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A systematic theology of tolerance

A Reformed perspective

Antonius Steven Un¹

Abstract

This article seeks to construct a theology of tolerance, based on the Reformed doctrines. It argues that since God gives general revelation, the sense of the divine and the seed of religion, the capacity to interpret and form an identity, and the common grace to every human being including those who do not yet believe in Jesus Christ, Protestants should tolerate their fellow human beings' existence, even though they may not necessarily agree with other people's beliefs. Moreover, the authority to coerce human beings regarding their beliefs is Christ's eschatological authority, not our responsibility.

Keywords tolerance, revelation, common grace, the sense of the divine, seed of religion, Christ, eschatology.

1. Introduction

Reformed theology is a school of Christian theology, commonly known as initiated by the sixteenth-century Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564), and further developed by Calvin's theological successors.² Reformed theology holds several sharp theological positions. For instance, it believes in the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* – in other words, that the Bible is the sole inerrant and infallible foundation for Christian faith and practice. It also affirms Jesus Christ as the only way to the true God. Other Reformed convictions include the unconditional election of believers by God the Father and the limited atonement of God the Son. These sharp theological positions differentiate Reformed theology not only from other religions but even from other schools of theology in Christianity. The clear distinctions made in these theological statements could give the impression that Reformed theology lacks a theology or an attitude of tolerance.

Living in this postmodern multicultural era, Reformed theology is challenged to maintain a tolerant attitude toward those who have different religious beliefs

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² Of course, the important role of Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) in the initial stage is beyond doubt.

and practices without compromising its core beliefs. Addressing this challenge is important to avoid what Nicholas Wolterstorff warned about when he stated, “Therein lies the greatest obstacle to religious toleration: many religious people down through the ages and yet today, believe that their religion obligates them not to tolerate other religions” (Wolterstorff 2015:378).

I contend that Reformed theology contains a set of doctrines that encourages tolerance. Tolerance in this article means an attitude to acknowledge the existence of other people, especially their right to have other views even though that recognition is not the same as agreeing with their views. Therefore, the main concern of this article is to construct a systematic theology of tolerance from a Reformed perspective. Theology of tolerance means a theology, especially in this sense, Christian theology, that encourages a tolerant attitude toward those who have different beliefs and practices. I call the result a “systematic theology of tolerance” since it consists of four aspects, ordered according to the traditional structure of systematic theology: the doctrine of revelation, the doctrine of humanity, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and grace, and the doctrine of last things. I will begin my explanation with the doctrine of revelation.

2. Revelatory tolerance

Revelatory tolerance means tolerance based on the teaching of revelation. The Bible clearly teaches that God reveals himself. Reformed theologians usually distinguish between general and special revelation. General revelation can be received by human beings through the work of mere reason alone, whereas special revelation can be received only through the work of the Holy Spirit exclusively. General revelation consists of nature, human conscience, and human history. Special revelation consists of the Bible as the written word of God and Jesus Christ as the living word of God. General revelation is given to all human beings, but special revelation is only given to the believers who by the work of the Holy Spirit, accept the Bible as the word of God and acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord and only Savior. Thus, only special revelation could bring human beings to the true knowledge of God. General revelation, however, still has a great significance.

Louis Berkhof says that in general revelation, “Divine thoughts are embodied in the phenomena of nature, in the human consciousness, and in the facts of experience or history” (Berkhof 1996, Introductory:128). In Berkhof’s explanation, the last form of general revelation is “the course of God’s providential government.” According to article 2 of the Belgic Confession, general revelation is:

[T]he creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many

characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, his power and divinity, as the apostle Paul saith, Romans 1:20. All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse.

