



## Praying for rain? Reformed perspectives from the Southern African context

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### Abstract

This contribution addresses the question raised in this volume whether praying for rain is an appropriate response to the impact of climate change from a Southern African perspective. It commences with a missionary story from Chipata in Zambia, reflects on subsequent contextual changes, and raises some theological questions on discerning the movement of the Spirit, divine action, and providence. It addresses such questions with reference to material developed for a “Season of Creation” from within the Western Cape, namely on the theme of “God and El Niño: What can we expect from the God of Exodus?” It concludes that praying for rain is a rather limited ecclesial response to climate change that raises more questions than it can answer.

### A Story from My Extended Family

When it comes to praying for rain, I need to tell a story often recalled by my father-in-law, Martin Pauw. He comes from a lineage of Dutch missionaries to Southern Africa. Jacobus Cornelis Pauw (1837–1918) was a pioneer who came to South Africa in 1861 and worked at Zoar and later at Zuurbraak in the Western Cape. He became the moderator of the first synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church after its controversial establishment in 1881. He had 12 children, including Christoffel Petrus Pauw (1878–1950, my wife’s great-grandfather), who arrived on 6 June 1905 as a missionary at Fort Jameson (later Chipata), in the former Northern Rhodesia.<sup>1</sup> Jacobus Cornelius Christoff Pauw (1909–1985), the son of Christoffel Petrus Pauw, also served as a missionary/pastor in Chipata, while my father-in-law, Christoff Martin Pauw (1940–), grew up in Chipata and later lectured at Justo Mwale Theological Seminary in Lusaka (1975–1983), named after the first Zambian to be ordained to the ministry in any denomination at Madzimoyo on 29 September 1929.

The town of Chipata began in 1895 as a military post of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) established by Cecil John Rhodes. The site was chosen to be about 20 miles west of the headquarters of the Ngoni Chief Mpezeni. This history reveals something of the collision of forces amidst which the early mission was established. I rely here on an unpublished report from Martin Pauw (2013) on the history of the Chipata Congregation of the Reformed Church in Zambia:

<sup>1</sup> See Jurie van Wyk, “Pauw, Christoffel Petrus,” Dictionary of African Christian Biography, 2003, [http://www.dacb.org/stories/zambia/pauw\\_christoffel.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/zambia/pauw_christoffel.html).

Mpezeni was the eldest son of the great Ngoni leader, Zongendaba (or Zwangendaba) who led his people out of South Africa in order to escape the warring of the Zulu king, Tshaka. After crossing the Zambezi near the confluence of the Zambezi/Luangwa Rivers in 1835, the Ngoni exodus moved north almost as far as Lake Tanganyika where Zwangendaba died in 1845. The Ngoni split up under various sons of Zwangendaba and Mpezeni led his group south. Around the 1870s they finally settled at a place called Luangeni, east of Chipata. Here they came into conflict with the Chewa people and when the BSAC came onto the scene the Chewa chiefs saw their presence as a way of protecting themselves against Mpezeni's aggression. A revolt against the BSAC led by Mpezeni's son, Nsingo was suppressed early in 1898 and Nsingo was put to death. Mpezeni was imprisoned for one year in a fort called Fort Manning (now Mchinji), just inside Malawi. While in prison he sent a message to the DRC missionaries at Mvera in Malawi, requesting missionaries to be sent to Eastern Zambia. This led to the opening of the first mission station at Magwero on 5 July 1899 by Revs P J Smit and J M Hofmeyr.<sup>2</sup>

The first part of this story is documented in a book on the history of the mission of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Orange Free State in the period 1899–1949 entitled *En Daar was Lig* ("And there was light")<sup>3</sup> by J. M. Cronje, while the second part is based on oral transmission. The preface of Cronje's book is dated 16 January 1948 and certainly conveys the spirit of the time in terms of missionary stereotypes, cultural assumptions, and nationalist aspirations. There is ample room for a hermeneutics of suspicion here, but let the story speak for itself:

In December 1906 there was a serious drought in and around Chipata. There were early rains, the maize developed well, and then the follow-up rains stayed away. There was still time to plant new crops, and some did, but the season remained bone dry. Chief Kapatamoyo then offered a pitch-black bull to the spirit of Mpezeni, the deceased chief. The bull had to be black to call forth the dark rain clouds through sympathetic magic. Some of the people observed that the bull had some white hair so that a second offering was required. Since such a specimen could not be found, the tribe called upon the British commissioner for help. The second offering still did not bring the desired results. A request for yet another bull from the government's herd was refused. It was suggested that Chief Kapatamoyo should approach the missionaries for assistance. They did that with meagre communication (Pauw was still learning Chichewa) and without much mutual trust. With some trepidation it was agreed to hold a Day of Prayer for rain the next Sunday at the church in the then Fort Jameson.

