Ho eschatos: The eschatological Christ and the future of reformed theology

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The doctrine on Christ brings us to the heart of our Christian faith and also that of dogmatics and theology in general. It is therefore not strange that theological research throughout history, and even more so today, focuses to a great extent on Christology. The problem statement of this article is that the traditional reformed doctrine on Christ, and in close connection to that the traditional doctrine on eschatology, is threatened. The aim of the article is to investigate a certain aspect of the current debate from a South African point of view in order to determine what the road ahead should be for reformed theology. This is done from within the paradigm of the Calvinistic-reformed tradition. Apart from a short historical overview, the article deals with the viewpoint of four South African theologians, namely Spangenberg, Van Aarde, Müller and Bosch, whose viewpoints clearly illustrate the difference between a more confessional, Scriptural approach and a more critical approach, especially with regard to the divine nature and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. One's view on the resurrection of Christ has implications for one's view on eschatology. It is the task of the reformed theology, in the interim period between the ascension and the second coming of Christ, to proclaim and glorify the risen, eschatological Christ.

***Ho eschatos*: Die eskatologiese Christus en die toekoms van die gereformeerde teologie.** Die leer aangaande Christus bring ons by die hart van ons Christelike geloof en so ook by die hart van dogmatiek en teologie in die algemeen. Dit is daarom nie vreemd dat teologiese navorsing dwarsdeur die geskiedenis, en ook vandag, op die Christologie fokus nie. Die probleemstelling van hierdie artikel is dat die tradisionele reformatoriese leer aangaande Christus, en in noue verband daarmee ook die tradisionele leer oor die eskatologie, bedreig word. Die doel van die artikel is om 'n bepaalde aspek van die huidige debat te ondersoek vanuit die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks ten einde te bepaal wat die toekomstaak van 'n reformatoriese teologie moet wees. Die ondersoek word gedoen vanuit die paradigma van die Calvinisties-reformatoriese tradisie. Behalwe vir 'n kort historiese oorsig, word die standpunte van vier Suid-Afrikaanse teoloë, naamlik Spangenberg, Van Aarde, Müller en Bosch aan die orde gestel. Uit hierdie standpunte word die verskil tussen 'n meer belydende, Skriftuurlike benadering en 'n meer kritiese benadering duidelik, veral met betrekking tot die Goddelike natuur en die opstanding van Christus. Die siening van die opstanding van Christus het verreikende implikasies vir die leer van die eskatologie. Die taak van 'n reformatoriese Teologie, in die interim tyd tussen hemelvaart en wederkoms, is om die opgestane, eskatologiese Christus te verkondig en verheerlik.

Introduction

The subtitle of Bram van de Beek's book *Jesus Kurios* (2007) says it all: 'Christology as heart of theology'. Scholars agree that the doctrine on Christ brings us to the heart of our Christian faith and also to that of dogmatics and theology in general. As Van Genderen and Velema (2008:437) points out: 'Faith in Christ is the core of the creed of the church. It is the *heart of the Christian faith*. For this reason Christology is the centrepiece of dogmatics.' Spykman (1992:84) also states the following: 'He is … the heartbeat of the biblical message from the first word to the last. Without him the Old Testament remains a closed book (cf. Matthew's repeated emphasis on "fulfilment"; also Luke 24:25–27; John 5:39; Acts 8:35). His life, death, and resurrection are the very core of the New Testament gospel (John 20:30–31).'

It is therefore not strange that theological research throughout history, and even more so today, focuses to a great extent on Christology. Van de Beek (2002:165) goes as far as saying that the twentieth century was the century of Christology. The same can be said of the first decade of the twenty-first century. It is also pointed out later in this article that the theological debate in the South African context is to a great extent dominated by the Christological debate.

As far as eschatology is concerned, the statement of Patterson (1995:29) is worth quoting: 'New Testament theology has been united around at least one proposition: The beginnings of New Testament theology are rooted in thinking that is thoroughly eschatological.' The relevance

and importance of the doctrine on eschatology are further illustrated by the fact that even a popular magazine like *Time* carries a headline article on 'Rethinking heaven' (Meacham 2012) in its edition of 16 April 2012.

Against this background, the aim of this article is to investigate a certain aspect of the current debate from a South African point of view in order to determine what the road ahead should be for reformed theology.

