

LuxMundi 30

No 2 June 2011

Published quarterly by the Committee
on Relations with Churches Abroad
of the Reformed Churches in The
Netherlands



LuxMundi 30

No 2 June 2011

Editorial

By J.M. Batteau, p. 29

The biblical background of the doctrine of the Trinity (2)

By G. van den Brink, p. 30

Theocracy or democracy?

By J.P. de Vries, p. 34

Paradise Motifs in the Book of Revelation - Part 2

By P.H.R. van Houwelingen, p. 37

Marriage, Family and the Civil Authority – Part 2

By D.J. Steensma, p. 42

The 2010/2011 National Assembly of the NGK

By A.P. de Boer, p. 47

‘Theological Education and Mission’

By J.W. Maris, p. 50

Banning ritual slaughter,

By N.D. Kloosterman, p. 52

Newsupdate

Preaching Library, p. 41

Book announcements, p. 45

Promotion studies Apeldoorn, p. 51

Published quarterly by the Committee on Relations with churches Abroad of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands
Volume 30 - No. 2
June 2011

Editors: Rev. J.M. Batteau
Mrs. S.M. Bosscha-Timmermans
Rev. R.C. Janssen
Dr. J.W. Maris
Mr. P.G.B. de Vries

Design: BVGO - Age Jan van Veelen
www.bvgo.nl

Print: Van Berkum Graphic Solutions
www.drukkerijvanberkum.nl

Address for editorial and administrative matters (subscriptions, change of address):

Lux Mundi / office BBK

P.O. Box 499

8000 AL ZWOLLE

The Netherlands

Phone: ++31(0)38 4270470

E-mail: bbk@gbouw.nl

<http://www.bbk.gkv.nl>

Bank account 1084.32.556

Adm. Lux Mundi

Subscriptions in The Netherlands:

€ 19,25 for one year

Editorial

Freedom and Islam

The international community's war with Al Qaeda continues, even after the death of Osama Bin Laden. Here in Europe we see a rising polarization around Islam, with Geert Wilders in The Netherlands calling for a ban of the Koran, and Marine Le Pen in France calling for a halt to immigration from (primarily) North African Moslem countries. What are we, as orthodox Reformed Christians, to make of this situation?



Our principles can lead us to divergent standpoints. In the words of the original Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, the civil government is called “not only to have regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state, but also that they protect the sacred ministry, *and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship, that the kingdom of antichrist may be thus destroyed* and the kingdom of Christ promoted.” These words are still adhered to by the Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij (SGP party) in The Netherlands, with two members in the Second Chamber (House of Representatives) of parliament. This has led the SGP party to oppose the building of mosques, and to a certain degree of sympathy with Geert Wilders on the issue of Islam.

Article 36

On the other hand, the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands modified Article 36 in 1905 to exclude the words “and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship, that the kingdom of antichrist may thus be destroyed,” and their sister-churches around the world have maintained this exclusion. This has led orthodox Reformed Christians who support the ChristenUnie (Christian Union) party in The Netherlands, with five members in the Second Chamber, to vigorously support religious freedom, to not oppose the building of mosques, and to be much more critical of Wilders on this point. The Protestant Reformation is seen as a movement toward religious freedom, based on the Bible, by which Christians, but also Moslems and humanists, have the right to association and to set up their own institutions.

It is thus true, we orthodox Reformed believers are inwardly divided on the issue of religious freedom. However, the tension caused by this division is one which can still be fruitful for our participation in the societies of which we are a part. We affirm together

the sovereignty of God, and God's call to all rulers to follow Him and His Christ. Think of the words of Psalm 2:10-12: “Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son (!), lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (NIV). True freedom, for all human beings, is ultimately freedom in Christ, and not apart from Him.

At the same time, we, including those of maintaining the contested verses of Art. 36 of the Belgic Confession, do believe that the government can never coerce belief. The way to the hearts of the peoples of the world is not through the sword, but through the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is neither appropriate nor morally right for Christians to call for the outlawing of Islam. The path to the freedom which only Christ can give is one which should be held open to all citizens, regardless of their current religious (or even atheistic) commitments. Let Moslems build their mosques. We will ask the same privilege in majority Moslem countries. We as Christians are not at war with human beings, but are engaged in a spiritual struggle “against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12).

While supporting the right of self-defense across national borders, and the fight against terrorism, we as Christians must be clear in our intentions to love all, including our enemies. Here in The Netherlands, various contacts between Christians and Moslems have been and continue to be hopeful, when carried out in a spirit of respect. Freedom in Christ can only be reached through a free meeting of minds. ■

The biblical background of the doctrine of the Trinity [2]

In the first part of this article we saw that the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testament, speaks clearly about God as a triune God. We saw how Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of the Father, and made it a reality through his life, suffering, and death. We learnt that the Father identifies with Jesus and proclaims himself to be his Father, and that the Spirit continues and completes Jesus' work on earth, inspiring people to believe. In this second and final part, we will take a further look at the importance of this doctrine of Trinity and find out why it is still relevant today.



Let us stand still for a moment on this roundtrip through the gospel. How far are we now? What have we discovered? Have we 'proved' with the above that the doctrine of the Trinity is biblical? Have I, by means of a cleverly constructed collage of biblical texts, brought the reader so far that he must admit: 'Now I can (unfortunately) no longer deny the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity?' No, we cannot call it foolproof evidence. It is important to remain honest, not try to smuggle things in secretly that the New Testament does not exhibit. What the New Testament does portray however is this pattern of mutual involvement with each other of Father, Son and Spirit in the drama of redemptive history. In mutual respect of each other and in persevering love, all three of them are involved in bringing back the human world to God.

What the New Testament also shows us is that in accordance with this mutual involvement of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, it becomes common to name these three, or two of the three, in *one* breath. We see that Jesus and the Father are named in *one* breath in all the letters of Paul (Rom 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:3, 2 Cor. 1:2, Phil. 1:2, Gal. 1:3, 2 Thess. 1:1-2, 1 Tim. 1:1-2). In other places, the Spirit is also included (Matt. 28: 19, the Baptismal formula; 2 Cor. 13:13, the New Testament blessing; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 5:18-20; 1 Pet. 1:1-2 and Jude 20-21). With this it cannot yet be said that Father, Son and Spirit share in the same Divine Nature (that they three are all 'God'). But it can be said that in this way they all together form the object of Christian worship. That is remarkable enough, for we may only worship God.

About the author:

Prof. Dr Gijsbert van den Brink (b. 1963) is senior university lecturer in Dogmatics at the Free University of Amsterdam (VU) and professor of the History of Reformed Protestantism at the University of Leiden.

Moreover it is important here to keep sight of the order of developments. Whoever wishes to point out the roots of the doctrine of Trinity in the New Testament does well not to refer simply to a few scattered Bible texts. In doing so you can make dreadful mistakes. Such as, for example, if you were to assume that the few words from 1 John 5:7-8 (... for there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one, - *King James Version*) are authentic, since here we are dealing with an interpolation from the Middle Ages, which was meant to prove the church right. To be able to understand where the doctrine of the Trinity comes from one must focus on something quite different from some scattered Bible texts, namely on the *overarching pattern* of God's redeeming work in both the Old and the New Testament. The New Testament is entirely about the cooperation between the Father, Son and Spirit in the plan to let people with a death warrant share in God's kingdom, and, in doing so, receive eternal life. That is the core of the events to which the gospels and letters wish to draw our attention. That is the reason why we have, in the above, stopped to look at these patterns, in the hope that the readers may become sensitive to them. From these patterns we can subsequently understand why so many separate texts speak in *one* breath of the Father, the Son and/or the Spirit.

The final step

Still, one might say that according to the NT, of the aforementioned three persons who play a role in the drama of redemptive history, only the Father is truly God. Jesus and the Spirit are then instruments playing a role in God's actions. They purportedly stand for two different aspects of the manner in which God comes to us: Jesus is the pre-eminent prophet who proclaims God's message, and the Spirit is another word for God's activity in people. In the economy of redemption (or more popularly phrased: in God's plan of salvation) God then relates to earth through the human Jesus and through this Spirit. And in the realization of that plan, these three are single-minded. But, so some believe, God himself is naturally much more than that plan. In his essence he is concealed behind Jesus and the Spirit, and he could even turn out to be very different. Whoever stands eye to eye with

Jesus is not necessarily meeting God himself. Jesus is *the* (or in any case *a*) way to God, just as the Spirit is. As soon as you have found God through this way you have achieved your goal and have left the road behind you. Jesus and the Spirit are like the scaffolding that is dismantled after the house is built. Thus God himself is not seen to be triune, but simply singular.

