



# What Does God Require of Us? Discerning Confessing and Witnessing in the Times of Covid-19 and Beyond

## Working Paper for the Confessing Circle

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As we enter into the second wider circle of answering the question, what does God require of us? Discerning, Confessing and Witnessing in a time of COVID19 and beyond. We must ask the question, what does it mean to confess for us? For the Reformed Communion, at this critical juncture, perhaps, the idea of confession can be fleshed out in three ways.

### I. Engaging with Our Confessions

Firstly, we are a confessional body. The World Communion of Reformed Churches is a communion of churches that draws from the protestant traditions of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and particularly from the theology of John Calvin. The protestant reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was not only a religious reformation that asserted certain theological principles, but these theological principles also emerged from and engaged with economic and political ideals.

In many ways, the protestant reformation was a reaction to the increasing commodification of society in which everything, including salvation, was reduced to a value in the Market. It is precisely in this context that grace (*gratis*) emerges as a theological principle to indicate that not all of life can be subsumed to a monetary value and that salvation was not for sale. It was a strong assertion that not all of life could be monetized.

To own Calvin's legacy is to assert that the economic system serves human interests and particularly the interests of the poor. Calvin's gift in the present time should encourage us to engage with economic systems contextually and pastorally from the perspective of justice, ensuring that our economies serve people's interests and not the large multinational companies. And today we once more assert that we cannot monetize faith or let it be co-opted for the sake of profit. The legacy of Calvin calls us to place life before profit. To put back the protest in protestant.

But the protestant reformation was also had political and specifically anti-imperial implications. It was a move away from Rome's hegemony to assert the independence and autonomy of the city-states. While it is undeniable that the city-states had their own systems of exploitation, particularly of the surrounding rural areas, this was a significant move away from the imperial logic of the Roman See. It was also this anti-imperial logic that paved the first in-roads for democracy, autonomy and human dignity. This logic came into its fruition in the Synod of Emden, which rejected a hierarchical church structure and instead suggested that "No congregation should claim priority or rule over other congregations, no pastor over other pastors, no elder over other elders, no deacon over other deacons."

To be a confessional body is also to claim our communion and our unity. There is a need to theologically re-signify our understanding of unity. When we argue that the Church is one, we are claiming a unity of which Christ is the head. This implies that the unity of the Church is directed to the ends that Christ himself taught us. That is to say that we are united not for exerting power but rather for the sake of powerlessness. This