Problem statement

If we try to formulate a problem statement to motivate the choice of title for this article, it would not be that either the doctrine on Christ or the doctrine on eschatology is neglected. On the contrary, we find ourselves in the age of Christology, as stated above. New publications in the field of Christology are published on a regular basis.[1] And as far as eschatology is concerned, every handbook in systematic theology or dogmatics deals with the '*locus de Consumatione Saeculi*' [the doctrine on the consummation of the ages], apart from many other publications on the subject. The problem is not that the doctrine on Christ or on eschatology is neglected. The problem is rather that the traditional reformed doctrine on Christ, and in close connection to that the traditional doctrine on eschatology, is threatened. This is the result of a renewed onslaught on reformed Christology. In the South African context, certain viewpoints which will be referred to later in this article, even led to a publication by Adrio König (2009) with the title '*Die evangelie is op die spel*' [The gospel is at stake]. On the one hand, the onslaught is coming from the side of modernism in the form of critical theology. This is not a new onslaught. It goes back to the time of the Enlightenment since when the miracles ascribed to Christ, his virginal conception and his bodily resurrection have either been questioned or plainly rejected (Bosch 2009:646). The commencement of Scriptural criticism led the way to the search for the historical Jesus by scholars like Schleiermacher in the nineteenth century and Bultmann in the twentieth century. Today it is conducted in the circles of the Jesus Seminar, and in South Africa especially, by a group who call themselves the New Reformation.

On the other hand, the onslaught is coming from the side of postmodernism with its characteristic view on Scripture, hermeneutics and truth. According to this view, there is no absolute truth. A text has no meaning in itself and neither does the author of a text give meaning to it. The emphasis shifted from the object to the subject and the reader gives meaning to the text (cf. Coetzee 2010:32–37; Grenz 1996:8; Janse van Rensburg 2000:6–7).

As far as the eschatological Jesus is concerned, a scholar like Stephen Patterson from Eden Theological Seminary, co-author of *The Q-Thomas Reader* (1990) and author of *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (1992), sees a direct link between the view on Jesus and what happens in the cultural sphere. Referring to the work of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer, Patterson (1995:31) makes the statement that their apocalyptic view of Jesus has been the dominant paradigm for understanding Jesus for most of the twentieth century. He then asks the question: 'But why was Schweitzer able to succeed in 1906, where Weiss had failed in 1892?' and according to him the answer is simple (Patterson *ibid*):

> Times changed … In the midst of the cultural optimism of 1892, Weiss's apocalyptic Jesus was a scandal; in the atmosphere of cultural pessimism that was just beginning to come to expression in 1906, this apocalyptic Jesus was just what the doctor ordered. (p. 32)

In the end, however, Patterson (1995:34) gives credit for the collapse of the 'apocalyptic hypothesis' to the latest phase of research into the history of the gospel tradition: 'I believe that the latest phase of research into the history of the gospel tradition has produced too many results that do not fit the apocalyptic paradigm of Johannes Weiss.' In this regard he then refers to the postmodern theologian Marcus Borg's *A Temperate Case for a Non-eschatological Jesus* (1986)[2] and John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus* (1991), as well as the final report on the Jesus Seminar by Robert Funk and Roy Hoover (cf. Patterson 1995:34).

Patterson (1995:35–36) also deals with the sayings gospel known as 'Q', the Gospel of Thomas and other sources, before coming to the conclusion that there is one element 'profoundly absent' from the preaching of Jesus, namely apocalypticism (Patterson *ibid*:37). 'The earliest identifiable stratum of the Jesus tradition is not apocalyptic' (Patterson *ibid*:39). This leads Patterson (*ibid*:43) to the conclusion that the 'apocalyptic paradigm' must be removed from the centre of theology. This is part of the problem statement that will be dealt with in the rest of this article.

Before continuing, however, it is necessary to affirm the presuppositions underlying this article.

Presuppositions

In the postmodern era in which we live, it is increasingly accepted that science cannot be practised without presuppositions. This is also true as far as the science of Theology is concerned. In this regard, Van Aarde (2001:3) says of his own book on Christology: 'The suppositions of this book reflect my own journey and the itineraries of scholars before me who have had an impact on my life and thinking.' He then quotes Freyne who said (Van Aarde *ibid*):

> I am convinced that the present: 'third wave' quest for the historical Jesus is no more free of presuppositions than any of the other quests that went before it. Nor could it be otherwise, no matter how refined our methodologies. (p.3)

As far as this article is concerned, the following presuppositions are valid. The author finds himself within the Calvinistic-reformed tradition, which *inter alia* implies the following:

1.In the South African context alone we can refer to Spangenberg, Botha and Jacobs (2009) and Van Aarde (2001), as well as Van de Beek (2007) and Hall (2009).

