

The Threat and Promise of One's Mind Being Changed

From the Summer 1999 Lecture Series

How My Mind Has Changed

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I begin with an acknowledgment of feeling some ambiguity about offering four lectures on how my mind has changed. A haunting, taunting voice in my mind asks, "Who cares?" "So what?" and "Why is it a matter of note that your mind has changed?"

Good questions, those. Even as I begin, they remain with me and I feel the need to address them. Let me be very clear: I do not suspect the world is holding its breath either for my answers or for the tracing of my mind change. Why engage in this exercise, then?

I suspect I am doing it first of all for myself. I have traversed a good distance on the theological spectrum from a very conservative evangelical orthodox position to a very liberal, open-ended, progressive posture. We all move in our theological understanding, our faith understanding, even if we never really stop to think about it, but my move has been more than the natural drift that comes with living, with experience, with age. My moves have been self-conscious, deliberate, intentional. They have come in the wake of lifelong, serious study of the faith, reflection on the faith and endeavor to proclaim and teach the faith in the midst of the community of faith engaged in the practice of the faith - a worshipping community intent on living out the implications of the faith in society.

For me, study and reflection have always had the background of the Church, thus necessitating the translation of academic pursuit into concrete action, and that in intimate connection, for the end of my study has been the ongoing need to preach; the sermon has driven the study and reflection, ever and anew demanding expression - having something to say.

Early in his ministry after the publication of his *Epistle to the Romans* had caused such a stir, Karl Barth was asked to speak to a ministers' meeting in his native Switzerland (Schulpforta, July, 1922) to discuss his theology. He was somewhat embarrassed to hear the words "my theology" spoken of so seriously - not that he was not doing theology- "plain and honest theology." But, he went on to discuss "his theology," claiming,

"my theology" becomes, when I look at it closely, a single point, and that not, as one might demand as the least qualification of a true theology, a standpoint, but rather a mathematical point upon which one cannot stand - a *viewpoint* merely.

(Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, p. 97f)

Yet, one must stand somewhere, Barth acknowledged, and thus he went on,

If then I have not only a *viewpoint*, but something also of a *standpoint*, it is simply the familiar standpoint of the man in the pulpit. Before him lies the Bible full of mystery: and before him are seated his more or less numerous hearers, also full of mystery - and what indeed is more so? "What now?" asks the minister. If I could succeed in bringing acutely to your minds the whole content of that "What now?" I should have won you not only to my standpoint... but also to my viewpoint, no matter what you might think of my theology, (p. 104)

Barth raised the question,

Would it not be for theology's own good if it attempted, as I have said, to be nothing more than this knowledge of the quest and questioning of the Christian preacher, full of need and promise? (p. 102)

I cannot emphasize too strongly how I thrilled to be introduced to Karl Barth and to read these words, for they expressed for me everything I believed most strongly and that to which my life was committed.

The moves of my theological pilgrimage have come, not through academic endeavor apart from the Church, but very concretely in my passion to have something significant to say in preaching - and that for the well-being of the congregation and for the best possible expression of the biblical faith.

Of this purpose for my ministry of preaching, teaching and pastoral care, I have all along been aware. But, that the result should be the traversing of the theological spectrum from far right to far left is to me a very great surprise, for I began as a champion of orthodox Christian tradition and evangelical faith expression. As I said above, I do this exercise first of all for myself, to review the way I have come, the better to understand where I am and where I am going.

So to quiet the questions, "Who cares?" "So what? etc., I simply say, "I care; it matters to me," and I invite any who are interested in the evolution of my theological understanding and the emergence of my present faith perspective to listen in as I tell my story and then to interact with me as the story unfolds.

Still by way of introduction, let me note the passive mood of the title of this series - "How My Mind Has Changed." I state the series thus intentionally rather than How I Changed My Mind, because I want to point to a process of growing awareness, epiphany-type experience in which truth dawns upon one. To be sure, this does not happen in a vacuum; I have worked intentionally at seeking knowledge, at serious investigation, persistent pursuit of understanding through intensive reading and reflection. Nonetheless, there is a gift quality to new insight and deeper comprehension.

Furthermore, I did not start out to arrive where I am. No one is more surprised than I am that I stand at the far left of the theological spectrum, judged beyond the pale of Reformed confessionalism. My mind has been changed in face of the knowledge available in the respective disciplines of human inquiry; biblical study and study of the development of dogma to be sure, but also the findings of the natural sciences, behavioral and social sciences, history and comparative religions. Before the veritable explosion of knowledge, my understanding of religion and, specifically the Christian faith, has changed. In a word, my mind has been changed.