General revelation has great importance in understanding the existence of religions. Cornelis van der Kooi and Gijsbert van den Brink conclude, “God’s (general) revelation, however fragmentary and incomplete it may be, basically has a universal operating range... In general, we believe that all religions somehow reflect the divine mystery that surrounds and challenges humankind. That is, no religion should be regarded in detachment from God’s speaking and acting” (van der Kooi and van den Brink 2017:191). This conclusion is in accordance with the previous studies in Reformed theology. “Though there is no purely natural religion,” Berkhof says, “yet the general revelation of God in nature and history furnishes the firm and lasting foundation for the Gentile religions” (Berkhof 1996, Introductory:130). This does not necessarily mean that religions are part of general revelation. Nevertheless, general revelation, as the Bible witnesses it, becomes the basis for religions (e.g., Acts 17:26-28). General revelation cannot produce a true religion, but it can produce some true features within a religion. As Berkhof states, “But though Scripture passes a severe judgment on the religions of the Gentiles and represents them as false religions over against Christianity as the only true religion, it also recognizes *true elements* in them” (Berkhof 1996, Introductory:131; my emphasis). This statement will be endorsed by the explanation of the work of the Holy Spirit in common grace as presented below.

The connection between revelation and religion is also elaborated by Herman Bavinck. He refuses to acknowledge historical and psychological methods as sufficient explanations of the origin of religion. Instead, for him, “God is the great supposition of religion. His existence and revelation are the foundation on which all human religion rests... Aside from him religion is an absurdity... There is no religion without revelation; revelation is the necessary correlative of religion” (Bavinck 2003:276). Revelation becomes not only a distinctive way to understand the origin of religion but also becomes a unique source for religion. Here, Bavinck differentiates between religion, knowledge and art. He says, “Nature, the world all around us is the source of our knowledge and the teacher of art. But in religion, that same world comes under consideration from still another viewpoint, viz., as the revelation of God, as the disclosure of his eternal power and divinity” (Bavinck 2003:277).

Though religions are dependent on the revelation of God, especially general revelation, religions themselves are not parts of general revelation itself. Rather, they are the “interpretations of God’s general revelation” (Berkhof 1996, Systematic:28). Berkhof uses this phrase in the context of his explanation of the rational arguments for the existence of God. Berkhof asserts that believers do not need

those arguments to prove the existence of God since the witness of special revelation within the work of the Holy Spirit is enough for believers to know the true God. While these non-biblical rational arguments can be considered interpretations of God's general revelation, in the same way, we could say that religions are also attempts to interpret God's general revelation after the Fall.

Though we do not acknowledge religions as necessarily the correct interpretations of God's general revelation, the doctrine of general revelation provides a theological framework for us to understand and accept the existence of other religions. God who provides general revelation is the same God who created human beings as the image of God with the capacity to interpret it. Though this interpretative process takes place after the fall, general revelation itself and our capacity to interpret it are created by God. This becomes the basis for us to tolerate the existence of other religious adherents, though we do not accept their teachings. Now we will turn to another basis for tolerance.

3. Anthropological tolerance³

Anthropological tolerance means tolerance based on the teaching of anthropology or the doctrine of humanity. Reformed theologians, especially in the line of John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper believe that all human beings are "by nature 'incurably religious'" (Spykman 1989:81). In this conviction, Kuyper, Spykman, and others were preceded by Calvin. Calvin says, "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, *an awareness of divinity*. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty" (Calvin 1960:I.iii.1; my emphasis). This "awareness of divinity" would generate human perception of the presence of God and of God's role as the creator of the human beings. Thus, Calvin believed that we find even in primitive tribes, "a deep-seated conviction that there is a God" and "some seed of religion". In brief, there is no tribe so brutal, barbaric or backward that it does not have a seed of religion or awareness of divinity. "A sense of deity", Calvin called it, "inscribed in the hearts of all". We will not here distinguish between the terms used by Calvin. Rather, we will follow Calvinists such as John McNeill who says that these terms "refer generally to a numinous awareness of God" and are synonymous (see Oliphint 2008:27).

