

## FINAL STATEMENT<sup>1</sup>

### *The background*

We came together as Christian philosophers from five continents, conscious of the importance of a Christian response to the ethical problems of today's world. We recognized these problems existing on a personal level (e.g., as a disconnection from sources of truth and morality), on the level of practices (e.g., as a subordination of human values to technical procedures) and on the level of society (e.g., as a mounting anxiety about failing communal relationships and bonds of solidarity).

We proceeded from the conviction that, from a biblical standpoint, the good to which we find ourselves drawn is deeply connected with the world as it was meant to be. Ethics cannot be considered as a set of rules apart from the deep purposes and callings given by God in the order of creation and renewed in redemption through Jesus Christ. From such a standpoint, questions of ethics are not confined to certain 'values' that we bring to created reality, but concern the ways human beings respond, in many particular situations, to the normed reality of a created, broken, but redeemed world. Thus we have identified what can be called an 'ethics of listening and responding' as a key concept in Christian ethics: it reminds us that we are called to 'attend to' and 'take care' of such a world. Such an 'ethics of listening and responding' also enables us to discern common ground with our fellow human beings. Our ethical motivation, and our understanding of the content of the norms guiding human life, should certainly reflect an authentic Christian confession. Yet because we confess that the whole of reality is God's creation, we confidently expect to find many areas of shared concern and cooperation with those of other faiths. Our vision has particular roots, but its scope is universal. Thus, it is possible for us to recognize many valid insights in the ethical conceptions of those of other faiths, and to appreciate why some of our ethical conceptions and stances can be recognized as valid by others.

Reformational philosophy has always considered 'the ethical' as something that pertains to all kinds of human actions, relationships and practices. However it has been recognized that reflection on ethics has remained relatively undeveloped in our tradition and that there is more to do (and other traditions to learn from) as we seek to make reformational insights more fruitful for our contemporary situation. For example, many Christians still see their work or profession as something separate from their ethical convictions. In the meantime we allow technological and economic forces and global processes to distort God's good creation. We have also identified the need to reflect more fully in our philosophizing on both the depth and scope of human suffering and human evil, and the call to respond attentively and with compassion to

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victims of suffering and evil. An ‘ethics of listening and responding’ is, in part, an attempt to address this need in a more radical way even as we were reminded of the limits of the possibilities for change and healing in a broken world — a world in which we always bear the mark of the Cross.

Our Symposium has enabled us to take some steps in responding to the challenges just described. We explored ethical challenges in philosophy, theology, anthropology, and ecclesiology, but also in many concrete sectors of social and professional life where acute ethical challenges arise.

*What did we gain?*

1. In pursuing an ‘ethics of listening and responding’ we focussed on the human capacity to respond to the presence, needs, and ‘otherness’ of all God’s creatures. We also reflected on the structure of and need for deep moral sensitivity, something which we identified as a precondition for the way we act in particular situations. This human capacity needs to be discussed and formed, through practical experience, educational encounters, inter-cultural dialogues, and so forth. It was suggested that what is often talked about as personal ‘virtues’ can be understood to be about this moral sensitivity.
2. We reflected on the role of the church, the worshipping and believing community of Christ’s disciples, and on the virtues thereby formed in its members. We were reminded that the church is called to receive, proclaim, discern and concretely embody the summons and call of the Word of God in its own communal life, as well as to witness to the truth and shalom offered by the Word.
3. A new and enriching element in our discussions was the consideration of normative social and professional ‘practices’ and the integral role of ethical considerations in those practices. In panels and workshops we addressed urgent questions arising in practices such as business, education, medicine, social work, family life, politics, media and information technologies, and agriculture, as well as issues arising from environmental degradation, multicultural tensions, and religious and moral conflict. We also recognized that, underlying many of these problems are deeper and often destructive cultural and religious forces and patterns. Thus, in each of these areas, not only are new approaches to specific ethical problems required, but a new ‘ethos’ — a new basic orientation — is called for. Profoundly damaging consequences will follow if our societies persist in distorted ways of acting and thinking.
4. We also highlighted the importance of a global ethics, acknowledging the ever-widening circles of responsibility to which we are now increasingly called. Here we were also reminded to the ‘golden rule’ as formulated in the Gospels — the Divine call upon us to do more for the other than we are merely obliged to do. Our global experience of encounters with other very diverse cultural and religious contexts also commanded our engagement. Such a response

requires a careful 'listening' to and recognition of the 'otherness' of the great diversity of our fellow human beings. This cannot but involve a call to faithfulness to a Kingdom vision, through compassionate and sensitive discernment of normative pathways.

*What next?*

We were conscious of not being able to address many important questions adequately (for example: the status of the discipline of 'ethics' within Reformational philosophy in which it has long had an ambiguous position; the possible place of 'virtue' within a Reformational ethics; the continuing challenge to articulate a biblically and philosophically compelling account of 'creational norms;' the need to integrate a creational ethics with an 'ethics of the Cross'). Yet participants left with renewed motivation to work further on these and other challenging issues, in future conferences, study groups, and publication projects, by offering our specific expertise as philosophers inspired by the Gospel.