprises, on blessing, on the sunrise. We partake in making history deeply conscious of the limitations, shortcomings and provisional nature of our achievements – grateful for “early gains”!,⁵⁵ yet self-critical and therefore open and receptive. He often said that “learning, not knowledge” is the true mode of hopeful agents.⁵⁶

6. On his commitment to transformation

Everyone who knew Russel Botman also knew his own commitment to transformation, to making history for the generation to whom the future belongs. He also wanted others to share this commitment. Speaking about

such hope against all hope? Will the people of our world, even at a cost to themselves summon the courage to be stronger than their most revered leaders in governments and religious communities everywhere in the world? If we can't achieve this, there will be no planet left. My generation succeeded in creating the biggest hole in the ozone layer. Plugging that hole requires a new humanism, a new way of being among all the people and the ecosystems of the world. My generation succeeded in dividing the world, the humanism of the next generation must deal with justice and unity. We have nowhere else to go, nowhere else to leave a footprint,” 246.

- 53 “(T)ransformation remains penultimate living. The same applies to the resultant transformed form of things. The only true finality is the ultimate reality and our obedience to that call,” in *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 128-129.
- 54 Being on shifting ground and doing theology on shifting ground and participating in transformation on shifting ground, for Botman, is not a sign of weakness but instead this open-endedness is a sign of strength, see *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 160-166.
- 55 In many of his speeches on the implementation of the HOPE Project he would list five important lessons that they learnt, including “celebrating early gains” as a way of keeping people involved and inspired.
- 56 *Discipleship as transformation? Towards a theology of transformation*, 174.

the HOPE Project and about donors, he once explained that “they want to see the passion in your eyes.”⁵⁷

Where did this passion and this commitment come from? Perhaps one could say that in his case it was a commitment to imagine. One of the motto’s in his dissertation was the word from Proverbs that without a vision a nation perishes, although he changed the word “vision” to “revelation”. Without something being revealed to us, without seeing something, something different from what is, without receiving a glimpse of what could be and should be and will be, because the present form of things is passing away, we become captives of the past – and perish. In his case, he saw and he kept seeing something, even when many others around him failed to see.

Again, it is for others to draw and debate the practical implications of his thought for transformation in academic and public life. As theologian, I only reminded us of something of the theological logic behind his commitment to transformation – visible in his views on vocational spirituality, responsible discipleship, complex obedience, and hopeful agency. Although he no longer used these notions publicly during his years

57 A longer quote of these words in context may perhaps help to illustrate his own passion and commitment: “I started off by saying how important vision was. *To me, this is the legacy I want to leave behind one day* – our new destiny as university and the journey we took to get there. I learnt early on that if my vision is to succeed, *I have to give voice and passion to the case of my university. Me. Strategic donors want ... to be able to judge for themselves whether your campaign is a core strategy ... They want to see the passion in your eyes ... It requires a deep commitment to a multi-year effort to transform an institution ... This has been a most exciting and rewarding journey. For me, what stands out is that we have changed the conversation about Stellenbosch from being referenced in the past to being about the future and the kind of world we want to build for generations coming after us. Our HOPE Project has enhanced respect for what science can contribute to human development, the moral imperative of our time ... Finally, we have shown that it is possible to change perceptions, elevate the relevance of an institution and garner more support. Imagine what this approach can do for higher education in Africa as whole. Just imagine ...*” the final words in “The HOPE Project: A rector’s View on leading a Major Campaign in Africa,” input at the Conference of Rectors, Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of the Association of African Universities, June 2011.

as university manager⁵⁸ and so-called thought leader,⁵⁹ there can be little doubt that his visions and actions somehow remained inspired by this earlier theological logic.⁶⁰

58 In the installation address as rector, for example, “A Multi-Cultural University with a Pedagogy of Hope for Africa,” he referred to “my dreams for a new generation of young people who will know apartheid only from hearsay,” without any reference to Bonhoeffer.

Again, when receiving the Kuyper Prize he looked back and explained: “In my current position as rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University, I have tried to dream with our students and staff a new dream, to hope anew. *For me this arose partly out of my theological work, expressing the idea of confessing hope concretely.* However, at this secular institution, the focus was more on the role of professors of different academic disciplines finding ways to put their sciences behind the most intractable problems of our society – and in that way professing their hope,” “Dread, Hope and the African Dream: An Ecumenical Collage.”