2.Cf. Johnsen (2009) for a critical evaluation of the Postmodern Christology of Marcus Borg.

- Scripture is viewed as the infallible Word of God and all that God has revealed to us in his Word is held for truth (cf. Beeke 1999:34–35).
- The reformed confessions are maintained, because they are in full agreement with Scripture.
- The very core or centre of Scripture is found in Jesus Christ and more particular in his crucifixion and resurrection. He is 'our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption' (Beeke *ibid*:40).
- The unity of the revelation in the Old and New Testament is maintained.
- Jesus Christ is a true and righteous man, and withal true God. He is the Word who became flesh (Jn 1:1, 14). He died for our sins on the Cross and rose again bodily from the dead (Beeke *ibid*:Introduction). He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- Sound hermeneutics and interpretation of Scripture is only possible through the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Van de Beek 2002:165).[3]

The Christological debate

It is not within the scope of this article to deal with every aspect of the Christological debate through the centuries.[3] Only data that seem relevant to the specific topic will be mentioned, with special reference to the South African context.

From the first to the sixteenth century

The first well-known decision that Christ is consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father, and therefore very God, made at Nicea in 325 AD on the Arian controversy, was followed by the question of the relation between the divine and the human nature of Christ (Berkhof 1969:101; cf. ed. Beeke 1999:Introduction). Important role players in this period were *inter alia* the Ebionites, Docetists, Eutyches and Nestorius (cf. Van Genderen 1996:61–70). The fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD finally formulated what Scripture teaches about the relationship between the two natures, namely inconfusedly (*asuggutos*), unchangeably (*atreptos*), indivisibly (*adiairetos*) and inseparably (*achoristos*) (Berkhof 1969:107).

The Reformers of the sixteenth century accepted the dogma on the Trinity, as well as the Christology of the early church. Van Genderen (1996:81) refers to John Calvin in this regard who taught that the eternal Word of God took on the human nature through a hypostatic unification. Hoek (2003) also deals with the 'Calvinistic eschatology' and points out that 'the theology of John Calvin has a structurally Christocentric and eschatological character' (Hoek *ibid*:96–97). In 1561 Guido de Bres formulated the reformed dogma on Christology, especially in Articles 17 to 21 of the Belgic Confession (Van Genderen *ibid*:82; ed. Beeke 1999:13–15). The Synod of Dordt officially accepted this confession as one of the Three Forms of Unity in 1618–1619. Berkhof (1969:116) also refers to the Second Helvetic Confession, prepared in 1566, which he calls 'the most complete official deliverance on the reformed position with respect to the doctrine of Christ'.

The nineteenth century

During the eighteenth century a striking change took place in the study of the person of Christ with the beginning of the study of the historical Jesus. 'A new Christological period was ushered in … The point of view was anthropological, and the result was anthropocentric' (Berkhof 1969:117). This led to the liberal theology of Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who was called the theologian of the nineteenth century and the 'founder of the whole of modern theology' (Lane 2006:237). Berkhof (*ibid*) states:

> In the Christology of Schleiermacher Jesus can hardly be said to rise above the human level. The uniqueness of His Person consists in the fact that He possesses a perfect and unbroken sense of union with the divine, and also realises to the full the destiny of man in his character of sinless perfection. (p. 118)

To Immanuel Kant, Christ was merely an abstract ideal; the ideal of ethical perfection. Kant propounded that you are not saved in Jesus as a person, but when you have faith in his ideal – Christ in this view is nothing more than a preacher of morality (Berkhof 1969:119).

For Hegel the beliefs of the Church respecting the person of Jesus Christ are merely 'man's stammering utterances of ontological ideas – symbols expressive of metaphysical truth' (Berkhof 1969:119). Berkhof (*ibid*:120) is of the opinion that we find a pantheistic identification of the human and the divine in Hegel's Christology insofar as faith (according to Hegel) recognises Jesus as divine and as terminating the transcendence of God: 'In Him God Himself draws near unto us, touches us, and so takes us up into the divine consciousness' (Berkhof *ibid*:10).

With the exception of Schleiermacher (Berkhof 1969:122), Albert Ritsch, born in 1822, was the 'most influential of the nineteenth century Liberals … Like Schleiermacher, Ritschl based his theology on Christian experience' (Lane 2006:240). He takes his starting point in the work of Christ rather than in his person. The work of Christ determines the dignity of his person. 'Christ is a mere man, but in view of the work He accomplished and the service He rendered we rightly attribute to Him the predicate of the Godhead' (Berkhof *ibid*:122).