It is this portrayal of the matter that the Church had passionately rejected with her doctrine of the Trinity. For this approach gives the redemptive history as described in the Bible a secondary, subordinate position. In this portrayal, the gospel of the crucified Lord and the life-giving Spirit is no longer the decisive event that enables us to look right into the heart of God. It is but a step to what may be a very different eternal God hidden *behind* his threefold earthly appearance.

Usually the view is that God is the highest being, the unmoved mover, the One, the Absolute, or however philosophers call it. A divine being so exalted that he can only be approached along mystical ways, impossible to be squared with the image of the suffering Christ and the groaning Spirit. But if that is true, in the end we still have no idea what to expect from God. Then the whole Christian Faith is built on shaky ground.

In this way we do no justice to the Bible and do not take the message of salvation seriously. For in the Bible God makes himself known not just *via* Jesus Christ and the Spirit, but also as the God who is completely one with them. There is no God-behind-God. The God who gave his Son and his Spirit is the only one we know. As God made himself known in Jesus and the Spirit, so is he in reality – forever and in all eternity. But if that be the case, then we must also dare to take the final decisive step. For then it cannot be any other way than that Jesus and the Spirit share in God's being. In God's inclination towards us humans, of which the gospel speaks, God shows himself as the God who is always one with the Son and the Spirit and can never be thought of without them. Only in this way do we take seriously that 'whoever sees Jesus sees the Father' (John 14:9). And that it is the Spirit who fathoms God's depths and allows us to share in this knowledge (1 Cor 2:10-14). For the knowledge

of God mediated by the Spirit is not a sort of mystical ecstasy, or a vague ethereal feeling, but a knowledge that bears the stamp of the suffering and crucified Jesus (1 Cor 2:2,8).

It is for this reason that the early church did not stop at a so-called 'economical doctrine of trinity', according to which Father, Son and Spirit are but temporarily 'single-minded' in their cooperation with each other. The church realized that she can only do justice to the biblical message by taking the final step too: *if this is the way in which God reveals Himself to us, then it is also the way in which God truly exists – forever and in all eternity*. For we would not be taking seriously God's revelation in Christ and the Spirit if we suspected a very different God behind them. That would become a great Unknown, the 'hidden God' that Luther feared so badly that he was sometimes frightened that the biblical God was all a pretence. The gospel however wants to impress upon us that God will never be other than how he made Himself known in the history of salvation. Yes, that he never was any different: always one with Christ and the Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is, seen in this light, the security seal on the heart of the biblical message. God is light; in him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). That can only be true if God is not ambiguous but transparent; if his being is completely in accordance with his threefold revelation, meaning that God's being is itself also threefold. Then Jesus and the Spirit belong essentially and from all eternity with God. They share in God's one being, because *God's Name is in them* (Ex 23:22).

It is clear then that from a biblical point of view it is really no blasphemy to believe in a triune God. The fact that no man will ever be able to fathom completely the manner in which God's unity exactly relates to his tri-unity – our human reason is just too limited – does not make it nonsense. It is, as we saw, the only way to do true justice to what the New Testament tells us. It only goes awry when we start speculating *separately* from the New Testament about how God works. Unfortunately, that has taken place too often in history. The correct reaction to that is not to reject the doctrine of the Trinity, but to unearth it from the Bible itself. Then it becomes apparent that we cannot do with

anything less. Therefore, whoever wishes, for the sake of Muslims or others, to place the doctrine of the Trinity in parentheses, loses all that makes the Christian faith distinctively Christian. For you don't have to be a Christian to see Jesus as a 'special inspiring person', a prophet or a teacher of wisdom, and to see the Spirit as a 'force'. The unique insight of the earliest Christians was the fact that in Jesus we are dealing with no less than God himself. And with that, as we saw, the doctrine of the Trinity was already given to us in the kernel.

Practical meaning

What now is the practical relevance of all this? We can make this visible by summing up the spiritual positions around which the doctrine of the Trinity has made demarcations, due to the fact that they were less-than-Christian (sub-Christian). There are six in all. All six positions survive up to the present day, actually occurring in real life, sometimes even *en masse*. But all six of them do injustice to the close connection between Father, Son and Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is therefore meant to stand guard around this unique message of the gospel, in which God is known only through Christ and the Spirit.

That means therefore:

- *No Son without the Father.* Christians should not allow themselves to be satisfied by seeing Jesus as a historical figure who taught us all sorts of important values and gave a good moral example. Whoever desires to do the New Testament justice, cannot possibly see only a prophet and wise teacher in him. For his purpose was to bring us into contact with the One who, in his view, was always and everywhere the most important Person, namely his God and Father. That is why it is simply not possible to follow Jesus without a focus on God. Whoever thinks differently about Jesus is not talking about the Jesus of the New Testament, the beloved Son of God.
- *No Father without the Son.* According to the Christian Faith you cannot associate with God in such a manner that the person and the work of Jesus are of no relevance. The cross and resurrection are not a stadium that one can leave behind in a moment of spiritual enlightenment or mystical ecstasy (as some Corinthians and other gnostic-influenced Christians thought). Jesus is the way to God, but not in the manner of a traveller who forgets the road he walked as soon as he has arrived at his destination. On the contrary, 'Christians never approach so close to the Father that they can forget about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; they can never find a place in the heart of the Father where there is no presence of the crucified and risen one' (Mike Higton, *Christian Doctrine*, 86). Whoever thinks otherwise about that is speaking of a divinity different from the God that is proclaimed to us in the New Testament.
- *No Son without the Spirit.* In the Christian consciousness it is simply not possible to have a relationship with Christ that is not being paved and mediated by the Spirit. Without the Spirit, Jesus remains to us either locked up in the past, as – to be sure – an important but somewhat mysterious historical figure, or at an unreachable distance in heaven. It is only the Spirit who can bridge the chasm between past and present, by showing us how all-decisive Jesus is to us. It is also the Spirit who brings Jesus from heaven into the human heart, by convincing that human heart internally that there is no one in heaven and on earth that loves it more than this very Jesus (Belgic Confession art. 26).
- *No Spirit without the Son.* True, a Christian is filled with the Spirit – but the Spirit does not ever make us descend or prophesy so deeply or does not bring us onto such high planes that we should forget the cross on which Jesus died for our sins. For the Spirit brings joy and comfort out of the cross and resurrection of Christ. He does not instigate a *feel good* faith in which everything revolves around self-confirmation and positive thinking. Every form of Christianity in which I find God in myself or myself in God, without Jesus being part of it, is therefore sub-Christian: it may make me a 'spiritual' person, but not a Christian. Whoever thinks he can pass Jesus by in a spiritual manner is speaking of a different spirit from that of the Father and the Son.
- *No Father without the Spirit.* Christian faith in God is never 'unspirited'. Christianity is not about a distant, far-off God who once upon a time fitted the world together like an intelligent watchmaker, but who now no longer concerns himself with it anymore. Man can believe in such a deistic God in a purely rational manner. But, Christianly speaking, that is not enough. Belief touches our heart and renews our life. It means that we have, through the Spirit, been included in a close relationship with the Father.

The Bible uses big words to describe this, like 'born again' or 'being made alive' through the Spirit. Being in God is therefore a passionate experience: it is literally 'enthusiastic' (that word comes from *en* = in, and *theos* = God). We can only know this communion with the Father if we have been led into it by the Spirit – otherwise we are speaking of another Father than the one who according to the New Testament sent his Spirit.

- *No Spirit without the Father*. Conclusively, the Spirit never takes us beyond God the Father's concrete plans and intentions for this hard reality on earth. Via Christ, he brings us back to the longing of the Father. He does not let us walk past God's Kingdom and his justice. No, the Spirit lets us groan together with creation for as long as that creation has not been completed (Rom 8). For was it not the same Spirit who inspired Jesus to his proclamation of the Kingdom? The Spirit does not want Christians to draw back into an atmosphere of religious self-fulfilment, but equips them for a life of testimony and service.

In this way, the doctrine of the Trinity clearly marks out the coordinates within which the Christian Faith can flourish. The doctrine of the Trinity - together with the doctrine of who Jesus is - is not for nothing the original primeval dogma of the Christian community: the pre-eminent guide through which one can test the spirits, to discern whether they are of God.

