

## REFORMATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN NEW ZEALAND

Petrus Simons

From a Dutch point of view New Zealand is truly part of the antipodes. It is just about as far away as possible, close to the end of the world. About four million people live on its islands, of which about 15 percent are Māori. Geologically, most of New Zealand is under water as part of the continent Zealandia. What is now above sea level is the result of volcanic activity as the Pacific and the Australian tectonic plates are meeting here. Since earthquakes are frequent occurrences, the islands are often referred to as the Shaky Isles. Volcanic activity is also frequent, as was shown a few weeks ago when the volcano that is Raoul Island (1000 km North East of Auckland) suddenly erupted, costing the life of a ranger who had set out to measure the temperature of the crater lake.

The largest city is Auckland. It is built on an active volcanic field. An eruption, for which the warning time might be no more than 24 hours would require a major evacuation of at least 200,000 people. Wellington, the capital city is located on top of a major fault line. The very beautiful lake Taupo (North Island) is in fact a caldera and is considered the location of one of the most dangerous volcanoes in the world. The dangerous nature of the place notwithstanding, few people actively worry about it and are keen to get on with life. Economically, the country is a major exporter of dairy produce, meat, forestry products, seafood and horticultural products. Increasingly, tourism is a major export industry. Films such as Lord of the Rings, King Kong and others have been set in wonderful scenery and this has raised interest in the country. To be fair, New Zealand is not free from the ailments of industrial societies. There is much pollution of waterways and land.

Culturally, New Zealand continues to be an Anglo-Saxon country, albeit with a significant and growing Māori presence and influence. Rugby and cricket are the main sports. The Anglican church is the largest church. Since 1992 it has consisted of three parts: Māori, Polynesian and other. Each has its own bishops and synod. The Archbishop, however, presides over the church as a whole and the three groups also hold a general synod.

The arrival of reformational philosophy in the 1960s and beyond has not been of an earth-shattering nature. Linguistic analysis and positivism tend to be the main stream. During the 1940s Dr Karl Popper taught philosophy here for a number of years.

A small circle of people either have accepted reformational philosophy or have been stimulated by it in various ways. It can also be said that a few people have made contributions of their own towards its further development and dissemination.

Reformational philosophy has become known in New Zealand through:

- personal contacts,
- the written word;
- the work of the Association for Christian Scholarship (ACS, (known before 1984 as the Foundation for Christian Studies or FCS);

- Dutch migrants;
- The Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto.

Dr Duncan Roper learnt about it via Christian Student Fellowships, whilst studying in England, followed by a brief study period at L'Abri in Switzerland. On his return to New Zealand in 1966 he embarked on an intensive study of H. Dooyeweerd, whilst teaching mathematical statistics at Victoria University. The project extended to aesthetics as he gained an honours degree in music and later on a postgraduate diploma in philosophy at Otago University. The relationship between I. Kant and H. Dooyeweerd and Karl Popper became one of his study projects.

Through Duncan's contacts with students, who went on to become university lecturers or professionals, the interest in reformational philosophy extended. At the end of 1973 FCS was founded with a board of Trustees of 6 members, only one of whom was Dutch. At that time a link was also established with a similar group in Australia, especially centred in Melbourne. Rev. Stuart Fowler, Prof Ted Fackerell and Doug Blomberg, who recently has become a lecturer at The Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, were key people there. It is fair to say that the Australian Association included a larger group of Dutch migrants than the New Zealand group. In 1984 the two groups merged into ACS, with regional divisions in New Zealand and Australia. The former became responsible for the production of a scholarly publication, called Issues, whilst the latter looked after a more informal paper for internal news.

In 1993/94 it became impossible for ACS to hold an Annual General Meeting, whilst, for other reasons the publication of Issues had to be discontinued. Since that time ACS in both countries has been in abeyance as an organisation.

Nonetheless, the work has continued. I would like to mention specifically:

1. Alan Cameron, lecturer at Victoria University, has been involved in the translation of H. Dooyeweerd's lectures on jurisprudence.
2. Chris Gousmett completed a Master of Philosophy degree in Toronto and went on to gain a doctorate in theology in Dunedin. He is actively involved with a number of people interested in Christian philosophy and theology in Wellington.
3. Richard Willis, a senior lecturer in geography at Victoria University of Wellington has been working amongst students and has built up contacts with Calvin College in the US.
4. John Patterson has studied in Wellington and Canada and has been concerned with a Christian approach to farming.

5. Duncan Roper has continued work on his projects. He published three articles on the theory of aesthetics in *Issues* in 1991/92. Part of this involved a proposal to change the order of modalities in such a way that the first modality involving human beings directly would be the aesthetic one rather than the analytical one. He is still awaiting comments from people in the Netherlands on this subject. More recently, he has been engaged on a project involving the constitutional history of New Zealand, especially in relation to the great Christian Maori chief Wiremu Tamihana Tarapipipi Te Waharoa, who had developed, independently from the English missionaries, a transforming vision of the Gospel, which put him at odds with fellow Maori chiefs as well as with the white settlers. The Right Rev. Muru Walters, Maori Bishop of Wellington (Anglican) has taken a deep interest in this work and has been instrumental in furthering bi-cultural studies on these lines via the Tamihana Foundation. This year Duncan's two books on these subjects will be published by Otago University Press in Dunedin. It is not far-fetched to say that Tamihana's vision runs closely parallel to Abraham Kuyper's basic Biblical vision, although without the concept of sphere sovereignty. Other work involves an extensive set of studies on the Christian view of life and the world.

6. Petrus Simons, a Dutch migrant, has used reformational philosophy in his practical work as an economist in Wellington, especially in the development of a methodology for scenarios of future developments and the management of uncertainty. Over the past ten years he has been working on a PH. D thesis on the impact of technicism and economism on agriculture under the direction of Ponti Venter in Potchefstroom and Egbert Schuurman in the Netherlands. He published an edited version of Schuurman's book: *Christians in Babylon* under the title: *The Future: Our Choice or God's Gift?* With Kevin Fischer he published: *Heaven Above; the Earth beneath*, showing that reformational philosophy is quite consistent with a Lutheran perspective.

Looking back over the past 40 years, we have made many mistakes; there have been serious divisions about the road to follow. Much could have been done much better. Yet, seeds have been sown that under God's blessing may yet sprout and bear fruit. The rich heritage that has come to us through the labours of Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk Vollenhoven and their followers in the movement for reformational philosophy is capable of taking root and blossoming in the cultural setting of New Zealand in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is certainly our prayer.

Wellington, 28 March 2006

Petrus Simons, with thanks to Duncan Roper for comments on an earlier draft.