Even though Chief Kapatamoyo and his people were not Christians, Pauw believed that God's mercy extends to all people in need. However, he fully realized how detrimental to the Christian cause it could be if the rain did not follow on the day of prayer. He was very anxious

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<sup>2</sup> See C. Martin Pauw, "The Beginnings of Chipata RCZ Congregation," unpublished report for the centennial of the congregation (2013).

<sup>3</sup> See J. M. Cronj\_e, *En Daar Was Lig: Die Sending van die Ned: Geref. Kerk in die O.V.S. na Noord- en Suid-Rhodesië, gedurende die jare 1899–1947* (Bloemfontein: Sinodale Algemene Sendingkommissie van die Ned. Geref. Kerk in die O.V.S., 1948), 102–104.

as a young, unmarried pastor with no one to consult or to pray with. The Sunday arrived with beautiful weather, with no cloud in sight. An expectant crowd gathered at the church. Pauw preached on the events on Mount Carmel with little hope that the gathering understood much of what he was saying. During the sermon he saw a white cloud through the window. Through the window on the other side another cloud gathered. Soon the white clouds turned dark and pregnant with rain. The last hymn was accompanied by thunder and the first drops. Kapatamoyo and his people went home drenched in rain. The harvest was plentiful, as were the fruits of the mission. Chief Kapatamoyo was never baptized but remained a life-long friend of the mission.

The sequel to the story took place in 1949, 43 years later. Jacobus Christoff Pauw, the son of Christoffel Petrus, served as pastor in Chipata from 1948 until 1954. His son, my father-in-law, witnessed the events as a nine-year-old boy. There was another serious drought. The people came to the younger Pauw for assistance. Inevitably, the question was whether he could accomplish what his father did 40 years earlier – although both father and son would not claim any credit for themselves. In the words of the elder Pauw, “God has done it. To him be the glory!” Another day of prayer was organized to take place around mid-December. Thousands of people gathered, also on the hillside outside the church. My father-in-law clearly recalls that many arrived there with umbrellas, fully expecting a torrential downpour. It did not rain on that day, but it rained soon afterwards and there was again a good harvest.

### **Contextual Considerations**

The world was a quite different place when the two stories described above took place, one before the First World War and the other just after the Second World War. Zambia gained political independence on 24 October 1964, and South Africa’s apartheid history had just started at the time of the second story. The period since 1949 was characterized by the Cold War, by decolonialization in Africa, by the quest for “development,” and later “sustainable development” in the so-called underdeveloped third world and by the emergence of a global environmental awareness. The period since 1949 was characterized by rapid population growth, increases in the use of fossil fuels, and the rise of consumerism. In hindsight, this was also a period of climate change.

In 1958, David Keeling established a monitoring facility at Mauna Loa in Hawaii that measured the concentration of carbon dioxide in the earth’s atmosphere. The measurements collected at Mauna Loa show a steady increase in the mean atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide from about 315 parts per million in 1958 to 406.07 in January 2017. There is some seasonal variation given the foliation patterns in the land mass of the northern hemisphere so that the current figure (19 February 2017) is 405.91 as compared to 403.61 one year ago (19 February 2016).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See the home page of CO2-Earth at <https://www.co2.earth>.

It is widely recognized that climate change already has and will have a devastating impact throughout the African continent, albeit that there is much local variation as to what this impact may be. In Southern Africa, the impact coincides with the El Niño and La Niña effects. The El Niño pattern of 2015 was associated with a devastating drought throughout the summer rainfall areas of Southern Africa, including Zambia. The impact of that is still being felt in terms of food prices and food security, since the next harvest will only be gathered in the southern winter of 2017.