Further reading:

- Gijsbert van den Brink, 'De hedendaagse renaissance van de triniteitsleer. Een oriënterend overzicht', *Theologia Reformata* 46, 2003, p. 210-240.
- Philip W. Butin, *The Trinity* (Foundations of Christian Faith), Louisville 2001.
- Paul M. Collins, *The Trinity. A Guide for the Perplexed*, London 2008.
- 'The Doctrine of the Trinity in Faith and Global Theology', Special edition of the *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3.1 (2009), p. 1-107; compare also issue 3.2 for essays on how the Trinity is currently experienced in Africa, Asia and Latin-America.
- Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity*, Grand Rapids 1995.
- Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity. In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, Phillipsburg 2004.
- Roger Olson & Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity*, Guides to Theology, Grand Rapids 2002.

This article was originally published in the Dutch language as '*De drie-eenheidsleer: rechtstreeks weggelopen uit de Bijbel*' in: *Cees Dekker e.a. Hete Hangijzers*, edited by Buijten & Schipperheijn, Amsterdam 2009, Ch. 11, p. 199-210. This translation by Sabine Bosscha-Timmermans, March 2010, by arrangement with the author. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations and references are taken from the New International Version of the Bible (NIV), 2010.

About our new editor-in-chief

Rev. J.M. (Kim) Batteau is the minister-emeritus of the Reformed Church in The Hague-Center/Scheveningen. He is an American, studied literature at Harvard College, theology at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, and at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in Kampen. He taught theology at Korea Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) from 1980 to 1988, and pastored congregations in The Netherlands from 1988 to 2011.

Greetings from your new editor-in-chief and editorial writer! I'm back as part of the team which puts together the issues of Lux Mundi. I'm enjoying my new situation as a minister-emeritus. My wife and I are now living in the lovely little town of IJsselstein, just below Utrecht, and I'm looking forward, Lord willing, to help out with various projects of our church federation. It's good to have some extra time, and it's good to be able to help out with producing Lux Mundi!

J.M.B.

Theocracy or democracy?

Ever since the beginning of the Christian Church, the relationship between the Church and the State has been a much considered issue. In the course of the centuries, depending on the circumstances, this relationship has taken various forms. For example, it makes a substantial difference whether Christian believers form a minority in society, or whether practically the whole nation consists of believers. This last situation, we might add, has been rare in the course of history.



Since the French period (the constitution of 1798), the Netherlands has enjoyed freedom of religion, mutual independence of church and state, and equal rights for all churches, as far as the state is concerned. During the first decades of the Monarchy (1813-1853) this right nevertheless had to be defended, even fought for, in practice (see the 2009 dissertation by Mr Emo Bos, *Souvereiniteit en religie – godsdienstvrijheid onder de eerste Oranjevorsten*).

While this has been the constitutional arrangement in the Netherlands for two whole centuries, there were also those among the Dutch Protestants who preferred a different system: a theocracy, in which church and state carry a joint responsibility for the Christian (Protestant) character of the nation. At the end of the 19th century Philip J. Hoedemaker (1839-1910) was an advocate of this system, as were Theodorus L. Haitjema (1888-1972) and subsequently Arnold A. van Ruler (1908-1970) in the 20th century. On May 25, 2010, it was my privilege to defend at the Theological University of Kampen a thesis dedicated to Van Ruler's theocratic vision entitled *Een theocratisch visioen – De verhouding van religie en politiek volgens A.A. van Ruler*. Van Ruler was professor representing the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk at Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht (Utrecht University) from 1947 onward.

Communal mission

According to Van Ruler, the Christianization of society is the communal mission of both church and state. He characterizes their relationship as the two focal points of an ellipse, and even, at one point, as a marriage. The church must educate the state concerning God's will; the state must profess God's name and, through her laws, keep the people

close to God's will. The state ought to provide materially for the church also; church guardianship is seen by him as, in principle, a government task. A state government that is religiously neutral was an offence to him. To his way of thinking, Government offices with influence in the determination of policies can therefore only be held by professing Christians. In 1945, he even wanted to ban Roman Catholics from office, because he considered their loyalty to the Pope to be at odds with the Protestant character of the nation of the Netherlands. In later documents we see him becoming more sensitive to the importance of political tolerance towards those of other beliefs, yet still holding on to a privileged position for the Christian Church.

A parliamentary democracy, within which every conviction has equal rights and may express itself equally, cannot easily be incorporated into this theocratic image. Therefore Van Ruler states that the rise of democracy has caused the political parties to penetrate into what is really a church task. Though he was an advocate of popular influence, he preferred to have it take shape in a representation based on social diversity (corporatism), rather than based on political convictions. Later on he became more appreciative of the value of a parliamentary system; he even compared the people's representative's speech to the believer's prayer to God. Nevertheless, the fact that the church thereby lost her public function still bothered him.

Because he took his starting point in the people of the nation as a Christian entity, he did not see any room for Christian political parties, on principle. Nor did he join the movement of 1945, in which many Reformed and Roman-Catholics left the confessional parties to join the Party van de Arbeid (the labour party). Van Ruler's objections to the socialist ideology of this party were too substantial for that. As there was not a single party that propagated the theocratic ideal, he and others together founded the Protestant Union in 1945. The first point of this party's programme declared that the State of the Netherlands ought to have a spiritual foundation, and must acknowledge and express that foundation. Moreover, the Bible is highlighted as the most essential foundation for a state within a Christianized Europe. This party took part in parliamentary elections only once, without gaining a single seat. After that it became a political study fellowship.

About the author:

Dr Jurjen P. de Vries (b. 1940) was chief editor of the reformed daily newspaper 'Nederlands Dagblad' and a member of the Senate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands



On the 25th of May the author had his doctorate conferred at the Theological University of Kampen. His thesis is titled: Een theocratisch visioen, De verhouding van religie en politiek volgens A.A. van Ruler. A publication of this thesis can be ordered at Boekencentrum Uitgevers. (Photo P.G.B. de Vries)

Five elements

With Van Ruler, this theocratic vision on the relationship between church and state is embedded within his dogmatic view of the manner in which the kingdom of God emerges throughout history. Some five elements in that view lay the ground for his theocratic vision. In the first place would be the great value that he places on the Old Testament. He sees David's theocratic rulership as a model for all monarchies in the world. In the second place, he states, with reference to Matt. 28:19, that the nation as a whole must be brought to Christ. God's redeeming plan is not about individuals but about nations. In the third place, he is of the opinion that the state is allowed to implement its power forcefully to achieve the Christianization of the nations, in the same way that it may be used for the punishment of evil. A fourth thesis expressed by him is that Christianity can never be more than a mingling of revelation and heathendom. This conviction allows him to accept that his theocratic ideal, in everyday practice, can only become reality in a very limited way even in the most favourable circumstances. Lastly, what also stands out is his positive evaluation of western (European-American) culture as Christian culture, and therefore as a starting point for the realization of a theocracy.

These five points with which Van Ruler lays the ground for his theocratic vision, cannot, in my opinion, withstand the test of scriptural criticism. Therefore, the biblical base under his theocratic ideal does not hold ground. Van Ruler allots tasks and responsibilities to the state, which, as the Bible sees it, belong to the church. He wishes to exert the worldly means of power to achieve the people's conversion, whereas the Bible says that people can only be brought to God through the Word and the

Spirit. The state is there to protect the outward legal order, as the working ground upon which churches and church members can work in peace towards fulfilling their mission. The state may not stand between the people and God. Western culture, moreover, contains not only Christian, but also many heathen elements.

Positive evaluation

Even though we must reject Van Ruler's theocratic view, this does not mean that there is nothing positive to be said about his vision on the relationship between religion and politics. What does appeal to us in his vision is the positive evaluation of all creation as the work of the Creator, his respect for the government as the servant of God, and his love for the people, whom he would so dearly have seen serving God as a whole nation. Also we appreciate his rejection of the radical theology that was on the rise in the Sixties. He certainly raised some critical questions regarding the workings of the democratic system, the neutrality of the government, and the division of the people into parties, which theological ethicists could not ignore.

Is a Christian state – other than in the theocratic form – a biblical goal to strive for? And if not, or if this goal is now unobtainable, how then should the government cope with the spiritual diversity among the people? Christians who aspire towards a responsible position in the political domain should give some thought to this, and make themselves accountable for the opinions of their predecessors, who have already aired their opinions on the matter. That prevents secularization creeping into Christian-political thinking.