Twentieth century

Van de Beek (2002) gives an overview of the Christology of a number of twentieth-century theologians. As far as the eschatological aspect of Christology is concerned, he (Van de Beek *ibid*:167) refers to Van Ruler who was of the opinion that in the eschaton, when the work of Christ will be completed by the Spirit, the incarnation will come to an end, just as the inhabitation of the Spirit. The author of this article is of the opinion that Scripture does not give a clear answer on this question.

3.For an overview of the Christological debate, there are too many sources to list. From a reformed perspective refer to *inter alia* Van Genderen (1996); Berkhof (1969); Schulze (1978); Lane (2006).

Van de Beek (2002:178) also points out that eschatology forms a central part of the theology of Pannenberg. The end is really the end of history and therefore has an apocalyptic character. For Pannenberg the resurrection of Jesus is proleptic of the eschaton as last judgement. Pannenberg is convinced that the resurrection can be proved and with this proof of the resurrection, faith is at stake (cf. Van de Beek *ibid*:180).

Van de Beek (2002:182) also deals with the Christology of Moltmann, who speaks about Jesus as the crucified God in the literary sense of the word. The resurrection therefore to Moltmann is the resurrection of the Crucified. And that there is hope for those who meet the Crucified in their suffering (Van de Beek *ibid*:182–183).

The South African context

In the South African context, there are at least four theologians whose Christology is relevant to the topic of this article.[4]

Sakkie Spangenberg

Sakkie Spangenberg, theologian at the University of South Africa, is also a member of the group known as the New Reformation. His theological views must be seen against the background of his view on Scripture. He (Spangenberg 2011) sees Scripture as a book written by ordinary people, which is in no way different from any other literary source (cf. Smith 2011). Apart from his other publications, his view on Scripture also becomes clear in his latest book on Jesus of Nazareth. One example is his statement that there is no narrative on the birth of Jesus in the gospel of Mark, because, according to Spangenberg *et al.* 2009, there were no such narratives at the time when Mark was written (Spangenberg *et al.* 2009:149).

In his Christology, Spangenberg distinguishes between the historical Jesus, the Jesus we find in the New Testament narratives, and the dogmatic Jesus (Spangenberg *et al.* 2009:6, 368). In this regard there is a striking correspondence with the views of the Dutch theologian Kuitert (cf. Van de Beek 2002:175 on Kuitert's Christology). Like Kuitert (Van de Beek *ibid*:177) Spangenberg differs fundamentally from the classical Reformed Christology. He gives authority to the non-biblical sources like the sayings gospel known as 'Q' (Spangenberg *et al. ibid*:147; 2011) and the gospel of Thomas (Spangenberg *et al. ibid*:150–152; 2011). On the basis of these two sources he regards Jesus as merely a man (Spangenberg *et al. ibid*:158) and therefore categorically rejects the divinity of Christ, as well as the doctrine on the Trinity (Spangenberg *et al. ibid*:352, 362).

He says (Spangenberg *et al.* 2009) his vision on Scripture and on Jesus was formed by scientific research and it is because of this scientific research (Spangenberg *et al.* 2009:365–366) that scholars in the Biblical and natural sciences are more and more embarrassed by people who still teach that Jesus was part of the Trinity in heaven before creation, that he took on a human nature through a miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit, that he died on a cross in order that people who were conceived and born in sin could be redeemed, that he descended to hell to escape from there after three days to appear bodily and physically on earth, and that he ascended to heaven and will come back to judge all the people who do not believe the above-mentioned 'facts'. It is significant to note that Spangenberg here refers to the very core of the traditional reformed faith in and doctrine on Christ. It seems clear that he has made a final choice between the reformed dogma and the scientific paradigm within which he finds himself.

It is no surprise that Spangenberg has come to the point where he states categorically that there is no life hereafter. Death is just part of the life cycle and has nothing to do with sin (Spangenberg 2011). Death, according to Spangenberg (2010), is an integral part of the functioning of the cosmos. There is no resurrection, either of Jesus or of us (Spangenberg 2011).