The journal of liberal Christianity, *The Christian Century*, on three occasions asked Karl Barth to write an article on how his mind had changed over the previous decade. He complied with their request, covering the decades 1928-1938, 1938-1948, and 1948-1958. The journal has continued the practice, occasionally asking scholars to indicate how their mind had changed. It is from the series in *The Century* that I take the idea for these lectures.

I have entitled this first lecture "The Threat and Promise of One's Mind Being Changed." That title signals what I have experienced in the movement of my understanding of Christian reality. The experience is threatening because one's personal faith, one's identity, and in my case, one's professional life is called into question. But with the ongoing movement over the years there has been great promise of intellectual freedom and deeper humanity.

Let me begin with the threat - the fear of losing one's faith or salvation. This is especially critical for one in the Protestant, Reformed tradition where saving faith has been identified with believing certain things to be true. In the Lutheran confessional family one speaks of "right doctrine." In the definition of faith in the Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 21, the Question is "What is true faith?" The Answer:

"It is not only a certain knowledge by which I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in his Word, but also a wholehearted trust which the Holy Spirit creates in me through the gospel, that, not only to others, but to me also God has given the forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, out of sheer grace solely for the sake of Christ's saving work."

One can see here two elements: a certain knowledge of biblical revelation and wholehearted trust. The second element is often pointed to when the warmly personal aspect of the Catechism is spoken of. But the first element points to the content of faith's knowledge and the assent to what is revealed in Scripture has had heavy emphasis.

In his growing up, "package version of Christian Faith," Marcus Borg defines faith as he was taught in his Lutheran tradition:

Faith meant strong and correct belief. It meant believing what God wanted us to believe, as disclosed in the Bible. Faith as *strong* belief meant that doubt was the opposite of faith. Faith as *correct* belief meant believing the right things. For me, that meant believing as we Lutherans believed.

In a footnote, Borg notes that such an understanding of faith left a lot of people out. One wasn't sure of Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Methodists - they were marginal. He can't remember speaking of Episcopalians but certainly Roman Catholics were out.

I grew up in the Reformed tradition in its most conservative expression and the definition of the knowledge God revealed in the Scriptures was very definite and clear. The faith paradigm, I now know, derived from the 17th century, the period of Protestant scholasticism in which the fresh discovery of the Gospel of the Grace of God as it erupted in the 16th century was carefully systematized.

More of that in a subsequent lecture. My point here is that, if one has been nurtured deeply in such a conception of saving faith, one has a whole system of belief to which one must assent, and to tinker with the respective articles of belief is to call the whole structure into question - and that can be very threatening because one risks losing everything, including, of course, one's salvation.

By way of contrast to make this point sharper, one deeply formed in Roman Catholicism would find challenge to the institution more threatening than challenge to any particular article of faith, for there exists in the religious experience of such a person an implicit faith in the Church through which grace is mediated in the Sacraments. Catholic religious experience is more intuitive, less intellectual as a belief system.

Thus, one might say that for one nurtured as I was, a challenge to the belief structure would be comparable to a challenge to the Church for a Catholic Christian. One doesn't leave the Church easily if one has been deeply formed in the Catholic tradition.

As I reflect on this, I discover an interesting fact that, while it is a belief system that must be assented to intellectually, once that assent has been made and one is deeply formed in a particular belief system, one tends to shut down the intellectual pursuit of religious truth. One becomes emotionally engaged; correct

belief is no longer an intellectual matter but one in which one's being, one's identity is involved.

And so my very identity is at stake – who I am, how I perceive myself. To pursue this further would take us into the psychology of the person, an area in which I am not schooled to speak. But it is obvious, as one sees the reaction of persons whose faith structure is challenged, that there is much more going on than an intellectual discussion of alternative expressions of faith. Again, the greater seriousness with which one's religious commitment is lived out, the greater the threat to one's personhood when a faith structure is called in question. I have experienced the fear of free fall and the pain that wrenches one when one's faith system is called in question and, even more, as a pastor, I have witnessed it over and over again in my people. My religious faith and life are so centered in the core of my being that to threaten them is to threaten me.

A mind change is threatening and can be costly to one whose professional life is in the Church and the field of religion. Here I speak, as well, from personal experience, both my own struggle and, even more, the struggle I see in colleagues in ministry. If there is one overriding reason why the Church is the most conservative of all social institutions and why it continues adherence to faith structures and social positions out of touch with modern knowledge and human experience, I would claim it is the threat felt by persons in leadership if they acknowledge that their mind has changed.