Today Christians in The Netherlands live in a democratically-furbished public order, in which every conviction has equal rights. Must the Church continue striving for a theocratic system, or should it instead be averse to all political life? Is there a third way? Can a Christian who is convinced that God's Word is the truth (Psalm 119: 160) participate and bear responsibility in a political system in which no stand is taken on the question of truth and all convictions have equal rights? What does it mean for the constitutions of founded parties? In short: can Van Ruler's political theology help us find an answer to the questions that face Christians of the 21st century?

One-sided view

Our discussion of these questions results in the conclusion that Van Ruler's criticism of the democratic system stems from a one-sided view of democracy. To the very essence of democracy belong the following: the recognition of the constitutional state (the *rule of law*: even the highest authority is subject to the law; political power is not a licence for governments to do what they arbitrarily desire) and the recognition and protection of the rights and freedoms of minorities. When we view democracy in that way – and that is an idea stemming not only from Reformed ethicists, but from non-reformed theologians and legal experts just as well – a Christian can freely participate in a democratic system. In doing so there is – contrary to what Barth said – no need to hide his Christianity, let alone deny it, but he will have to accept that his conviction as to the absolute truth of God's revelation is not prominently shared in the public debate.

Concerning the question whether the government can or should be neutral, we would like to make a distinction. Within a democratic constitutional state, the government ought to treat all civilians equally, irrespective of their religious convictions. In that sense, the government should be impartial and may not use her means of power to privilege one church or religion. Moreover, the government can never be neutral in her own policies; on that point Van Ruler was right. The government cannot escape making choices for her own policy that are ethically determined and entail a judgment of what is good and evil. Ignoring the wisdom of the Bible in this process can only be to her own detriment. Christian civilians and Christian churches can point this out to them.

Therefore it is a good thing when Christians organize themselves into a party with a Christian foundation. But they should be aware of the dangers inherent in that. For the Bible offers no political programme for a state in the 21st century. Whatever Christians derive from the message of the Bible as a guide for their political wishes remains the fruit of human thought, and is therefore open to criticism. Christians and Christian political parties do have God's Word as a light to their path, but they do not have a monopoly on wisdom. Differences in political convictions among Christians do not automatically have the status of confessional differences. Yet this moderating

comment is not meant to imply that we should refrain on principle from forming Christian-based parties. For every party rests on a political conviction that has an ideological foundation, and that conviction must be tested against the Bible.

Tempting

Van Ruler's dream of a theocratically ruled society seems tempting, but the realization of this dream may only be expected after Jesus has returned to judge all people and nations, and found his Kingdom definitely on a new earth. Then tolerance will no longer be an issue, since all the godless will have disappeared from the earth (Psalm 104:35). Critical testing of Van Ruler's political theology brings us to the conclusion that we should not anticipate the future by turning this dream into a pursuable programme in this temporary earthly dispensation, attempting to achieve this Kingdom here and now – a temptation which Van Ruler was not always able to resist.

While rejecting these theocratic ideals, as well as the Anabaptists' avoidance of all politics, we therefore choose a third way. While acknowledging the earthly character of the state's authority, Christians may strive to influence government policy by using their democratic rights. If God wills it, it is even possible that a country for the shorter or longer term can be (co-) ruled by governments that are willing to be guided by the Word of God. But that in itself does not mean that this is the inception of a theocratic state. It remains a free, democratic state, in which the government does not apply her authority towards force or coercion in spiritual matters, but respects everyone's freedom. In this situation also, the church should cherish her own independence and own responsibility, and the government should respect that.

However, whatever the political circumstances may be – from dictatorial Roman Emperors up to Libertine secularists – at all times the church and the believers have the mission to pray for kings and others in authority, so that the people may live peaceful and quietly, in all godliness and holiness (1 Timothy 2:2) and honour the authorities as servants of God (Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:17). ■

Paradise Motifs in the Book of Revelation [2]

In the previous instalment of this article, we dealt with the first three of the seven paradise motifs in the Book of Revelation: The paradise garden of God; the new heaven and the new earth, where there is no sea; God and the Lamb as the eternal source of light. In this second, final instalment we will discuss the remaining four motifs, and examine the differences between Revelation and Genesis.¹



4. Servants who reign as kings

“And they will reign for ever and ever” (ch. 22:5b). Grammatically, the subject of this ‘reigning’ is found back in v. 3: the servants of God, who worship him. Cultic adoration in heaven was already described with reference to a great multitude, whom no-one could count: “*These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God day and night, and serve him day and night in his temple...*” (ch. 7:14,15). Just as to serve the God of Israel in freedom was one of the goals of the Exodus, so these people will be free to worship God forever.

The throne of God and of the Lamb stands in the centre of the new Jerusalem (this is stated twice, with emphasis, in chapter 22:1 and 3). Around the throne there are the servants of God. In vv 3b-5a, Mathewson sees them as priests, who are given a royal task as well. This combination makes us think of Exodus 19:6, where Israel is described as a ‘kingdom of priests’.² But this worshipful reigning is not confined to Israel; throughout the book of Revelation, Jerusalem is revealed as the world capital for all believers (cf. Isaiah 61:6; I Peter 2:9-10).

They will reign

“They will reign”. It seems as if they are promised an almost autonomous dominion; still, these are the servants of God, who serve him. The eternal duration of this royal position is already foreshadowed in Daniel 7. Here, too, we see something of the vindication of the people of

the Most High, people who have so often been oppressed. “*...the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him*” (Daniel 7:27). This was already announced earlier in the Book of Revelation: those who had been purchased for God from every nation ‘will reign on the earth’ (ch. 5:10). The seventh trumpet ushers in “*the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever*” (ch. 11:15). The martyrs, raised to life, will reign for a thousand years together with the Messiah (ch. 20:4,6).

This calls to mind the exalted Christ’s promise of victory to the church of Laodicea: “*To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne*” (ch. 3:21). In ancient times, thrones were sometimes so large that several people could seat themselves next to the king. In this way, the royal dominion was literally and figuratively shared. Christ shares the throne with his Father (‘on his throne’). He who overcomes will share the throne with Christ (‘on my throne’). The Father and Christ do not hand over their dominion; they allow those who share in their victory to share in their dominion as well.

Genesis 1 and 2 do not speak of royal dominion. Still, the Book of Revelation contains a latent allusion to the paradise mandate. Man was appointed as custodian and labourer in the paradise garden of God: he was to exercise authority over creation on God’s behalf. Adam and Eve failed in their exercise of this responsibility. And still there is hope for mankind. This world-encompassing dominion will return, but inseparably joined to the worship of God.

Strictly speaking, Revelation doesn’t specify the object of this dominion, but it is clear from Daniel 7 that this is a dominion over the whole world. It also shows the manner of this dominion: not under God, but together with him. For ever and ever (literally, ages of ages: *eis tous aionas toon aionoon*: ch. 22:5) is a fitting conclusion to this part of the book. Jerusalem is to be a royal city again, for all eternity.

About the author:

Dr Rob van Houwelingen is Professor of New Testament at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in Kampen, the Netherlands.

5. Free access to the Tree of Life

In point 1, we already paid attention to the promise contained in the letter to the church at Ephesus, that those who overcome may freely “*eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God*” (ch 2:7). That is a remarkable usufruct! (= privilege of enjoyment).

Given the Ephesian context, Hemer sees this as an allusion to the cult of Artemis. Originally, this virginal goddess of the hunt was worshipped in a primitive sacred grove. The tree of Artemis adorned the coat of arms of the city of Ephesus, and is to be seen on numerous Ephesian coins of the time.² Still, the reference to the Tree of Life points in the first place to the situation in paradise (in Genesis 2:9 and 3:22 and 24, LXX has *xulon*, ‘wood’, instead of *dendron*, the more usual word for ‘tree’). The reverse of this promise is also found in Revelation: God may take away from any transgressor ‘*his share in the tree of life, and in the holy city, which are described in this book*’ (ch. 22:19).

In paradise, there were two special trees: the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. The paradise narrative concentrates mostly on what happened with the tree of knowledge. The key was discerning between good and evil. To eat from the tree of knowledge was to exchange good for evil, so transgressing the boundary God had set. The human desire for autonomy led to a conflict with the Creator. And as a punishment for this sin, the first couple was banished from the tree of life (for to eat from that tree, as had previously not been forbidden, would have led to eternal life; that privilege was now revoked). At that time already, God began to carry out the sentence pronounced over mankind: to be kept away from life means death. Scripture also refers to wisdom and righteousness as trees of life (Proverbs 3:18, 11:30, cf. 13:12 and 15:4). This shows that ‘life’ is more than just a continued existence, but a life in communion with the Creator.