Andries van Aarde

Andries van Aarde is a New Testament scholar of the University of Pretoria and also took part in the so-called Jesus Seminar. His book *Fatherless in Galilee* was published in 2001. According to Van Aarde (2001:13), Christology emerged as an enterprise of theologians who reflected and systematised their thoughts about Jesus. He states that they presumed that witnesses in the New Testament supported these thoughts, whilst most of their presuppositions actually originated in later Christian thinking. In this statement of Van Aarde his view on Scripture is also clear. He says that (Van Aarde *ibid*:13) most critical New Testament scholars are convinced that a Christology 'from above' is not to be found in the New Testament and not even in Johannine literature. He himself (Van Aarde *ibid*:14) is in favour of a Christology 'from the side':

> In this investigation, the issue is how Jesus would have been experienced by his contemporaries rather than how his later followers interpreted his words and deeds. The interpretation from a post-Easter faith perspective was filtered through experiences of resurrection appearances. (Van Aarde *ibid*:14)

As far as the divinity of Christ is concerned, Van Aarde (2001:21) says: 'For me, Jesus *is* God, but not necessarily in the classical ontological sense.'

It is significant and interesting that Van Aarde does not (yet?) want to break all the ties with the classical reformed dogma (Van Aarde 2001:204):

> I still find myself within the realm of the church and therefore would like to uphold the relationship between the *historical* Jesus and the *kerygmatic* Christ. The Jesus kerygma (the faith assertions of the church modelled on the New Testament [cf. the 'dogmatic Jesus' of Spangenberg – CFCC]), however, seems to have increasingly lost its explanatory and heuristic power in the secular and postmodern religious age. The twenty-first century could be the time when the relevance of the church as institution and the Christian Bible as its canon become outdated for people

4.In the South African context, there are more theologians with 'strange' viewpoints on Scripture and Christology. König (2009:17–18) also deals with theologians like Craffert, Du Toit and Veldsman. For the purpose of this article, only four were chosen.

> on the street. If and when the process of secularisation reaches its consummation, another Christian generation will be called to reconsider the continued importance of the historical Jesus and to reinterpret that figure as the manifestation of God. (p. 204)

The viewpoints of Van Aarde is a contributing factor to the current unrest within the denomination of the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk*, the denomination in which he is an ordained minister and Theological professor. The unrest has already led to the founding of a group who call themselves *Steedshervormers*. In a press release on 2 March 2012, the *Hervormde Kerkvereniging* deals in depth with the book of Van Aarde and comes to the conclusion that his viewpoints are contrary to the reformed confessions (cf. Hervormde Kerkvereniging 2012).

It is very important to note that the viewpoints of Spangenberg, Van Aarde and others are not new. On the contrary, it reminds us of heresies from the second century. The Ebionites (cf. Nel 2008:727; Anon. 1925b:1), as well as the Greek philosopher Celsus (cf. Landman 2008:977–978; Origen 1953:II.79,VIII.12) rejected the divinity and the resurrection of Christ. Celsus called the doctrine on incarnation and the resurrection of Christ an absurdity (Landman *ibid*:978). It was Celsus who first rejected the doctrine of the virgin birth and taught that Jesus was an illegitimate child, whose 'father was a certain Panthera who corrupted the virgin' (Origen 1953:I.32, 69; cf. Anon. 1925a:434).

Van Aarde (2001) indeed deals with the viewpoint of Celsus to point out that 'Christianity was defamed from the earliest times' (Van Aarde *ibid*:48). It is furthermore clear that Van Aarde agrees with the viewpoint of Celsus. As a matter of fact, the contention of his book 'is that Jesus grew up as a fatherless son' (Van Aarde *ibid*:14). To Van Aarde (*ibid*:118), Joseph is a legend. 'The contribution to historical Jesus research I wish to make is the development of a construct of Jesus as a fatherless figure who called God his Father' (Van Aarde *ibid*:46). According to Van Aarde (*ibid*:77): 'Records show he [*Jesus – CFCC*] was born out of wedlock. A father figure was absent in his life.'

According to Schulze (1978:46), it was one of the greatest church fathers, namely Origen (185–254), who thoroughly refuted the viewpoints of Celsus from Scripture (Origen 1953). Origen (*ibid*) calls it a fabricated myth 'that the virgin and Panthera committed adultery'. Those who fabricated this myth:

> … concocted all this to get rid of the miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit. ... It was inevitable that those who did not accept the miraculous birth of Jesus would have invented some lie. (p. I.33)

As far as the divinity of Christ is concerned, Origen (1953) *inter alia* states:

> Similarly in our opinion it was the divine Logos and Son of the God of the universe that spoke in Jesus, saying: I am the way, the truth, and the life', and 'I am the door', and 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven', and any other such saying. … When we say this, we do not separate the Son of God from Jesus. For after the incarnation the soul and body of Jesus became very closely united with the Logos of God. (p. II.9)

As far as the resurrection is concerned, Origen (1953) asserts:

> … even Jesus, who was a composite being, was not immortal before his death since he was going to die. No one who is going to die at some future date is immortal, but he becomes immortal when he will no longer die. 'And Christ being raised from the dead, dies no more; death has no more dominion over him' (Rom. Vi.9), even if people who have not the capacity to understand what this means may not be willing to accept it. (p. II.16)

Both in the Ecumenical creeds and in the reformed confessions dating from the sixteenth century, churches or denominations in the reformed tradition, until today, confess the miraculous conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit (virgin birth) and the two natures of Christ and his bodily resurrection on the basis of Scripture, against the viewpoint of Celsus and scholars of the same opinion.