Since these lectures are about how my mind has changed, I will speak first of my own experience over the past three decades. My four years in the Netherlands at the University of Leiden under the mentorship of Hendrikus Berkhof were simply invaluable. I had graduated from seminary with my orthodox conservative Reformed faith intact. I had sought in my education to buttress the faith of my childhood nurture. I believed it all. I believed it strongly. I believed it passionately and I was determined to proclaim it in its conservative evangelical expression. I was also defensive, although I did not recognize that. I regret that I did not question more, read more broadly, quest more openly.

Finally, four years of pastoral experience here in Spring Lake forced on me for the first time questions and wonderings I could not put away. And a new curriculum, *Covenant Life*, produced by the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches opened new directions, which I pursued during my three years in New Jersey. For the first time in my life, I began to think, desiring to know the truth. My pilgrimage to Europe and post-graduate study was not a flight from the pastorate, not first of all to attain a degree; it was an existential quest to test the truth of the Christian faith as I had learned it.

I am a late bloomer. I was 32 years old when I began my search and I had the time of my life.

When this congregation invited me to return to be their pastor, I had gone through a thorough transformation. My personal life in shambles through the breakup of my marriage, I had come to a core conviction about the Christian faith and I knew I had one sermon at least to preach. I said, "Give me Jesus and the resurrection and the rest is negotiable."

I provide this background sketch because it reveals how fortunate I have been in having the post-graduate experience in Europe after enough time in concrete ministry to have begun to sense the limitations of my understanding and my knowledge, and then to have the opportunity to come to a congregation where there was already an affectional and trusting relationship so that I could begin to bring the knowledge and insight I had gained into coherent expression. For the first two decades after my return, I literally preached and I taught out of that European reservoir of learning. I had a place to preach and teach that allowed my four years of reading, reflection and writing to come to expression, to be assimilated and to mature. And, while the responsibilities of an exploding parish were demanding, I never stopped reading and thinking, the congregation being my laboratory for the exploration of new knowledge and fresh insight.

The relationship with the congregation was solid and healthy. The growing insight into the development of the Christian faith shared with the people was gradual. I was aware of movement in my understanding and I was aware that I was endeavoring to broaden and deepen the faith knowledge and experience of the congregation. I was conscious of being on a journey of growing understanding and I was intentional about bringing the people along. We were all clear that we were in life, together as a faith community seeking understanding. The ideal of those early years - an ideal never lost - was the union of intellectual integrity and evangelical passion.

The next significant happening in my own development occurred in 1985 when I was invited to become one of the editors of a theological journal founded by the Reformed Church in America. The Editorial Board of ten met twice yearly for three days. I was already heavily engaged in denominational work, having at the time four responsibilities, one of which was the chairing of the Board of Theological Education that was responsible for the seminaries. But, the Consistory gave me their blessing and I accepted the invitation and profited greatly from the discussions in which we determined the themes for the respective issues. Even more, it now became my responsibility to write and publish.

The journal, *Perspectives*, was founded by the Reformed Church for the express purpose of addressing the leadership of the RCA and beyond with the intention of stimulating discussion of the pressing issues of Church and society - a hope to initiate theological awareness and conversation in the Church. There was an inner core of the Editorial Board that was especially committed to dealing with

what we felt were theological positions that needed to be examined if the Church was to be a factor in the broader cultural conversation that shapes the future.

I was one of only two pastors on the Editorial Board and I soon learned that I would be the one to handle the topics that were most likely to meet with resistance from the conservative part of the Church. Why? Because my pastoral position was safe. This congregation by that time had had fifteen years of theological probing in sermon and teaching. This congregation had given me the freedom to study, to think, to bring to expression new ideas and fresh statement of the faith. The scholars who made up the rest of the board from RCA colleges and seminaries had to take into account their position in an institution accountable to the whole Church and therefore, there were some topics better left untouched. From the safety of my position in this congregation, I had a freedom they did not have.

I had occasion to experience first hand why the academic contingent of the board was cautious. In 1987, I was invited to become the Professor of Preaching at Western Theological Seminary. I declined a full-time position, not being willing to give up my pastorate here, but accepted the position halftime. About that same time I was assigned responsibility by the Editorial Board, in the midst of a full board discussion, to write a piece on the extent of God's grace. The article, entitled "The Habit of God's Heart," appeared in the September 1988 issue, just as I was about to begin the second year of teaching.