Central place

In the future paradise of God, there will no longer be a tree of knowledge. It is the tree of life that is given a central place in the new city of God; not just one, it seems, but more than one (ch. 22:2). In the new Jerusalem, John sees a whole avenue of trees of life, planted on either side of the river that flows down the middle of the street of the great city. Inhabitants may freely pick of their fruit (the

singular *xulon* is generally regarded as a collective noun, as in ‘a wood’ – unless perhaps we ought to think of two trees, one on either side of the river). These trees are spectacularly fruitful, one crop in each and every month.³ Again, a remarkable usufruct! Ezekiel 47:12 describes the river of living water that flows from the sanctuary (see also point 6, below): “*Fruit trees of all kinds (LXX: pan xulon broosimon) will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear...their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.*”

Inhabitants of such a city are truly blessed: “*Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city*” (ch. 22:14). Free access to the new Jerusalem, by way of its gates, stands in contrast to the paradise story. There, cherubim – winged creatures with hands, feet and faces – stood guard over the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). They blocked the way to paradise, with the aid of a flaming sword that flashed back and forth. This sword, symbol of God’s blazing anger, was a separate entity, independent of the cherubim (cf. Isaiah 34:5, Jeremiah 46:10, Ezekiel 21:10ff, Zephaniah 2:12). Paradise lost!

In contrast, at the gates of the new Jerusalem (open day and night, see point 3, above), not cherubim but angels stand guard. Twelve of them, three in each direction, one angel at each gate. Even though the city of God is not open to everyone (ch. 21:27), their role seems to be to welcome people in, rather than to keep them out. They stand guard to regulate the stream of those who would come in to make their home in the new Jerusalem. Welcome to the paradise of God, where you may freely pick fruit from the tree of life!

6. A river of living water, with deposits of precious stones.

The new Jerusalem is a town with its own water supply: “*A river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb*” (ch. 22:1-2; cf. 21:6). And this while the memory of the earlier account of the disasters that came upon the earth, where water was turned into blood, is still so fresh (ch. 8:8, 16:3-4)! There, the polluted water reeks of death; here, in the city of God, the water will be fresh and clear: life-giving water! This motif – life-giving water – is found with the prophets also. Ezekiel 47:4-7 describes the brook

that flows from the temple; Joel 3:18 mentions a fountain that flows out of the Lord's house. And Psalm 46 sings of a river whose many streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. All of these point forward to the supply of water in the new city.

This combination with the trees of life in Revelation 22 is clearly reminiscent of paradise. It is true that Genesis does not explicitly speak of 'life-giving' water. On the other hand, it is clear that its spring must have provided an enormous amount of water, for it is the headwaters of four streams. This was simply 'water', necessary for plant growth; it was not the life-giving water, protecting people from death, and providing eternal life.

Genesis tells us about the water supply of the Garden of Eden. It 'waters' the garden, so to speak (ch. 2:10-14). The water comes 'from Eden', that is from God Himself. Leaving Eden, the water flows past the paradise garden; from there it splits into the headwaters of four separate rivers, each with their own name: Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates. In this way, the blessings of Eden – life and fertility – are distributed over the earth. The Pishon and the Gihon no longer exist today; scholars think that in the passage of the ages their flow has dried up. However, it is clear from the account of Genesis 2 that these four main rivers of the world, no matter where we would place them geographically, all arise from one and the same source, located upstream of the paradise garden of God.

The apocryphal book *The Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach* adds to these four rivers the Jordan and the Nile, in a symbolic reference to the overwhelming riches of the Torah. The Law is a stream of wisdom, knowledge and instruction. *"It [the Law] overflows, like the Pishon, with wisdom – like the Tigris in the days of the new fruits. It runs over, like the Euphrates, with understanding, like the Jordan at harvest time. It sparkles like the Nile with knowledge, like the Gihon at vintage time"* (Sirach 24:25-27, NAB). The addition of the Jordan (in Israel) and the Nile (in Egypt) brings the water supply of paradise very close to its later readers.

Precious Stones

This leads us to the precious stones that will adorn the new Jerusalem with their colourful brilliance. These gems are a remarkable touch in John's visionary portrayal of the city. The city itself – including its streets – is of pure gold (ch. 21:18, 21).

Gates, walls, foundations: everything in the city of God shines with resplendent glory. The beauty and splendour of these precious stones, which already described God's glorious presence in an earlier vision (ch. 4:3), stands in shrill contrast to the gaudy glitter which decks the great prostitute of Babylon (ch. 17:4,5). Isaiah had already prophesied about the restoration of God's chosen bride, Jerusalem. To her, the LORD himself had said: *"O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted, I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones"* (Isaiah 54:11-12).⁴

There is a rather puzzling passage in Ezekiel, which has its own perspective on the paradise motif. In this prophecy, the king of Tyre, who regards himself as a god (Ez. 28:2), enjoys a life comparable to that of the first humans: *"You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared"* (Ezekiel 28:13). It is striking that of the twelve gemstones attached to the high priest's breastpiece, nine are listed here (Exodus 28:17-20; 39:10-13; the Septuagint actually lists all twelve); gold is mentioned separately. A paradisiacal state, portrayed in the well-known palette of colours: the brilliance of gemstones and of gold.⁵

This takes us back to Genesis 2:11-12. The four rivers of paradise produce sedimentary deposits. Carried along by the water, the various rocks and minerals form deposits – including precious stones – in the alluvial plains. The Pishon winds around the land of Havilah (the 'sandy region'): gold is found there (see also Genesis 25:18 and I Samuel 15:7). Most exegetes identify Havilah with Arabia. In that case, the Pishon, which flows through the land, could correspond to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea together. In any case, the gold of Havilah is of outstanding quality (see the note in Genesis 2:12); aromatic resin and onyx stones are found there as well.

This is rare, a land of pure gold and a variety of precious stones; the wealth of the faraway land of Havilah was not found anywhere else. But in the new city of God, these riches are freely available to all its inhabitants. Water, gemstones and gold: a paradisiacal combination, promising a princely life of glorious splendour.

7. The removal of the dragon-serpent: the paradise curse lifted.

In John's visions, there are three references to the serpent of paradise. It is 'the serpent of old', the first snake, the snake from the beginning (*ho ophis ho archaios*: 12:9; 20:2; cf. 12:15). He has grown into an enormous dragon, a bloodthirsty red, strikingly similar to the beast John sees arising from the sea in the next chapter (ch. 13:1). In John's description, this great red dragon is a representation of the devil, or Satan (ch. 12:9; 20:2). Just as he was when he instigated the Fall, he has again become a mortal danger to the woman and her offspring (ch. 12:15, cf. 12:4).

In the Book of Revelation, the serpent of old is portrayed as the 'great deceiver'. He is the one who 'leads the whole world astray'; he 'deceives the nations' (*planan*; ch. 12:9; 20:2). Genesis tells us that the snake was the craftiest of all the animals. As crafty as he might be, he is and remains a creature. What he did in paradise was 'deceive' (*apatan*: Genesis 3:13 LXX; cf. II Corinthians 11:3). Some translations have the woman declare 'the serpent misled me', for 'to mislead' and 'to deceive' are synonymous. Genesis may not say so explicitly, but from the New Testament it becomes clear that Satan himself was at work in the snake.

Deception, leading people astray: that too is the tactic of the beast out of the earth (Revelation 13:14, 19:20). He acts as an instrument of Satan (Revelation 20: 8.10). The serpent of old takes on an increasingly monstrous form.

If it is true that John identifies the dragon with the serpent of paradise, then he does something unique. Never before has the snake that deceived man in paradise been explicitly identified with the devil, or Satan.

At the same time, this representation would no doubt also have evoked mythical associations with the first readers of Revelation, the seven churches in Asia Minor. Bauckham points to the ambiguity in pagan representations of the day: the snake was not only regarded as symbolic of divinity (as in the cult of Asclepius); it also represented opposition to the gods (as with Hercules and the Hydra). Sooner or later, however, hostility towards the gods will lead to punishment. In antiquity, people expected that the dragon-serpent would meet its destruction.⁶

Revelation 12 shows how the dragon is removed from heaven and hurled to the earth. Chapter 20 tell us that he is to be chained in the abyss for a thousand years; after a short time of release he will finally be thrown into the lake of burning sulphur. In this way,

the destruction of the treacherous dragon-serpent is sealed. The source of all deception in the world, the embodiment of all rebellion against the Creator, is to be removed forever from the scene.