Allow me to make three observations based on recent news reports that are clearly not unrelated to climate change:

Firstly, the Western Cape where I am based is one of the worst affected veld fire areas in South Africa, where fires are a natural phenomenon during summer. However, too frequent fires may have a negative effect on the biodiversity and water supplies. Here are some news headlines published on the South African Broadcasting Corporation website in January and February 2017, indicating that “playing with fire” is not restricted to climate change: “More Than 100 Shacks Guttled by Fire in Slovo Park Informal Settlement” (19 February 2017); “Students Set Fire to NMMU Building as Part of Fees Must Fall Protests” (12 February 2017); “Calls for Donations for Farmers Affected by Southern Cape Fires” (26 January 2017); “Firefighters to Monitor Hotspots after Paarl Fire” (19 January 2017); “Fires Continue to Wreak Havoc in Parts of the Western Cape” (18 January 2017); “Somerset West Fires Cause over R50 Million in Damages” (6 January 2017).

Secondly, dam levels in the Western Cape Province are critically low. This is influenced by below-average rainfalls in the winter rainy season of 2016, but also by an expanding population in and around Cape Town, partly due to an influx from rural areas and by foreigners, the excessive use of water for gardens in affluent areas, the use of water to clean cars and pavements, water used for vegetable and fruit farming, water-thirsty alien vegetation, leakages in pipes and taps that are not maintained, and an unwillingness of residents to abide by stricter legislation. Dam levels are said to be the lowest in 30 years, and it was reported on 20 February 2017 that the city of Cape Town had drinking water for about 135 days.<sup>5</sup>

Thirdly, and more or less simultaneously (in the last part of February 2017), there have been numerous reports about flooding elsewhere in the Southern African region. Tropical Cyclone Dineo left a trail of destruction in Mozambique, half of the town of Wolmaransstad in North-West Province had to be evacuated after a dam wall threatened to collapse due to floods, while farmers were jubilant about heavy rains in several arid areas, but also concerned about flooding. The Free State Province, which was virtually a sand desert in the summer of 2015–2016, became a virtual lake in the later summer of 2017.

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<sup>5</sup> See Ezra Claymore, “Report: Western Cape Dam Levels Lowest in 30 Years,” *The South African*, 20 February 2017, <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/report-western-cape-dam-levels-lowest-in-30-years>.

## Praying for Rain?

The diversity of predicaments sketched above already suggests that praying for rain cannot be the only appropriate response to climate change in the South African context. Should the quantity and spread of rain be prescribed in our prayers, too? Should we pray for more volunteers as firefighters? Or ask God to smite the arsonists responsible for starting some of the fires? Or should we ask God to help us prevent negligence? But would this not precisely be to shift the burden of responsibility to God, asking God to do things that fall within our own locus of control? Or should we ask God to strengthen the spirit of relief workers? But would this not be to treat the symptoms and not the underlying causes? If we seek the latter, should we ask God to liberate us from the oppression and indebtedness to those responsible for historical carbon emissions? If we pray for that, would that really alter the global climate, given the mechanics of carbon cycles in the biosphere? Or should we as Africans confess our own guilt in aspiring to similar consumption patterns that led to climate change? Or should we instead kindly ask God to stay out of politics and the weather and just help us to strengthen social cohesion in faith communities?

Given this plethora of rather irreverent questions, let me offer a few theological observations that could inform ecclesial reflection and personal spirituality alike:

Firstly, there is an obvious need to discern the signs of the times, as is often suggested in forms of prophetic theology, especially but not only in the South African context. This should not be reduced to running political commentary, but is best understood as discerning the movement of the Spirit. The question is not merely what is happening in the world, but what is God up to? Where are God's footprints to be found? As Jürgen Moltmann has suggested, this question has replaced the former interest in natural theology (which had such disastrous consequences in South Africa) and placed it in a more historical framework.<sup>6</sup> This is a matter of spiritual discernment, which is a strength of African wisdom traditions. The task is to detect a sense of direction: Whither is the Wind blowing?<sup>7</sup> This is a question demanding prophetic courage: there is only one thing that is more dangerous than identifying the "finger of God" in human history, and that is not even trying to do so.

Secondly, this task requires theological reflection on divine action. The main question is *what* God is doing, but this can scarcely be separated from reflection on *how* God is doing it. Most would agree that God is using instruments, but which instruments? Only the witness of the church? Or a latter-day Cyrus? Or the forces of nature? To what effect? The more difficult question is how what is happening in the world can be attributed (retrospectively) to God's intentional actions. Is this really *God's* work? This question is more easily raised than answered, and not only because of facile attempts to claim divine authority for vested interests.

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<sup>6</sup> See Jürgen Moltmann, *Sun of Righteousness, Arise: God's Future for Humanity and the Earth* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2010), 189–208.

<sup>7</sup> See Ernst M. Conradie, "What Makes the World Go Round? Some Reformed Perspectives on Pneumatology and Ecology," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6:3 (2012), 294–305.