In his commentary on Romans 1:18, Calvin indicates that this sense of the divine is implanted in the human being as the image of God. Calvin (Calvin 2009:XIX:67) says, "The structure of the world and the most beautiful arrangement of the elements ought to have induced man to glorify God, yet no one discharged his proper

³ This section further develops a part of my dissertation (see Un 2020b:242-243).

duty.” K. Scott Oliphint (Oliphint 2008:23-24) states, “There can be a little doubt that what Paul is describing here is an essential part of what it means to be the image of God.” Douglas Vickers also affirms this understanding. He says, “There exists in the soul, we have said, *a semen religionis*, a seed of religion. That means that by reason of his createdness as the image of God, man is necessarily a religious creature. He was made to worship God” (Vickers 2011:14). Stephen Tong (Tong 2007:II:23) asks, “Why does religion arise only in the realm of the human being?” The sense of religion has never appeared in the realm of animals. Tong answers, “The sense of religion has been placed by God in human being since he was created. Human being is created as a religious creature.”

Calvin believes that the human fall into sin does not remove this seed of religion from human beings as the image of God, though they are damaged by it. He says, “And they who in other aspects of life seem least to differ from brutes still continue to retain some seed of religion” (Calvin 1960:I.iii.1). In his commentary on Romans 2:15, in which Paul emphasizes the inscription of God’s law in human hearts, Calvin (Calvin 2009:99) affirms, “It is enough to know, that in [the Gentiles’] thought there is a God and that honour and worship are due to him”, no matter “what sort of God they imagined him to be, or how many gods they devised.” Louis Berkhof says, “The Bible informs us that man was created in the image of God. When he fell in sin, he did not entirely cease to be the image-bearer of the Most-High. The seed of religion is still present in all men, though their sinful nature constantly reacts against it” (Berkhof 1938:I.1). In sum, the human fall into sin did not deprive the sense of deity in human beings but damaged and turned it away from worshipping the true God.

Therefore, religion is inherent in the human being as the image of God. Religiosity is unavoidable for human life even after the human fall into sin. Since religion is deeply seated in the human heart (Berkhof 1996, Introductory:108) and affects all aspects of human life, we are invited to have what I call anthropological tolerance. We have to tolerate the existence of our fellow human beings who hold various convictions because of the biblical fact that they also are created as the image of God and have a sense of deity or the seed of religion implanted inside them. The notion of tolerance, as we will see later, however, does not necessarily imply the celebration of relativism.

Anthropological tolerance consists not only in the sense of the divine and the seed of religion, but in what Nicholas Wolterstorff (2015) calls “the dignity argument” for religious tolerance. In addition to the human capacities for rational and normative agency, he proposes two other capacities. First, he states, “To be a human person is to have the capacity to interpret reality and one’s place therein” (Wolterstorff 2015:383). It is relevant for me to mention this capacity since in the

preceding explanation of revelatory tolerance, I have described the human capacity to interpret God's general revelation. For Wolterstorff, human existence involves not only the interpretation of perception and introspection of our nature but also goes beyond that to interpret the invisible, immaterial, and eternal things. Second, Wolterstorff (2015:383) proposes, "To be a full-fledged human person is also to have the capacity to form what I shall call a 'valorized identity'". This identity is understood as "the relative importance that he/she assigns to states and events in his/her life: to his/her various beliefs, to his/her various commitments, to his/her plans for action, his/her memories, his/her attachments to persons, animals, and objects, and so forth." In short, "This commitment is more important to me than any other, I cannot imagine giving it up. It is fundamental to who I am." For me, this fundamental commitment is very much connected with the sense of the divine and the seed of religion as I have explained above. In sum, for Wolterstorff (Wolterstorff 2015:384), "Religions represent a remarkable exercise of these two capacities, along, of course, with the capacities for rational and normative agency".