I wrote the article as I have always preached and taught here at Christ Community. I was cautious in my claim, but it was, nonetheless, evident that I was sensing a broader sweep of God's saving grace than was the rule in the RCA and the Reformed Confessional documents. And further, it was clear I hoped that to be the case.

Having called Hell into question, all hell broke loose in the Church. I could see on the ashen face of the seminary president that there was trouble afoot. At a faculty meeting, one of the professors who was on the Editorial Board and who had read the manuscript before the issue went to print asked, "Why did you feel you had to raise this issue?" The rest of the faculty, with whom I had good relations and from whom I received respect, were strangely silent. The Professor of Systematic Theology said not a word on this burning theological issue. The one who raised the earlier question had been teaching at the seminary for over two decades and was known to hold essentially the same position I espoused in the article.

What was going on? Obviously, fear reigned: fear for professional position, fear for institutional support.

I saw it all very clearly. I said to the President, "I will resign; I have no need to bring the school into a battle." An Executive Committee meeting was called in October and I was asked to appear. Surveying the room, I sensed the group was pretty evenly divided between those who would have supported me and those

who would have demanded retraction or resignation. I offered to complete the second year and leave.

The following fall I would have been installed in the newly endowed Chair of Preaching which was the fruition of an idea I initiated while serving on the Board of Theological Education. But, instead, I simply came home here - again giving my full time and energy to this congregation.

I relate this experience because through it I learned first hand how threatening it is in the Church and its institutions to challenge the accepted paradigm of faith and traditional practice. Once again, I am one of the fortunate ones. I have a marvelous faith community that has always been totally supportive and has extended to me the freedom to think, to probe, to challenge and to attempt the translation of the tradition into new expression.

I did not seek out the seminary position and I did not suffer loss when I left it. But, I have been in a rather rare position with which not many are blessed.

I think the seminary administration and faculty lost an opportunity to affirm the critical importance of academic freedom. But, I was not the president, I was not a faculty member well settled in with no place to go. I think they all might have better stood together, not in support of me personally, but in support of the freedom necessary to wrestle with the biblical and confessional tradition. But, there is a cost involved; they chose not to risk.

My experience convinced me that an academic institution with close ties to the Church, which looks to the Church for its financial support, will be very slow to challenge the tradition and to be creative and innovative in the articulation of the faith. The deck is stacked against change in society's institutional structures. Not change, but continuity is the goal.

In sum, the Church's academic centers are severely proscribed in the degree to which they can engage in the kind of theological reflection that potentially issues in a paradigm shift. One comes not to expect theological renewal from the Church's academies.

If this is the case with the academic institutions, it is surely even more the case with the Church's bureaucratic structure. Management with a pinch of inspiration and some resourcing is all one can expect from denominational centers. Keeping the machinery in good order and the structures in place is a difficult task in a denominational institution with a broad spectrum of theological understanding. I need not belabor the obvious: theological renewal will not emerge from denominational headquarters. Those who carry out the task of denominational leadership are vulnerable to criticism from all sides and can lead only from the middle unless they are willing to risk their professional position.

Let me underscore a statement made earlier - the deck is stacked against change in society's institutional structures. I became so deeply impressed with this reality.

I will go into the specific changes that I underwent in subsequent lectures but, when I was called to account for positions I espoused, for example, on the extent of God's grace, I was criticized for not bringing my doubt about the traditional salvation paradigm first to the Classis, and, to be sure, this is the way the order of the Church conceived of the proper process for dealing with a change in one's biblical/theological understanding. Such a procedure would have eventuated in no public statement of my belief and I would have been given the option of being re-convinced of the tradition or being silent about my change of understanding, or being adjudged - as I was - as beyond the pale of the Reformed confession.

It would have been a fruitless exercise and I knew it. I assumed writing as I was in a theological journal, founded for the purpose of stimulating theological discussion, was a new and better way of effecting change in the Church. But, the old system for all practical purposes guarantees there will be no significant change in the confessional stance of the institution.

There are those both in the pastorate and in the academic and bureaucratic structures of the Church who were in essential agreement with me at critical points but, by their own admission, they dared not stand up and declare publicly that agreement.

In the case of the seminary, in particular, but it holds true to some extent for the colleges as well, the strongest financial support often comes from the more conservative congregations and the institutions are economic prisoners of the most conservative elements in the Church.