With the removal of the dragon, a new world order can appear, a new heaven and a new earth, the new Jerusalem. The promise of the new order is succinctly expressed: 'there will be no more curse' (ch. 22:3). This does not mean, as some translations suggest, that in the new Jerusalem, nothing accursed will still exist; instead, the divine curse itself has been removed. Zechariah had already prophesied that Jerusalem would be secure from the threat of destruction (because of her sins, Zech 14:11). In the new Jerusalem, not a soul would wish to resist the Almighty⁷. When the instigator of all evil has been removed, resistance cannot happen again. The death sentence from paradise, which rested as a curse upon all mankind, will be removed, and the tree of life will again be provided. The city of the future will far exceed the lost paradise. 'There will be no more curse' – that promises eternal paradise blessings for all the inhabitants of the new Jerusalem!

Back to the future

Throughout the foregoing, we explored a variety of paradise motifs, which observant readers will recognize from Genesis 1-3:

- The paradise garden of God
- The new heaven and the new earth, where there is no sea
- God and the Lamb as the eternal source of light
- Servants who reign as kings
- Free access to the Tree of Life
- A river of living water, with deposits of precious stones
- The removal of the dragon-snake: the paradise curse lifted.

The original paradise may have been removed from the face of the earth, but the Old Testament is filled with promises of salvation: the people of God will live in a place like the Garden of Eden (Isaiah 51:1-3; Ezekiel 36:35).

And yet, the Book of Revelation does not foretell a return to or restoration of the lost paradise of old. All of the paradise motifs contain indications that, in the future, things will be quite different. By way of conclusion, I list the following:

1. Paradise, the Garden of Eden, is transformed into a garden city, the new Jerusalem, a dwelling place for all the nations.
2. What is new in the new world, and in the new Jerusalem, remains forever: even the sea (including the grave of seafarers, and the whole

power of death) will be gone forever.

3. The light of God's presence will eclipse the light of sun and moon, and will cause day and night to become one. The blessing of God will spread to all the nations.
4. Humanity will manage and rule over creation, not *under* God, but *together with* God and the Lamb. This dominion over the world will last forever.
5. There is free access to the tree of life; apparently, in the new Jerusalem it will have multiplied. There will be no grim watchers guarding access to the tree, but welcoming angels holding all gates wide open.
6. A stream of living water, coming from God, is more than just a source of life: it protects mankind from death. Precious stones and gold are not just found in the far-off land of Havilah, but are part and parcel of the new Jerusalem.
7. The ancient dragon-serpent is removed, forever a thing of the past; and the paradise curse has been changed into eternal blessing.

In short, the Book of Revelation shows us a future that far exceeds the past. This future is dominated by the dwelling together of God and man. And that provides endless and undisturbed bliss! ■

Notes

- 1 This article was originally presented in the Dutch language at a conference on November 19, 2010 at the Theologische Universiteit in Kampen, the Netherlands. This translation by Aart Plug, March 2010, by arrangement with the author.
- 2 Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1986), pp.41-50.
- 3 Whether this reference is to a harvest of twelve different kinds of fruits (Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy. Studies on the Book of Revelation*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993, p.316) is not altogether clear. The reading 'twelve crops of fruit' could also be understood as 'one crop of fruit in each month'.
- 4 Both *Tobit 13:17* and the so-called 'new Jerusalem texts' from the caves of Qumran make mention of the use of precious stones in the walls, streets and squares of the eschatological Jerusalem.
- 5 In *Ezekiel 31:18*, Pharaoh is compared to the fair trees of Eden.
- 6 Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp.195-198.
- 7 Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), p.291.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations and references are taken from the New International Version of the Bible (NIV), 1984.

Preaching Library provides solidly Reformed and Biblical preaching material to thousands of ministers and lay pastors in Africa and further abroad.

After having served as a minister in the Free Reformed Church (Vrije Gereformeerde Kerk) of Johannesburg for only a few years, it looked as if a serious lung disease would bring an end to Rev. Jopie van der Linden's vocation. Now he sees God's guidance in the fact that, in cooperation with the aforementioned church, he has found a new way of helping to spread the gospel: a preaching library on the internet. Rev. Van der Linden now 'preaches' through the digital mailbox.

The concept is simple. The subscriber sends in the text on which he is writing a sermon. Within 24 hours he is provided with (quality) theological literature to help with his exegesis. While this may be useful to some, for others, who have nothing but empty bookshelves, it is of inestimable value! In this manner the proclamation of the gospel is being spread enormously in Africa and even beyond.

Rev. Van der Linden is enthusiastic about his work. The free service really fulfils a need. There are about two hundred requests a week, sometimes from pastors who travel more than 20 km to an internet source to receive the literature. The hunger for the gospel is great! More than 1500 subscribers are registered in lands stretching from Africa to the rural areas of China. 37 countries are being reached, and there are also plans to serve the French speaking parts of Africa. Since last year, the Preaching Library also started an educational branch. This is still in its infancy, but the aim is to provide primary schools all over Africa with Reformed teaching materials. As there are also many requests concerning various theological issues, plans are being made to expand the Preaching Library with a website called Christian Study Centre. These projects have grown so quickly that new office and library space has to be built.

A potential of three hundred thousand people can be reached by the Preaching Library with biblically sound teaching. A new missionary area stretches out from Congo to China - how wondrous God's ways are!

Your prayers and support for continuation of this valuable work are more than welcome.

Donations can be made to:

Stichting SORSA

Rabobank

Nummer 1607.20.141

The website is www.preachinglibrary.za.org. For more information on the projects, visit www.refstudycentre.com.

S.M.B.-T

Marriage, Family and the Civil Authority [2] A theological and ethical perspective¹

The previous instalment provided a Biblically-based definition of ‘marriage’ and ‘family’. It explored the Biblical foundations for these relationships as being covenantal: between husband and wife, and between parents and children. They reflect, each in their own way, the covenant relationship between God and His people. According to the teaching of Scripture, ‘marriage’ and ‘family’ are to be regarded as institutions given in creation by God, and at the same time objects of human responsibility.



3. Eschatological light

The purposes of God for marriage and the family belong to the present world order. However, the coming age throws light upon them also. In Christ, the final goal of marriage and family is the coming Kingdom of God. For God is King over these domains of life also.

First, the Kingdom of God finds expression in marriage. It is like yeast that leavens the dough of marriage (cf. Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:21). Of course, this expression is fragmented and incomplete. It is also temporary - not only because it ends when one of the partners dies, but also because it is limited to this earthly life. At the renewal of all things (Matthew 19:28), the bond of marriage will disappear. None of God’s children will marry on the new earth. Still, until the day of His return, we must confess that Christ is King over this part of life. Marriage is not an autonomous entity; it is subject to His dominion.

Of course, marriage in itself does not reflect the Kingdom of God. It does so only in Christ. It is a fruit of salvation, obtained by Christ and imparted by the Spirit. Unless we share in Christ and His gifts, marriage can never be restored to God’s original purpose.

This eschatological light governs the living style of married couples. Paul says: “...those who have wives should live as if they had none” (1 Corinthians 7:29). Marriage is not independent of but subordinate to

the coming of the Kingdom of God. Christ says that being newly married is no reason not to obey His call (Luke 14:20). His Kingdom transcends everything else: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). And elsewhere: “I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life” (Luke 19:29-30, cf. Matthew 19:29). Of course, this ‘hate’ is not a psychological state; here it emphasizes the radical character of the Kingdom.

Christ is not commanding us to end our marriages. Rather, He places them in the light of the end of this age. It may be necessary to remain unmarried for the sake of the coming Kingdom: “...some have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:12).

Jesus is certainly not saying that being unmarried is better than being married. He does, however, call for self-denial, for the sake of the Kingdom. For men who all too easily divorce their wives, that self-denial will mean faithfulness to one’s own wife. Consider the context of this instruction! Jesus has just been saying that divorce is *not* permitted. And Jesus’ word about self-renunciation is a reply to the disciples’ deflated reaction: “If that is the situation, it is better not to marry” (Matthew 19:10). Jesus points to the new dimension of His Kingdom: some would give up anything for its sake; even marriage, if necessary. Faithfulness to the end in marriage is not something that would cause a man to miss his destiny. Real fulfilment in life is to be sought in the Kingdom of God, and earthly desires must always be subject to that. For someone who expects the Kingdom, faithfulness to a difficult marriage is worth everything. The way we deal with husband or wife is governed not by what we would wish or expect here on earth, but by what we expect from God and His future.²

About the author:

Douwe Jacob Steensma (b.1958) is pastor of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk of Veenwouden, the Netherlands. He was awarded a doctorate in ethics in 1995. Currently, he also lectures at the Gereformeerde Hogeschool in Zwolle, the Netherlands.