The dignity argument proposed by Wolterstorff complements my explanation of the sense of the divine and the seed of religion so as to provide a basis for anthropological tolerance. Those who have the capacities of religion, interpretation, and forming valorized identity should be treated as having the civil right to freely exercise their belief. Moreover, "The freedom to adopt and lead a way of life is the most fundamental human freedom, since our commitment to a way of life shapes every aspect of our existence" (Volf and McAnnally-Linz 2016:169). This does not mean that we acknowledge the civil right of free exercise of all kinds of beliefs, such as a belief in the positive value of child sacrifice. Religious tolerance as posited in this article must be a tolerance of something true and good produced by religion, at least in terms of universal humanitarian values. The production of everything true and good that may be contained in religion is a fruit of common grace, as I will explain in the next section.

4. Pneumatological tolerance⁴

Pneumatological tolerance is tolerance based on the teaching of the Holy Spirit, especially common grace. To explain this, I must first elaborate on the meaning of common grace. Human beings as the image of God have fallen into sin, and our human capacities and relationships are not spared from sin. Nonetheless, we still experience the blessing of common grace. As Kuyper put it, though the world is totally corrupted, it still exceeds believers' expectations (van der Kooi 1999:96; cf. Kuyper 2019:10). I believe that common grace is poured out to glorify God's supremacy

⁴ This section is a further development (Un 2020b:206-211).

over Satan and sin and to protect God's creatures. Hence, "pure wickedness and corruption" do not "dominate the world" (van der Kooi 1999:96). Common grace is an "instrument to halt the disintegrative effects of sin" and "to make possible the actualization of Particular Grace" (van der Kooi 1999:97).

Moreover, God's gift of common grace fosters the development of all aspects of earthly life, such as culture, science, technology, society, politics, and so forth. In Kuyper's view, common grace reaches every place where sin and its destructive effects are found. "Common grace extends", Kuyper says, "over our entire human life, in all its manifestations" (2016:497-498). Kuyper thus mentions several aspects as examples of the operation of common grace: "order and law," "prosperity and affluence," "healthy development of strength and heroic courage of a nation," "the development of science and art," the "inventiveness in enterprise and commerce," the empowerment of "the domestic and moral life," and the protection of "religious life against excessive degeneration".

I will now suggest some implications of the doctrine of common grace regarding the existence of non-Christian beliefs and worldviews. First, though common grace lacks the power to solve the problem of sin and its effects completely, it nevertheless empowers civil society, the realm outside the church including other religions. The church, meanwhile, can be viewed as the locus of saving grace. Whereas saving grace "ultimately cancels sin and completely neutralizes its consequences," Kuyper defines common grace as "a *temporarily restraining* grace that stems and arrests the continued effect of sin" (2016:264; emphasis in original). Thus, saving grace "is connected with the elect of God" while common grace "covers the *entire sphere* of human life" (Kuyper 2016:264; my emphasis). By its connection with the elect of God, saving grace is *particularly* the business of the church. No wonder Kuyper calls the church "an institution of grace" (2017:302). Common grace, however, covers all spheres of human life, which *commonly* means human civil life, such as the family, society, art, science, and so forth (Kuyper 2017:301). Consequently, common grace provides the possibility for people who hold other religious convictions to flourish. For instance, when a religion teaches and encourages something true and good, its followers' lives will be enhanced and society will be blessed.

Second, common grace is the universal operation of the Holy Spirit to provide intellectual knowledge and technical capabilities that may generate various fields of study as part of the realm of education or art in civil society. Here we can learn from Calvin's valuable explanation of the universal operation of the Holy Spirit. About Bezalel, God says, "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship" (Exod. 31:3). The divine spirit, based on his pleasures, distributes all excellent capabilities for the "common good of mankind" (Calvin 1960:II.ii.16). Though the Spirit of sanctification dwells and

works only in believers, the Lord “quickens all things by the power of the same spirit” (Calvin 1960:II.ii.16) since the Spirit of God is “the sole fountain of truth” (Calvin 1960:II.ii.15).