To put this bluntly: Can God really alter weather patterns? How would God do that given our current (still limited) scientific knowledge of the Earth's climate? How does God answer our prayers? The danger is to adopt a quasi-magical stance under the assumption that "of course an almighty God can do this." Does God then meddle with the laws of nature that, presumably, God established in the first place? Is God as Saviour not here acting in opposition to God as Creator, to rectify a botched job?<sup>8</sup> If the Saviour intervenes regularly, does this not leave us with a God who is no longer steadfast in love and loyalty? If God can intervene, why does God not do that far more often, given the persistent cries of God's suffering creatures? This is the classic problem of theodicy.

There are deep divisions in addressing such theological questions. There are diverging worldviews, some more informed by evolutionary science and others more informed by a "primal" worldview, with many hybrids in between. All Africans who play soccer, use cell phones, and travel in cars have to relate to the technological applications of modern science and then have to grapple with conflicting worldviews. This matter cannot be resolved here, but it clearly plays a role in hosting any day of prayer for rain. Another divide is between so-called mainline churches – which tend to assume that the Spirit of Christ will work through the ministries and missions of the institutional church and endorse the role of science – and Pentecostal churches that embrace modern technology more readily, resist the "hegemony" of an evolutionary worldview, and emphasize the freedom of the Spirit also beyond the presence of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

In the North Atlantic discourse on theology and science, a huge corpus of highly technical literature on divine action and also on the theodicy problem has emerged that addresses the question as to how God can work in the world in a non-interventionist but "objective" way that still alters the outcome of what happens.<sup>10</sup> African theologians, with the exception of white South African scholars,<sup>11</sup> have scarcely participated in such discourse. My sense is that African theology, with its understanding of the spirit world – the visible and the invisible – nevertheless has some wisdom to offer here, but only if such spirits are not reduced to quasi-material and quasi-magical forces so that rather pagan religious rituals are then required to align such forces with one's own interests. Instead, the contribution may lie in spiritual discernment, sensing the direction in which the Spirit moves us.

Thirdly, the locus where theological discussion should be focused is the doctrine of providence. This is an expression of God's loving care: God's loyalty to and solidarity with God's own beloved creation. The word "providence" expresses the belief that God has

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion on the difficulties to justice to both God's work of creation and of salvation, see Ernst M. Conradie, *Saving the Earth? The Legacy of Reformed Views on "Re-creation"* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013) and *The Earth in God's Economy: Creation, Salvation and Consummation in Ecological Perspective* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> On this contemporary divide on the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, see Ernst M. Conradie, "Only a Fully Trinitarian Theology Will Do, But Where Can That Be Found?" *Ned Geref Teologiese Tydskrif* 54:1&2 (2015), 1–9.

<sup>10</sup> See, especially, Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and William R. Stoeger, eds., *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action: Twenty Years of Challenge and Progress* (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory Publications/Berkeley: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2008); also their *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, vol. 1 (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory Publications/Berkeley: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> I have reviewed the literature in a monograph for Afrikaans readers. See Ernst M. Conradie *Lewend en Kragtig? In Gesprek oor God se Handeling* (Wellington: Bybelmedia, 2010). See also chapter 4 of my *The Earth in God's Economy*.

provided and will continue to provide in our needs (but not for our greed). The Latin root *pro-videre* suggests an ability to see, that is, to see more deeply (which requires insight) and to see ahead (foresight). Such an ability to plan ahead, to see what is not yet there, is indeed crucial in providing for the needs of one's family – as any parent would know. Again, this emphasis on the invisible, the spirit world active in and through the material world, is at home in the African context.

In Reformed theology, a distinction is usually made between three aspects of God's providence, namely *conservatio*, *gubernatio*, and *concursum*.

*Conservatio* refers to God's response to sin, namely in terms of the decision not to abandon the works of God's hands, to protect the world from the destruction wreaked by human evil in order to make room for the subsequent history of salvation. In Western theological discourse, this is often reduced to an emphasis on continuing creation (evolutionary history) and in such a way that the impact of sin is simply neglected. If so, providence is not a matter of conservation but of evolutionary change – which cannot be “steered,” according to the Darwinian emphasis on random mutations.

*Gubernatio* refers to God's sovereign governance of world history, steering it toward God's coming reign. This is where there is a need to detect the “hand,” or, better, the “finger,” of God in (human) history, with the obvious dangers with which this is associated. Not surprisingly, many have given up on this question, although climate change necessitates a rereading of the history of industrialized forms of civilization.