I suspect this has always been the case, but my experience vividly demonstrated to me that the very leaders whose responsibility it is to move the Church along with fresh insight and ongoing translation of the faith, as the human story unfolds and knowledge from the full spectrum of the respective disciplines of learning explodes, are not free to do so. To do so puts one's career in jeopardy and the institution at risk. This is the way traditions perpetuate themselves, preserve their originating vision, and insulate themselves from the threat of change.

Finally, however, no person or institution can be insulated from change. In former ages and earlier times some measure of isolation was possible, but in a world marked by globalization and the information society, it is possible no longer. We are awash with knowledge of every conceivable subject under the sun and the Christian tradition must finally persuade of its truth and meaning in the market place of ideas and alternative religious visions. In a word, in the dizzying pace of historical development, the Church must change or die.

The problem of deeply grounded, well-established institutional religion is precisely its clarity and completeness. It is a life map that gives a person, a community, an orientation in the world. It tells one who one is and how one should live. It creates a tribe, a community, perhaps a national identity. Life's questions are answered, confusions ordered and mysteries domesticated - not totally, but sufficiently to make life bearable, having some sense, meaning and purpose.

But, the human experience in the cosmic drama is not static, but dynamic - ever changing, evolving, creating new realities to be negotiated and assimilated. Unless the conception of reality, the forms and the structures of the institution, are allowed to change and evolve with human knowledge and experience, the life map, the structural experience of the tradition will be more and more removed from real life, religion will be compartmentalized, no longer giving guidance and insight to live within the emerging human situation, rather becoming more and more irrelevant, an add-on to life rather than its generating center.

The more I reflected on what I encountered in the hostile and fearful response to the essay I wrote on the extent of God's grace, the more I recognized how rigidly and uncritically the biblical/theological paradigm of my heritage was held. I came to an awareness of the parochial narrowness of my own tradition.

As I think back on my own development, I realize my European study had opened up to me a whole new vista on Reformed theology simply by experiencing Church and society in the Netherlands from whence my forbears had come. There the Reformed faith had moved along with cultural development, whereas my experience and knowledge of my faith expression had been mediated through an immigrant mentality and piety- and that makes a world of difference. Dutch Reformed theology encountered the Enlightenment and was in conversation with the whole phenomenon of modernity, having to articulate the biblical faith in face of a wholly new cultural epoch. The immigrant community in this country, on the other hand, never really engaged the challenge of the modern period.

In 1983, I was given a sabbatical which began in the fall, as I spent Monday and Tuesday in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan where the Catholic theologian, Hans Küng, was giving public lectures on Monday evening and conducting a cross-discipline seminar for a three-hour period on Tuesday afternoon. The seminar was by invitation only and I was most fortunate to be invited, along with professors and students from the College of Arts and Sciences, the Law School, and the Medical School.

Küng had just been disciplined for his bold theological probing by the Vatican. The courses he taught at the University of Tübingen in Germany were no longer accredited for those preparing for the priesthood. He had also just, along with David Tracy of the University of Chicago, gathered an international Ecumenical Symposium at Tübingen in 1983 to discuss "A New Paradigm of Theology." Papers delivered at the symposium are published in the volume *Paradigm*

Change in Theology. At the symposium, Küng charted the epochal shifts in theology to test his scheme of periodization. Beginning with the primitive Christian apocalyptic paradigm, the historical progression moves through the ancient church Hellenistic, the medieval Roman Catholic, the Reformation Protestant with its two consequent paradigms of counter-reformation-Roman Catholic and Protestant Orthodox paradigms - the modern Enlightenment paradigm, and on to the present contemporary ecumenical paradigm.

Küng came on the idea of paradigm shifts in Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in which Kuhn portrayed scientific development as occurring, not as had been commonly assumed, in smooth cumulative progress, but rather in leaps triggered by paradigm shifts, the displacement of one model of understanding by another. Küng applied Kuhn's discovery to theological development and found points of significant shift there as well.

Paradigm as Kuhn defined it and as Küng utilizes it means "an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community." Küng's periodization marks off those points in the movement of history where a major shift in understanding took place, a shift from one constellation of beliefs to another - a change in the explanation model through which Christian faith was interpreted. The points of shift can be debated and the flow of history cannot be rigidly sectioned off. Nevertheless, the periodization Küng has suggested has been widely received.

Insight into major paradigmatic shifts in the history of Christian dogmatic development was critically important for me. My major area of study at Leiden had been the History of Dogma, but the charting of the points of significant shift was very helpful to me in surveying the historical development.