Bavinck affirms Calvin’s conviction by saying, “The Holy Spirit is the author of all life, of every power, and every virtue” (Bavinck 1989:41). Bavinck also says, “It is true the Holy Spirit as a spirit of sanctification dwells in believers only, but as a spirit of life, of wisdom and of power He works also in those who do not believe. No Christian, therefore, should despise these gifts; on the contrary, he should honor art and science, music and philosophy and various other products of the human mind as *praestantissima Spiritus dona* [the most outstanding gifts of the Spirit], and make the most of them for his own personal use” (Bavinck 2004:119). Thus, the excellent capacities provided by the Holy Spirit include not only technical and artistic knowledge and craftsmanship, as illustrated by Bezalel and Oholiab, but are also abilities in philosophy, medicine, physics, dialectics, mathematics, and other disciplines (Calvin 1960:II.ii.15-16).

The Holy Spirit also works to provide ability in judgment, reading or learning, in government as exemplified by Saul and David, and in literature such as in Homer (Calvin 1960:II.ii.17). The Holy Spirit as the only source of truth, knowledge, and craftsmanship works through His universal operation to empower the clergy, philosophers and followers of other worldviews who may contribute to society or exercise authority. Furthermore, every truth in every belief and worldview must be acknowledged as the gift of the Holy Spirit. As I have quoted above, what Berkhof calls the true elements in other religions must be acknowledged as the gift of the Holy Spirit. By this acknowledgment, we learn to apply pneumatological tolerance to the actuality of the devotees of other beliefs and worldviews, though we do not agree with their convictions.

Third, common grace not only enables the restraint of sin but also ensures that “order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted” (Berkhof 1996, Systematic:436), and this civil righteousness is deeply connected to civil society, including religions. Common grace makes possible both moral order and social order. As the image of God, human beings with a moral order instituted by God still have moral obligations that govern human life, even after the fall (cf. Ballor and Charles 2019:xvii). This is of course an act of common grace, as Kuyper stated, “Thanks to common grace, the spiritual light has not totally departed from the soul’s eye of the sinner. And also, notwithstanding the curse that spread throughout creation, a speaking of God has survived within that creation, thanks to common grace” (Kuyper 2016:490). The moral order or discernment in Kuyper’s thought is ontologically rooted in God’s inscribing his law into human hearts, as Paul says in Romans 2:15. “By the law of God [we mean] the universal moral law that was in-

grained in man before his fall into sin and which nevertheless, however, weakened after the fall, still speaks so sharply, so strongly, so clearly among even the most brutalized peoples and the most degenerate persons” (Kuyper 2015:76). It is vital for us to recognize moral order, albeit present imperfectly in other religions.

Besides this moral order, there is also a social order. People do not want to live in a chaotic situation. Social order refers to the fact that however it may be conceived of theoretically, “the essential notion of ‘society’ is scientifically and practically meaningful only when it refers to routinely observable phenomena about which lasting statements are possible” (Dandaneau 2007:4495). To avoid chaos and maintain a society with regular order, common grace is needed to restrain sin by providing the possibility of law and instituting civil government supported by the adherents of various religions.

Fourth, common grace blesses other beliefs and worldviews through its operation in “the internal part” and in “the external dimension” of human existence (Kuyper 2016:539-540). When common grace operates in the inner part of human existence, it produces civic virtue, natural love, public conscience, integrity, and mutual loyalty. When common grace operates in the outer part of the human being, it brings forth many other fruits: the growth of human understanding through beliefs and worldviews, the flourishing of religious arts, the multiplicity of religious enjoyment, and more.

Fifth, public opinion, which is an important manifestation of the public sphere, can be an instrument for the operation of common grace when it becomes a means of exercising social or political control with a view to avoiding sin. Religions can appear as a strong force in shaping public opinion. Religions and other philosophies can form a public opinion through the medium of the public sphere, with the effect of restraining sin, maintaining social order, and promoting civil righteousness.

5. Eschatological tolerance⁵

The doctrinal basis for the Protestant’s tolerance toward the adherents of other beliefs and worldviews, however, goes beyond the doctrine of common grace. It also encompasses eschatological tolerance, or tolerance based on the doctrine of last things. I take this term from Gordon Spykman (1989:85).