Significance

Just as Jesus did, the apostles taught the all-surpassing significance of the coming Kingdom. It

throws a whole new light on this temporal life. Paul speaks of 'this present crisis' (I Corinthians 7:26) in which we live. The time is short (v. 29). The end is in sight, "*this world in its present form is passing away*". Present tense. Not sometime in the future; it is passing away now. The light of the end shows that marriage is not permanent. It belongs to the things that will pass. And that has consequences for our decisions to marry. "*Those who have wives should live as though they had none*" (v. 29). Not in some kind of Stoic or Epicurean *ataraxia*, but in the eschatological light. Paul makes no judgments about being married or unmarried here; they are fully equivalent possibilities. The coming of the Kingdom does not set aside God's purpose in creation. At the same time, Paul points to the fact that marriage concerns might be detrimental to one's devotion to the Lord. Then it might be better not to marry: serving the Lord, in obedient dependence on Him alone.

The present crisis gives pause to a desire to marry. In the *eschaton*, troubled times lie ahead. Jesus said: "*How dreadful it will be for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight may not take place in winter or on the Sabbath*" (Matthew 24:19, 20, cf. Mark 13:17; Luke 21:23). For practical reasons, it is better not to marry. For those who are married, hard times are coming (I Corinthians 7:28, 32-35). Just as for marriage, the final destination for the *family* lies in the Kingdom of God. The Fall has radically impaired the normative relationship between parents and children. In principle, Christ has restored this relationship. In Him, it now reflects the Kingdom of God.³ In faith, the bond of blood is now restored by the bond that He made through His blood. The covenant relationship between parents and children has now been placed under the yoke of Christ. Parents and children no longer wish to be served, but to serve (cf. Mark 10:45). They submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21). In Christ, there is neither parent nor child (cf. Galatians 3:28).

No less than the covenant communion, the focus in the bringing up of children is marked by the finished work of Christ. By faith the family is a *pedagogium*, and Christ is the highest Teacher. Paul's word, which speaks of bringing up children '*in the training and instruction of the Lord*' (Ephesians 6:24), remains of the highest possible relevance.

Because the Holy Spirit puts into effect the restoration that Christ has given to His own,

the Christian family serves the building of God's Kingdom. It is one of the bases from which the Gospel goes into the world, a communion that understands its witnessing and diaconal calling.

4. The distinctiveness of marriage and family

Marriage and the family are intimate relationships. What then is distinctive about them?

4.1 Love in marriage

Marriage is characterized by love. It is rooted in an all-encompassing relationship of love between husband and wife. Adam jubilantly sang: "*This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh*" (Genesis 2:23). The Song of Songs is full of this love. There are three aspects to this all-encompassing natural love. First, there is the closeness that is directed towards the sexual otherness of the marriage partner. Second, there is the security that comes with fully belonging to the whole person of the other. The first is largely physical, the second is affective. Third, this all-encompassing love within marriage includes the shared destiny of the couple. Husband and wife value each other because of the shared calling they have received.

This all-encompassing love has been greatly affected by the Fall. In all kinds of ways, this natural love – sexuality, closeness and shared direction – has been torn apart. Christ, however, has restored the natural foundations of marriage. His sacrificial love permeates it. Love for the other, marked by sexual union, personal closeness and a shared purpose in life, is filled by a greater love, which transcends the person of the other. In Christ, marriage is not just built on natural love; more than that, it is filled with *agapè*.

Such a love is more than just a feeling. It is expressed in justice, defined by rights and obligations. These rights and obligations do not stand in the way of love; rather, they give expression to it. Love calls for a just relationship, and conversely, right and duty are founded in love. Each partner is entitled and obliged to a love that excludes all others. Both husband and wife have a right to the other's loving care. In relation to these mutual rights and obligations, we will consider the aspects of monogamy, the order in the marriage relationship, and the lasting character of marriage.

4.2 Monogamy

A just and loving marriage relationship embodies mutual rights and obligations, to the exclusion of all others. Husband and wife have a right to receive, and a duty to give, exclusive love. Each belongs exclusively to the other; their lives are joined. This is a monogamous relationship. In the beginning, God joined one man to one woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6).

Sin has deeply affected this good institution of God, not just incidentally, but structurally. In the Old Testament, polygamy was common, as several instances show. While regulating polygamy (cf. Deuteronomy 21:15-17), the Old Testament nevertheless warns against it (Deuteronomy 17:17; 1 Kings 11:1-8), and over time there is a shift from polygamy to monogamy.

Christ reasserted God's original purpose for an exclusive marriage, and He restores the relationship to that purpose. Paul illustrates the exclusivity of marriage by comparing it with the relationship between Christ and His church. Whoever is united with Christ cannot and may not be united with a prostitute (1 Corinthians 6:16-17). Just as Christ is bound exclusively to His church, man and wife are bound exclusively to each other (Ephesians 5:22-33). Douma writes: *'The progressive revelation of Christ in the New Testament makes it morally impossible to accept polygamy'*.⁴ Apostolic teaching consistently views marriage as a union between one man and one woman (1 Corinthians 7:2; Ephesians 5:28-33; Titus 2:4-5; 1 Timothy 3:2). The all-encompassing love of marriage is characterized by the right and obligation to exclusivity, legally embodied in monogamy.

4.3 Blood relationship

Just as the distinctive character of marriage is determined by love, so the distinctive character of the family is marked by a blood relationship.⁵ This institution has its origin in creation, and transcends all human efforts to change it. Children do not choose their parents, and parents do not choose their children. While parents do have their own responsibility, and may sometimes intervene at the beginning of a human life, they have no choice in the child that is born. It is given to them. This fact determines the family's unique character. God could have used other means to multiply the human race, but this is the way He chose to bind people together. It is 'normal', in accordance with the norm God laid down in creation. From ancient times, lineal descent has been traced from father to son.⁶

This blood relationship between parents and children has a moral dimension, which gives strength to the relationship. The sense of belonging has deep biological roots. It is an inescapable bond, even where family relationships are far from ideal. Having an ancestry is integral to our human identity. This bond of blood transcends our emotional state.⁷ No other institution compares with the family in its effect on human growth and development. Socially and ethically, the family is fundamental to our being human.

This covenant relationship between parents and children, based on blood, has been radically impaired by sin. Throwing off his dependence on the Creator, man wants to shape his own primary social relationships. But Christ has restored this family bond. The family is not an oppressive force, but a 'given' that is subject to the dominion of Christ, an order which God has laid in creation, one which may not be downgraded.

4.4 Order in marriage

Our theological and ethical reflection on marriage and the family also requires us to consider the order in these relationships. We begin with marriage, and go on to the family in the next instalment. We already pointed out that love in marriage finds its expression in a specific structure, marked by a monogamous relationship. Is there a hierarchical order within this structure, and is this order expressed in distinctive roles and tasks of husband and wife?

In Bible times, women were subordinate. The husband led, and the wife followed. When the covenant community gathered for worship, the men represented the women. At certain times, women, and not men, were ceremonially unclean. Jewish tradition continued this subordination of women. In New Testament times, a similar ordering was evident. In the words of the philosopher Seneca: men are born to rule, and women to obey. He also regarded women as morally inferior to men. On the whole (though not exclusively), society had this rule: the husband was the ruler of the household, and the woman was to submit to her husband. Early Christians simply followed the cultural patterns of their time. Paul urges women to submit to the prevailing order (Ephesians 5:22,24; Colossians 3:18). They must respect their husbands (Ephesians 5:33), who are heads of the household (1 Timothy 3:4,12). Peter impresses upon women that the Gospel is served by their submission to the social order of the day (1 Peter 3:1).

This order in the family extended to the congregation. Here too, women must submit to the prevailing order. If they have any questions, they must ask their husbands at home. This, says Paul, is consistent with the law and good morals; it is disgraceful for a woman to speak out in the assembly (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). She must learn quietly, and in full submission. A woman ought not to teach or have authority over a man. Paul also draws on the creation order: Adam was created first, and then Eve; and it was Eve who first gave in to temptation (1 Timothy 2:12-14). Scripture itself sets out an order in the relationship between husband and wife.