Julian Müller

Julian Müller is vice-dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria. In recent publications he pleads for a new view on God in the light of a new worldview (cf. Müller 2011:151–155).

But it is especially his view on the resurrection of Christ that led to a charge of heresy against him by a theological student in 2005. Müller (2011:71–87) reflects on this in his latest book and also repeats his view on the resurrection of Christ.[5] Although the board of curators as well as the classis of Pretoria-East of the Dutch Reformed Church acquitted him on the charge, the whole issue did not come to rest completely.[6]

As far as his view on the resurrection is concerned, Müller (2011:75) refuses to answer yes to the question whether the tomb in which Jesus was buried, is empty, because the fact that Jesus lives and rises in the believer has very little to do with a factual statement about an empty tomb. According to Müller (*ibid*:75, 100), the question about the empty tomb is loaded with fundamentalistic theological points of departure and misunderstandings and to answer yes to this question would also mean to say yes to a certain theological paradigm.

Müller (2011:75) continues to say that he would answer yes to the question whether the tomb of Lazarus was empty, because the corpse of Lazarus became alive in the narrative. A resurrected corpse cannot but leave an empty tomb behind. But Müller says this is definitely not how we should think about the resurrection of Jesus. To speak in 'Lazarus categories' about the resurrection of Jesus would take away a lot of the meaning of Jesus' resurrection.

According to Müller (2011:100), he chooses to formulate and confess his faith in the resurrection in the language of the classical creeds. If this is the case, there should be no problem. In the Belgic Confession, Article XIX, we confess:

5.Müller also published a book *Opstanding* on the resurrection in 2006. In spite of all the questions put to him, *inter alia* König (2009:244-250), he maintains his viewpoint in the publication of 2011.

6.The student who initially laid the charge against Müller also recently published a book dealing with the whole issue from his point of view and with the doctrine on resurrection (cf. Mulder 2011). The studies of student Mulder at the University of Pretoria was terminated as a result of the outcome of the charge against prof. Müller and others.

> And though He hath by His resurrection given immortality to the same, nevertheless He hath not changed the reality of His human nature; forasmuch as our salvation and resurrection also depend on the reality of His body. (ed. Beeke 1999:14; cf. ed. Beeke 1999:45)

However, in the light of other statements by Müller, like those mentioned above, there still seems to be no clarity on his real viewpoint. What makes it more complicated is his postmodern viewpoint that there is no absolute truth (Müller 2011:117).

König (2009:17–18) deals in depth with the viewpoints of Spangenberg, Van Aarde and Müller. He sees their viewpoints as part of the liberalism that threatens the gospel (König *ibid*:17). As far as Müller and his viewpoint on the resurrection of Jesus is concerned, König (*ibid*:244–250) has many questions and finds it strange that Müller, after so many years, does not give a clear answer to a simple, clear question: 'Did Jesus rise physically, which means that the tomb was empty?' (König *ibid*:248).

Pieter Bosch

In 2009, a PhD in Dogmatics and Christian Ethics was conferred on Pieter Barendse Bosch by the University of Pretoria for his thesis 'The resurrection of Jesus Christ. A historical-systematic inquiry'. The hypothesis of this doctoral dissertation is that the traditional faith view regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ is still the most probable and most scientific-coherent explanation for the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Bosch 2009:11).