Eschatological tolerance is part of Kuyper’s idea of confessional pluralism, which encourages the appreciation of religious rights. That is “the right of the various religious groups that make up a society to develop their own patterns of involvement in public life through their own associations – schools, political parties, labor unions, churches, and so on – to promote their views” (Spykman 1989:79).

⁵ A small portion of this section has been previously published in Un 2020a:105.

Kuyper's argument for confessional pluralism can be traced through several points. First, we can consider his notion of Christ's kingship and eschatological unity. As indicated above, for Kuyper, the true unity of all creatures or all human beings will be accomplished by Christ at the end of history. He says, "Someday there will be *coercion*, when Christ descends in majesty from the heavens [and] breaks the anti-Christian powers with a rod of iron... He has a right to this because he knows the hearts of all and will be the judge of all. But *we do not*. To us it is only given to fight with spiritual weapons and to bear our cross in joyful discipleship" (Kuyper 1998:220; my emphasis). Coercion in religious matters, thus for Kuyper, is Christ's eschatological prerogative. Kuyper therefore encourages us to use "persuasion" in all religious and spiritual matters as a better way, instead of coercion (Kuyper 1998:219-220).

Kuyper further urges us to admit "the position of equality before the law" with those who hold a different belief from us. Kuyper seeks a formal assurance of constitutional liberty for the performance of the religious rights of citizens. This means the government must guarantee freedom of religion for all citizens (Spykman 1989:86). Spykman bases his argument for eschatological tolerance on Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. The parable is told in verses 24-30, and its meaning is explained in verses 36-43. In brief, by this parable, Jesus Christ teaches us that "the weeds" which "are the sons of the evil one" must be left until the end of the age when the angels will be sent as the reapers and "the weeds are gathered and burned with fire." Jesus is depicting "an ominous battle between the cosmic forces of good and evil" (Turner 2008:344). Another emphasis in this parable is that Jesus wants to emphasize that the sons of the evil one, who are marked by lawlessness will experience the "judgment at the end of the world [which] is portrayed as the removal of sinners from God's kingdom" (Turner 2008:351). By this judgment, the knees of the sinners will be forced to bow at the name of Jesus and the tongues of the wicked persons will be coerced to confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11). In Moisés Silva's interpretation of these verses, "Paul's purpose is clearly to stress the universality of Christ's lordship" (Silva 2005:epub file). Jesus' eschatological authority will make every person bow down and confess his authority at the end of the world. It is Jesus' end time responsibility and not our role in this life, to force others to confess Jesus as Lord. In this way, we can see how the eschatological parable of the weeds reinforces the idea of tolerance.

Matthew 13:30 states, "Let both grow together until the harvest." This statement is given to "the sons of the kingdom" who ask the Master, "Then do you want us to go and gather [the weeds]?" Jesus responds, "No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them." Craig L. Blomberg states that this parable is aimed at Jesus' disciples such as Simon the Zealot and his fellow Zealots, or those

people who did not want to wait for the final judgment and instead tried “to purify the world from evil” (Blomberg 1992:219). In Blomberg’s analysis, Jesus wants us to understand that even “God allows evil and suffering in the world”. Blomberg adds, “God’s delay in bringing the end of the world is thus entirely *gracious*, giving people more opportunity to repent” (my emphasis). He continues, “God will permit the righteous and wicked to coexist in this age.” Blomberg’s emphasis on God’s grace toward the sinners encourages us to have the same attitude as the “imitators of God” and his “beloved children” to “walk in love” (Eph. 5:1-2).