At the end of this speech he gave a new twist to his familiar Bonhoeffer allusion, when he said: “I see the recognition of my work in theology and public life through the Abraham Kuyper Prize as an expression of our common hope for a better future in the interest of the next generation – one that will know by hearsay, not only apartheid but also the current global economic crisis.”

59 His acceptance speech for the Honorary Degree from the University of Aberdeen, which Dr Beryl Botman delivered on his behalf on July 8, 2014, closed with the words “I want to challenge you to use your knowledge of the law to become a champion of hope ... Use the law as an instrument of hope. Defend human rights, including social and socio-economic rights. Become a thought leader for a better future, a thought leader for justice, a thought leader for dignity for all. It’s the right thing to do.”

60 According to some, the ability to speak publicly and about issues of public concern but without using the language of faith and theology is one of the methodological characteristics of so-called public theology, which has become increasingly popular in recent years. It was in fact Russel Botman’s vision to establish the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology in the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch although, after he became involved in university management, Nico Koopman became the first Director. In the conversation with Botman for the volume of conversations remembering Beyers Naudé, he briefly recounts some of that history, Coetzee, M, Müller, R & Hansen, L, *Cultivating Seeds of Hope: Conversations on the Life of Beyers Naudé*, Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2015, 133-138. For a ground-breaking contribution on the notion of public theology, see Botman’s “Theology after Apartheid: Paradigms and Progress in South African Public Theologies,” in Alston, WM (ed). *Theology in the Service of the Church*, 36-51.

From early on, however, Botman already argued for this form of public involvement from the perspective of faith but without the language of faith, appealing to the well-known sections in Bonhoeffer’s letters and papers from prison where he described this as the task of the church in his day, for example: “(People of faith cannot) boast the final word on the formation of society. They will have to join society in a healing cycle of transformation. No clear lines are drawn between societal and ecclesial metaphors. A new language, understood by those in the church as well as by those outside, will have to evolve. I hope that the day that Dietrich Bonhoeffer dreamed of will soon dawn: the day when the people of South Africa will once again be called to speak the Word of God in such a way that the world is changed by it. We yearn for the dawn of a new language, perhaps, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggested, totally areligious but indeed liberating and

I conclude on a personal note. We often spoke about the work of a Brazilian psychoanalyst and educator, Rubem Alves, in particular about his book called *Tomorrow's Child. Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture*. For me, this title is also a description of Russel. He was indeed “tomorrow’s child”, in the words of Alves. He lived for tomorrow’s children and he did that because he himself was a child of tomorrow. His imagination fed his creativity and made him believe in the seemingly impossible possibilities of the rebirth of a whole culture.⁶¹

Alves has a fascinating chapter on play, on the play of children and their playful imagination – and many will also remember Russel Botman for his playfulness, his humour and his joy, his sometimes mischievous smile, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Adults take their own values for granted, Alves says, and no one ever doubts that the adult style of life and the adult world are superior to those of children. We even impose our reality on children, we want them to fit into the little boxes we have built for ourselves. We want children to play the game of life according to our rules. Yet, in the children’s world of play and imagination there is joy and freedom and possibility and surprise. When Jesus said “unless you turn and become children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” it meant unless you give up the dominant logic of this present order of things for a different logic, and become imaginative and creative, you will not live to see the future. Children’s play, says Alves, always ends with the universal resurrection of the dead. At the end of the game, everyone is again alive. On a day like this it is good to be reminded how very much alive the spirit of Russel Botman is among and around us.⁶²

redeeming as the language of Jesus Christ, by Almighty God and through the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it will disturb the people, but they will eventually surrender to the self-validity enshrined in its message and actions. This is the kind of kairos that gives birth to what Wolterstorff calls world-formative Christianity,” in his “‘Dutch’ and Reformed and ‘Black’ and Reformed in South Africa,” 103.

61 Alves, R 1972, *Tomorrow's Child. Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture*, San Francisco: Harper & Row. In some of his speeches and papers he appealed to Paul Ricoeur’s stress on “transformed imagination” and to Walter Brueggemann’s work on “prophetic imagination,” for example “Turning the Tide of the City,” 516. In several documents of the HOPE Project, work by the German theologian Eberhard Jüngel is sometimes quoted with a similar thrust, albeit a different theological logic, namely “Die Welt als Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit,” *Evangelische Theologie* Vol 69, Issue 8, 417-441.

62 Alves, *Tomorrow's Child*, 85-100.