In the first part of his thesis he deals with the viewpoints on the resurrection of the theologians Barth, Bultmann, Moltmann and Pannenberg. In the end he comes to the following conclusion (Bosch 2009):

> In this regard Barth and Bultmann differ substantially. Barth emphasises the importance of the bodily resurrection as well as the empty tomb of Jesus Christ as its corroboration, thereby confirming Him as the Son of God. Bultmann, on the other hand, regards much of the gospels as mythology. The resurrection, therefore, is not an event in the history of the world and Jesus only arose in the minds and memories of the apostles. Bultmann had an immense influence on theological research in the twentieth century. Moltmann and Pannenberg emphasise the importance of the bodily resurrection of Jesus as an event in world history and thus open to historical verification. Both emphasise the cosmic importance of the Jesus event. (p. 646)

In part two of the thesis, Bosch deals with new apologetic perspectives regarding the resurrection. One of his conclusions in this regard is that due to the fact that the New Testament, and specifically the gospels, are rooted in the Jewish worldview, it seems that their historical reliability is above question and that they represent the Jesus of history. 'Their eyewitness testimony and nearness to the events, specifically, establish these documents as reliable' (Bosch 2009:647).

Part three of the thesis deals with the meaning and relevance or importance of the resurrection. In this regard Bosch (2009) concludes *inter alia*:

> With his resurrection Jesus initiated the new creation as well as God's kingdom and implies the annihilation of death. Soteriology has to do with the total universe, including its materiality, and the bodily resurrection of Jesus accentuates this … The resurrection of Jesus is coherent with a Christian-theistic worldview and necessarily leads to redefining any worldview ... because the most acceptable historical explanation for this event is that Jesus rose bodily from the dead. This signifies a unique event of cosmic importance. The hypothesis that Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, was in the first century just as controversial as today and not only questioned by modern man. It still provides the most coherent and satisfying explanation for the origin of Christianity as well as the specific form it took. (p. 648-649)

The eschatological Christ[7]

It should be clear from the overview above that there are fundamental differences or disagreement between the Christologies of the broadly speaking liberal, modern or postmodern theology (for example Schleiermacher)[8] on the one hand, and the classical reformed theology (for example Calvin) on the other hand. Most of these differences can be subscribed to a different view on Scripture (cf. *inter alia* König 2009:205–235).

In this section of the article, the intention is to make a few remarks on the eschatological Christ from a reformed perspective in the light of the presuppositions stated at the beginning, and to point out what the implications of the rejection of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ are for the traditional doctrine on eschatology.

König (1980:8) points out correctly that the incarnation, or first coming, of Christ was already part of the eschatology. Eschatology entails the whole history of Jesus Christ (König *ibid*:11). In this regard, the view of König differs from that of Karl Barth, who views the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of eschatology (König *ibid*:122).

Of course Barth is correct in the sense that the resurrection of Christ is a fundamental part of eschatology. Without a risen Christ there is no eschatology. König (1980:126) goes as far as saying that if Christ did not rise from the dead, the gospels would not have been written. We can add to this that without the physical resurrection of Christ there would be no church and all preaching and faith would be useless (cf. 1 Cor 15:14). It is the resurrection that makes our everyday life meaningful 'because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain' (1 Cor 15:58). Van de Beek (2007:183–184) states that Easter means the end has begun. And Norman (2001) makes the point that without the resurrection, there would be no ascension and, we can add, also no second coming and no consummation: 'Eschatological hope flourishes because Christ is absent' (Norman *ibid*:3). If Christ was not raised from the dead, how could He conquer the last enemy (1 Cor 15:26)? If the King is not alive, how can the Kingdom come? In this regard, Potgieter (2001:218) points out that

7. It is not within the scope or purpose of this article to deal in depth with all the aspects of eschatology, but to focus on the relevance and implications of a specific view on the resurrection of Christ for the view on eschatology.

8. It is not the purpose of this article to compare the theologies of these theologians in depth. The emphasis is rather on what they have in common regarding the viewpoint on Scripture and the resurrection of Christ.

the presence of the Kingdom is to be found in the person of Jesus Christ. With reference to Berkouwer, he states that the eschaton will be dominated by the theocentric stature of the Lamb. In raising Christ from the dead, God has set in motion a chain of events that must culminate in the final destruction of death and thus of God's being once again, as in eternity past, 'all in all' (Potgieter *ibid*:221 with reference to Fee). The current reign of the risen Christ is therefore an eschatological preliminary of the only and complete reign of God (Potgieter *ibid*:221 with reference to Moltmann). 'At the same time it is also the work of the Holy Spirit. It is he who glorifies Christ in us and us in Christ for the glory of God the Father' (Potgieter *ibid*:221).

With regard to the relationship or unity between resurrection and eschatology, Williams (2007) states the following:

> By virtue of his resurrection Jesus is, in his own body, reversing and undoing Adam's fall and its effects, and in so doing giving us a picture of the world to come. (p. 69)

Without the physical resurrection, the eschatological Christ is an illusion. 'The bodily resurrection is the heart of the gospel' (Williams 2007:69). The New Testament scholar, Tjaart van der Walt (2007:297–298),[9] also clearly points out from Scripture that the resurrection is a fact that cannot be denied.