The idea of tolerance, however, does not necessarily imply the celebration of relativism. Kuyper rejects relativism as I have explained elsewhere (see Un 2020a:107). Kuyper certainly rejects relativism since relativism means the theoretical and practical denial of any objective or absolute truth and moral standards. Nevertheless, Kuyper also rejected Calvin’s narrow understanding of the role of government to punish those who are outside the realm of Christianity (see Un 2020a:107-108). In Calvin’s view, the main tasks of government are “to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behaviour to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquillity” (Calvin 1960:IV.xx.2). Kuyper certainly affirms the second task of government to handle the relationships among human beings. What Kuyper rejected is the first task regarding the relationships between human beings and God. By this task, government is endorsed to punish those who are outside Christianity. According to Douglas Kelly, Calvin’s model of relating to other religious believers was “Constantinian and medieval” (Kelly 1992:26). Calvin, in Kelly’s reading, had “no concept of a separation between religion and state, or of a non-Christian magistrate, or of toleration of plural churches.” Though rejecting relativism, we should tolerate those who are different from us since the Lord Jesus calls us to let them exist till the end of the world.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have demonstrated that Reformed theology, despite its strongly held theological positions, does in fact contain a systematic theology of tolerance, based on its own core beliefs. Using the content of the traditional Reformed systematic doctrines of revelation, humanity, common grace, and eschatology, I have shown how tolerance has a strong Reformed foundation.

General revelation of God is an indirect source of the existence of religions since all religions engage in the interpretation of general revelation. Another source of the existence of religions is the sense of the divine or the seed of religion implanted by God in human beings as the image of God. Religion also entails the human ca-

capacity to interpret and form a valorized identity. Moreover, common grace of God provides the possibility for all religions to have some true elements and positive features. And even if religions have corrupt beliefs and practices, it is Christ's eschatological prerogatives, not ours, to coerce or punish them. Our responsibility is to maintain a persuasive model in our relationships with other religious believers.

These lines of argument should encourage Reformed church members and Reformed theologians to adopt a tolerant attitude toward those who have different beliefs and practices, without compromising or changing our core beliefs. I would encourage further studies to consider how other doctrines within Reformed thinking encourage believers to take a tolerant stance toward people of all worldviews.

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Call for Papers for Consultation and Special Issue on “Gender & Religious Freedom: Children and Youth”

The Gender and Religious Freedom Task Group and the Research Task Group of the Religious Liberty Partnership invite proposals on the theme of “Gender & Religious Freedom: Children and Youth”. You are warmly invited to submit proposals by **31 January 2023** for presentation of a paper at a seminar to be held in April 2023. Please send proposals to ijrf@iirf.global.

Following the seminar, academic papers may be submitted to a special issue of the International Journal for Religious Freedom (IJRF).

We encourage submissions from any relevant fields such as sociology, anthropology, religious studies, theology, philosophy, law, political studies and international relations. Submissions may address specific situations or be theoretical. They can focus on a particular country or be international in scope.

Papers can focus on children and/or adolescents (the terms ‘girls’ and ‘boys’ is used below to refer to the non-adult status of under-18s). We recognise that the cultural and legal definitions of child, youth or adolescent vary considerably across context so do include your definition and context in your paper. We particularly encourage papers that are related to gender-specific religious persecution or discrimination but will accept non-gender-specific papers related to FoRB and children/youth. Some themes that are of interest include:

1. Girls: Girls (under-18s) are subject to abduction, forced conversion, forced marriage and rape on the basis of their religion. Girls often have difficulty accessing education and this is exacerbated by their religion.
2. Boys: Boys (under-18s) are subject to forced conscription and militarization.
3. Orphans: Children who are orphaned because of religious conflicts are particularly vulnerable and at risk of being trafficked.
4. Families: Families are weakened when a parent faces discrimination or persecution (eg, a father is imprisoned, loses a job or is killed; a mother experiences sexual assault, abduction/trafficking or is widowed). The impact on boys and girls may be different but is often has both short and long-term consequences for all children and youth.
5. Education: The internationally recognized right to education up to the age of 16/18 in conformity with one’s convictions is frequently violated in practice as a deliberate means of diminishing future capacity of religious minorities.

*Articles submitted to the IJRF should be 4000-6000 words and be submitted by **15 August 2023**. Authors should conform to the Guidelines for Authors found on the ijrf.org website. Acceptance is subject to peer review. Please send your submission to: ijrf@iirf.global.*

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