Having encountered the strong resistance to my probings of the traditional theological paradigm of my faith family, I began to realize that we had never faced the challenge of the modern world. In 1991, I published another piece in *Perspectives* entitled "Sleeping Through a Revolution," in which I set forth my growing awareness of the theological impasse of Reformed theology of Dutch origin in America. I wrote:

Reformed theology in America, the roots of which lie in the Netherlands, has managed to sleep through the revolution of the modern world and survive. Through strong ethnic identity, internal growth, and a militant mind that maintained an adversarial attitude over against modern culture, a Reformed community of Dutch origin still exists. But the defensive posture that has largely characterized it has prevented it from translating the richness of its sixteenth-century legacy of Reformation theology into a proclamation of the gospel to engage modern thought.

I stated my conclusion in straightforward fashion, contending:

Theologically we are stuck, and the best and the brightest know it. Reformed orthodoxy has slept through the revolution of human understanding and knowledge created by the Enlightenment, never to this day having come to terms with the autonomy of the human person, the throwing off of all forms of authoritarianism, and the rise of historical thinking. These cultural assumptions are now being challenged. Many observers believe we are living at an epochal hinge point in history, experiencing the emergence of the post-modern age. But we will not be able to move directly from a seventeenth-century paradigm to the postmodern world without going through the baptism of the Enlightenment. While its assumptions are losing their self-evident status, what will not be lost is the value of critical rationality, and what will not be tolerated is any return to authoritarian claims, be they of church, of tradition, or of Bible.

In theology old paradigms keep their adherents even when theological development has left them behind. But they can do so only by some form of authoritarian claim. In the case of Reformed orthodoxy the authoritarian claim of the Bible has held theological movement hostage, hindering meaningful dialogue with the sciences and philosophy. We are theologically stuck, and we will not become unstuck until we learn to value Scripture as authority, but break loose from its authoritarian use.

Understandably, my contention was not received kindly. It was a serious charge and aroused a good deal of defensiveness and denial. But, I had supported my claim with a survey of developments on the broader cultural scene and specifically the philosophical/theological conversations that had marked continental theology. Recognizing the contemporary critique of Enlightenment thought, I pointed to developments in post-Modernism that held out possibilities for a fresh consideration of the 17th century paradigm that was still the ruling faith understanding. I concluded the essay pointing to the need to develop a new understanding of scripture, which I understood as the problem, the cause of the ideological impasse that marked my theological tradition. Of Reformed theology, I wrote:

... Its doctrine of Scripture has remained immune from the acids of criticism, and an authoritarian use of Scripture continues, making it impossible either to engage the cultural assumptions that remain as a legacy of the Enlightenment, or to capture the attention of an obviously spiritually destitute and groping present generation where the yearning for transcendence is pervasive.

Perhaps the insights and breakthroughs in science and the spiritual bankruptcy of the West have created the moment that will compel us to move beyond both the theological impasse traced above and an authoritarian use of Scripture. In his biography of Karl Barth, Eberhard

Busch records a conversation of Barth in which he referred to being dubbed orthodox. That was fine with Barth, if it pointed to a willingness "to learn from the Fathers."

But he rejected any restriction to the doctrinal position of any teacher school or confession... "Confessions" exist for us to go through them (not once but continually), not for us to return to them, take up our abode in them, and conduct our further thinking from their standpoint and in bondage to them. (Karl Barth. P. 375)

That is the freedom we must discover in order to enter the contemporary discussion, bringing the richness of Reformed theology into engagement with a post-modern world.

Having thrown out the challenge, I moved next to an essay on Scripture, "The Book That Binds Us" (December, 1992). It was here that I had long felt the problem of theological impasse was located. It was in a new understanding of the nature and function of scripture in the life of the Church that I discovered the freedom to think, to deal with the questions and issues that arise in the ongoing human story. And that freedom is the promise of the new insights that marked my mind change.

I have lived through the sense of threat when faith formulations are challenged by new knowledge and ongoing human experience, but I have lived *through* it, emerging on the other side of the struggle with a larger vision, realizing that all along my God was too small. I have come to know a freedom and a joy in the human experience I had not earlier known. And I have found that the Mystery that is God, the cosmic reality that has been discovered through the sciences, and the wonder of being human can only fill one with awe. To live with awareness, wonder and gratitude is the deepest reverence, the highest devotion. This is what marks the religious quest in the emerging cosmic reality.

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