Of course, the resurrection entails much more than the physical resurrection, more than we ever can imagine - the fact of a corpse coming to life again. Williams (2007:71) deals with the discontinuities between this present life and the life to come. In this sense, Müller (2011:77) is correct when he says that we have no idea what a '*geestelike liggaam*' [spiritual body] is, and all we can say is that it is a mystery. It is a glorified body; a '*pneumatikos soma*' [spiritual body] in distinction of a '*psugikos soma*' [psycological body] (cf. 1 Cor 15:44). But at the same time it is still a body of flesh and blood (*soma*), as Jesus appeared after his resurrection, and as we confess in Lord's Day 22 of the Heidelberg Catechism (ed. Beeke 1999:51). There are also continuities (Williams *ibid*):

> … not the least of which is the body itself. Paul does not speak of an exchange of the body for a completely different sort of existence. Rather, the one body is *transformed.* What is sown *becomes*. (p. 71)

The bodily resurrection of Christ is the point where it all starts. In this regard, Van de Beek (2007) rightly says:

> Jesus was raised bodily. The New Testament leaves no uncertainty about that. Jesus took on our humanity and was raised with our humanity … We are dealing with a material body that is glorified. (p. 180–181)

The eschatological Christ then, according to the Scriptures and as formulated in reformed doctrine, is a person, very God and very man, the only Mediator and Messiah (cf. ed. Beeke 1999:31–34).

He is the same, yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8). This statement, according to Guthrie (1983:271) 'may, in fact, be referring to the sequence of his acts for men, a past sacrifice, a present intercession and a future consummation'. This text emphasises the immutability of his work as Mediator (Grosheide 1955:310, cf. Van Oyen 1962:240). The Lamb is also the King (Rv 5:12).

He appears to John in Revelation 1:17 as the First and the Last. These words are repeated in Revelation 2:8 and Revelation 22:13. He is the conqueror of death, the ever-living one (Hendriksen 1967). It is directly linked with a reference to the resurrection (Rv 1:18; cf. Morris 1983:63). In him everything finds its destination and is controlled (Greijdanus 1925:37; cf. Col 1:15–19; Rm 11:36; Is 44:6; Is 48:12). It is as the last (*ho Eschatos*) that he reigns at the moment and leads everything to the consummation. He is at the same time the 'Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star' (Rv 22:16).

The eschatological Christ is the living Christ, the reigning Christ, the coming Christ. 'The ultimate hope of all Christians concentrates on the Word of Christ: "Surely, I will come soon." (Rv 22:20)' (Hoek 2003:110).

Conclusion: The future of reformed theology

Reformed theology is practised in the interim period, between ascension and the second coming of Christ, in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore the task of reformed theology to proclaim and glorify the eschatological Christ.

Van de Beek (2007:190–193) mentions various ways in which the eschatological meaning of the coming of Christ are weakened, namely by existential narrowing, rapid religiosity, a narrowing by church or believers, history as process idea, fundamental scenarios and a Marcionite view of God. reformed theology should address every one of these viewpoints (Van de Beek 2007):

> Even the sum total of these facets is not yet New Testament eschatology. At stake is a total, drastic intervention in the world, not only in the present but also in the past. (p. 192–193)

Reformed theology is Kingdom theology. Through sound hermeneutics, exegesis, and dogmatics the real depth and meaning of the Kingship of Christ and its relevance for today and tomorrow should be explicated.

Reformed theology is ecclesiastical theology. It means that it is in service of the Church of Christ. Which Christ is preached and confessed in churches today? In this regard, Van de Beek (2007) remarks:

> The first sermon held in the church is quite different from a typical sermon preached in an average church, no matter where in the world. Those who listened to the first sermon were cut to the heart when they heard it proclaimed: 'This Jesus, whom you have crucified, was made Lord!' (Acts 2:36) (p. 193)

Is church government in the church of Christ today anything less or more than the implementation of the Headship of the only Head of the church? Over against theologies that teach a Jesus who was no more than merely a man, who did not really conquer death physically, spiritually and eternally, who did not die on the cross for the sins of God's people, reformed theology should bring the bridegroom to his bride in all his glory and majesty (Dijk 1953:226).

9.Also available in English with the title *The Messiah has come!*

There is only one theology that will endure the ages to come until the day of the second coming. That is a theology that renders unconditional, glorifying service to the coming King.

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