*Concursum* refers to the interplay between divine and human agency. The focus here is on God's care in everyday affairs – for food, shelter, health, fertility, safety, and guidance. The logic of this interplay cannot be understood in terms of 50/50 contributions. There are dangers here of quietism (expecting everything from God) and activism (impatience with God's slowness), but at least in Reformed theology most would say that, retrospectively, all the glory should be attributed to God. Thus we express gratitude to God for food on the table, even if we planted, harvested, and prepared the food ourselves.

It makes a significant difference on which of these aspects of providence the emphasis is placed in theological reflection on climate change. Consider this: Should we work with the United Nations toward climate mitigation, that is, by collectively curbing the emission of greenhouse gases as God's agents for the sake of “conservation” and the protection of biodiversity? If this fails, is God punishing us for our sins – or is God even punishing us as Africans for the sins of others? Is God abandoning the covenant with Noah never again to destroy the world with flooding (as Christians in small island states fear)? Is God planning to allow the self-destruction of industrialized capitalism in order to start anew after another period of exile? And if humans become extinct? Will God then redirect evolutionary history to allow other, perhaps even more intelligent, beings to emerge? Who would dare to answer such questions on God's behalf? Can we afford, instead, to focus primarily on matters of *concursum* by working toward food security in self-sustaining rural communities based on

the concept of sustainable livelihoods? What then of the need for “development”? What about the aspirations of many Africans for better education and health services and living the good life as demonstrated by the affluent?

### **What May We Expect from the God of Exodus?**

Given such theological considerations, what is the best way to proceed? One answer to this question may be found in a series of three exegetical guidelines for a “Season of Creation” included in the 2016–2017 edition of *Woord en Fees* (Word and Feast), a longstanding project to provide liturgical and homiletical resources for reformed congregations making use of the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL). The series is produced through collaborative efforts of scholars and pastors, mostly in the Western Cape region, and is published by Bible Media. A section on a “Season of Creation” has been included since the 2015–2016 edition. The series is published in Afrikaans, but an English version (not a translation) is also published as *Word and Worship* for use in congregations where English is the language of communication.

The idea is to make use of the texts allocated by the RCL to offer an ecological reading of such texts and to then identify a theme that would not only bring the studies together but will also be relevant within the context of celebrating such a “Season of Creation.” For September 2017 the texts allocated were Exodus 3:1–15, 12:1–14, and 14:19–31. The theme that was identified was “God and El Niño: What Can We Expect from the God of Exodus?”<sup>12</sup> This theme obviously responds to the drought in the summer rainfall season of 2015–2016 in Southern Africa, with the expectation that this drought will have a long-lasting impact across the country: for example, in terms of food security and food prices.

The three Exodus texts describe classic events, namely God’s appearance in the burning bush, the inaugural Passover leading to the exodus from Egypt, and the crossing of the Reed Sea, bringing safety to runaway slaves but drowning for Egyptian soldiers. If God is believed to act in human history, these texts bear witness to truly paradigmatic forms of divine action, setting the basis and subsequent pattern for understanding God’s identity and character. If climate change is the most significant challenge of the 21st century (as many would say), then these texts are the ones that can serve as sources of inspiration to understand how God would respond to the plight of, for example, climate refugees. In short, given the impact of El Niño, what may contemporary believers expect from the God of Exodus?

There is no space here to offer an exegesis of the three texts, and the results are of course varied: we see different sides of God’s character in these texts. This already suggests that praying for rain may not be the only legitimate response to climate change. There are, however, at least three common features of these recorded narratives worth mentioning.

Firstly, God acts in a hidden way, as it were without a clear signature. It is through God’s mere presence and the narrative of God hearing the cry of victims that Moses comes to life-

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion, see Ernst M. Conradie, “‘n Seisoen van die Skepping 2017: God en El Nino – Wat kan ons van die God van Eksodus verwag?”, in *Woord en Fees: Preekstudies met Liturgiese Voorstelle Gebaseer op die Leesrooster 2016/2017*, ed. Eddie Orsmond and Johan Botha (Wellington: Bybelmedia, 2016), 257–59.

changing insights. The bloody rituals prescribed for the Passover do not prompt a bloody revolt against the Pharaoh's oppression, but merely allow Israelite families to be passed by when the Egyptians were punished. The Egyptian army drowns not because of the wind, but because the East wind ceased.

Secondly, the liberating impact of these events is nevertheless dramatic. Moses goes back to the people from whom he has become estranged, the oppressor agrees to release a task force of slave labourers, and runaway slaves escape from being captured and commence a long journey with the God of the exodus.

Thirdly, there is a shadow side to all three stories. Where is God's concern for the Canaanites whose land will become occupied (see Ex. 3:17), the firstborn amongst the people and animals of Egypt, and the soldiers who drowned and their families? Is this a matter of God's justice for victims, or do these texts reflect a still limited understanding of inclusive grace? I suggest that it may be best to leave these questions open-ended, as they will surely invite further reflection in Christian communities seeking to come to terms with the impact of climate change.

### **What, Then, May We Pray For?**

Let me state this boldly: I really do not think it is appropriate to pray for rain when all indications suggest that droughts in the Southern African region are associated with El Niño and thus with anthropogenic climate change. A Day of Prayer for rain may still yield beneficial results in order to muster ecclesial communities to care for the victims of water scarcity, food insecurity, and the psychological stress associated with soaring temperatures, water shortages, and immense anxiety. There is certainly a need to offer opportunities for soul-searching and penitence, acknowledging our human dependence upon each other, on nature (rain), and on God. There is ample room for a sense of humility and supplication in times of need. Even where things are within our locus of control, we are often unable to help ourselves.

However, it is doubtful whether praying for rain makes good scientific sense, even in terms of chaos theory. How do we imagine that God would be able to change the weather patterns? It also causes more theological problems than it can resolve. If God can be persuaded to send rain, what does that say about God? Is this not an arbitrary, rather fickle God? Why does God not do this regularly, whenever there is drought? Alternatively, if this is a matter of sin, should any drought really be regarded as God's punishment for sin? Does this not yield a vindictive God, easily offended and ready to cause the deaths of millions? And what does it say about us who ask for rain? Is the danger not that we treat God as if divine assistance can be turned on and off whenever required, assuming that God can be used in a quasi-magical way as a dispensary of blessings? Is this not the kind of idolatry associated with fertility cults – in ancient Israel but alas also in contemporary prosperity cults?

One may counter this by suggesting that if one cannot pray for rain, then there is little point in any petitionary prayer. This leaves ample room for other forms of prayer such as worship, praise, thanksgiving, confession, and dedication. The point is that petitionary prayer, praying for oneself or for others, is readily abused. At best, any form of prayer is an expression of what lies beyond the locus of control of the one who prays. We can work hard to secure food, but ultimately the fact that I have food on the table (and others do not) is not only dependent upon me. It is beyond my locus of control. The same applies to safety precautions in going on a journey. Thus we pray for a safe return, bringing before God our inability to control our destiny. The same would apply to prayers for fertility and for rains. However, in the case of rain this is only a half-truth, since we have been meddling with the weather, deforesting the land, and changing the composition of the earth's atmosphere. We are living in the age of the Anthropocene, which suggests that even the weather is within our sphere of influence, if perhaps not our control. If so, what can we, especially Reformed Christians in (South) Africa, pray for? I would suggest a threefold prayer with immense inner tensions:

Firstly, following Psalm 13:2, a prayer of protest is in order: How long, dear Father, will you tolerate the injustice that those who contributed least to climate change will suffer most under its consequences? *Kyrie eleison* (Matt. 15:22)!

Secondly, a prayer of confession is appropriate for Reformed Christians, specifically in South Africa, following Psalm 51:8: Jesus Christ, our broken Saviour, we confess our insincerity in seeing the faults of others, but when we examine our hearts we acknowledge that we aspire to the consumerist lifestyles of the affluent, while some of us have indeed contributed more than our fair share of greenhouse emissions. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sinned against us (Matt. 6:12).

Thirdly, a prayer for guidance and inspiration is appropriate, following Psalm 104:30: Spirit of the living God, come, renew your whole creation, guide us to remain steadfast on the path of faith, hope, and solidarity with the victims of climate change, also when love grows cold.<sup>13</sup> Sustain us to endure to the end (Matt. 24:13) and deliver us from evil (Matt. 6:13).

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers; your sustaining love endures forever (Ps. 136).

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<sup>13</sup> See the booklet produced by the World Council of Churches in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, *Solidarity with the Victims of Climate Change: Reflections on the World Council of Churches' Response to Climate Change* (Geneva: WCC, 2002). The document raises the need for solidarity when "love grows cold."