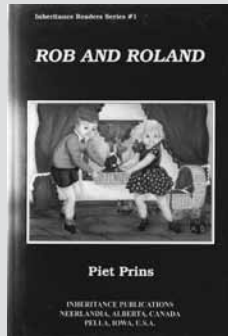
In addition to this line of submission, we see another line in the Bible. Both man and woman are created in the image of God. Both have been given dominion over God's creation. The woman too must fill the earth, and rule over it (Genesis 1:28). Both man and woman fell into sin. Both need the grace of God. Before God, they have equal value, and are equal in their humanity.

The mother's authority over her children is no less than the father's. Scripture is clear about that. The woman has authority, not just over creation and over her children, but also over her husband (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:4).

This fundamental equality between man and woman is reasserted with greater force in the new creation. Christ's restoring work extends to the relationship between husband and wife. Equality is not an object of struggle, but a gift in Christ. In line with God's promise, both men and women receive the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32). Unusually for His time, Jesus paid special attention to the position of women, speaking out against the prevailing male-centred view (this is especially clear in the Gospel of Luke). In Christ, there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:11). Through faith, both find their own place in the Kingdom of God, transcending their relative position in the prevailing culture. As members of the body of Christ, and in Christ's love, they submit to each other. Pauls mentions women who pray and prophesy (1 Corinthians 5:11), and women who contend with him for the Gospel (Philippians 4:2-3; Romans 16:1) The first of these two lines is clearly linked to cultural-historical development. Paul points to creation, to prevailing custom, and to what 'nature teaches'. The second line, however, points only to creation and to salvation in Christ. This does raise the question: why does the second line not do away with the first?

Book announcements

Piet Prins, the Dutch author of children's books, needs no introduction to many English speakers. The first editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper which is now called Nederlands Dagblad, Pieter Jongeling, wrote over 50 books for young people using this pseudonym. Most of them originated as serials in that newspaper and many of them have since been translated into English.



Inheritance Publications in Canada has started publishing the series that appeared in The Netherlands as the 'Jeugdland' series, consisting of some ten books, with increasing grades of difficulty, suitable for use as Primary School reading material. The parts 1,2 and 9 have now been published, namely

1. *Rob and Roland*
2. *Rob and Roland on the farm*
9. *Anak, the Eskimo Boy*

The language has been adapted to fit each intended age group. As a result, the first book starts with: *A little dog walked along the road. A white dog with brown ears and a brown spot on his head. It was a puppy. But he was not happy . . .* With such a beginning, I believe young readers will be directly hooked...

At the same time a new edition of 'Scout' (the original known as 'Snuf de hond' in The Netherlands) has been published. You receive a free copy together with any order you place. As a clever piece of advertising, the inside cover has been reserved for a complete *Inheritance Publications* catalogue, although we must admit that there are probably worse ways to advertise your wares!

We refer here to:

Rob en Roland, *Inheritance Readers Series (IRS) # 1*, ISBN 978-1-894666-32-9, Alberta 2009, Can. \$7.95, U.S. \$6.90

Rob and Roland on the farm, IRS # 2, ISBN 978-1-894666-33-6, Alberta 2009. Same prices

Anak, The Eskimo Boy, IRS 9, ISBN 978-0-921100-11-9, Alberta 2009, Can. \$8.95, U.S. \$7.90

Scout – including the 20th Anniversary Catalogue of *Inheritance Publications*. Free copy with any order

PGBdV

Newsupdate

To begin with, the renewed position of women cannot and may not be realized through revolution. The apostles did not proclaim a new social order, but salvation in Christ.

In addition, some elements of the first line – those that draw on the order of creation – have lasting validity. God created man first (I Timothy 2:13), spoke to him first, and heard his reply first. He was the first to receive the task to tend and keep the garden (Genesis 2:15-17), and he was given a suitable helper (ch. 2:18). The woman was taken from the man (ch. 2:22-23), was given her name by him (ch. 2:23). The man joins himself to his wife (ch 2:24), and is the first to be called to account after the Fall (ch. 3:9). There is an order to be seen in the creation story. The coming Kingdom does not set that order aside. There is no superiority of the man in the Bible; there is, however, a priority in responsibility. In this order, there is no 'greater' or 'lesser', no ontological ranking. A competitive struggle for superiority came with the Fall. The man aims to dominate (Genesis 3:16), in disobedience to God's command. The woman has a sinful desire to have power over her husband (ch. 3:16, cf. ch. 4:7). What God says about the desires of the man and his wife after the Fall is not a divine institution; rather, it describes the corruption of relationships because of sin. God's creation order is obscured by the Fall. This is shown, for example, by the Old Testament practice of polygamy, and the treatment of women as chattels.

Once must, therefore, take care with the first line (the male leadership role). Notions that are simply cultural-historical cannot and may not be regarded as normative. But in setting aside what is changeable, it is important not to discard what is of lasting validity. This includes that fact that God spoke to the man first. He must understand his first responsibility with regard to God's promises and commands. While there is no ontological ranking; there is still a functional ranking.

Order

According to God's purpose, there is an order within marriage. This God-given order is wholesome; it makes for wholesome leadership within a relationship of equals. Leadership has nothing to do with domination, and everything to do with service. In this, Christ set us an example. He was equal to His brothers in all things, even while He was their Master. His rule was marked by the power of love. His attitude of service lays the foundation for the mutual service of husband and wife. Without Christ, there can be no order in marriage

that answers God's purpose. Without Christ, any discussion about headship and submission is doomed only to reinforce the power of sin.

A marriage relationship that in Christ answers to its purpose leaves no room for either partner to demand a certain division of tasks. When Paul calls the husband the head of the wife, he doesn't attach any rights to this position; instead, he directs the husband to serve his wife in love.

Caring for a family is the shared task of husband and wife. Within their all-encompassing calling towards the Kingdom of God, this is their first responsibility. Scripture emphasizes the importance of this task. It speaks highly of the woman's calling in her house (Proverbs 31). Hence, parents may never see their responsibility to care for their children as an obstacle to their own development. ■

Notes:

- 1 This, the second in a series of three articles, is an abridged translation of *Huwelijk, gezin en overheid: een theologisch-ethisch perspectief*, first published in the Dutch language in: D. J. Steensma, M. Verhage-Van Kooten, J. Westert (e.a.), *Individualisering en gezinsbeleid. Gezin, arbeid, opvoeding en zorg in het licht van christelijke politiek, Nunspeet 1998*. This translation by Aart Plug, May 2011, by arrangement with the author.
Editor's note: In the first instalment of this article (*Lux Mundi*, 30 (1), March 2011), there was an error in the endnotes. Note 2 should have read: Compare D.J. Steensma, 'Het eigene van het gezin' in: J.W. Maris en H.G.L. Peels, *Onthullende woorden. Theologische opstellen, aangeboden aan prof. dr. J. de Vuyst bij zijn afscheid als hoogleraar aan de Theologische Universiteit te Apeldoorn* (Leiden, 1997) 172-173; and: *Leefeenheden en beleid I* (Den Haag, Nederlandse Gezinsraad, Raad voor Gezinnen en andere Leefvormen, 1992) bijlage. Vgl. de nota *Leefvormen in het familierecht* (Ministerie van Justitie: 1995).
- 2 J. van Bruggen, *Matteüs. Het evangelie voor Israël*. Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament. Derde serie (Kampen, 1988) pp. 366-367.
- 3 D.J. Steensma, *Ouders en kinderen. Een theologisch-ethische bezinning* (Zoetermeer, 1995) pp.201-244.
- 4 J. Douma, *Seksualiteit en huwelijk*. Ethische bezinning VI (Kampen, 1993) p.111 (translation mine – AP).
- 5 Compare H. Dooyeweerd, *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee III. De individualiteitsstructuren der tijdelijke werkelijkheid* (Amsterdam, 1936) pp. 211-214; D.J. Steensma, 'Het eigene van het gezin' in: J.W. Maris en H.G.L. Peels, *Onthullende woorden. Theologische Leefeenheden en beleid I* pp.175-177.
- 6 Compare Steensma, 'Het eigene van het gezin', p.258
- 7 R. Mehl, *Ethiek van het gezin* (Utrecht, 1964) pp.28-29. Original title: *Société et amour*.

In the third and final instalment, the author goes on to explore the order in the relationship between parents and children in the family, as outlined in Scripture. He then concludes by examining the place of marriage and the family within the structures of society, and the role of the civil authority in protecting and supporting these divinely-ordained institutions.

The 2010/2011 National Assembly of the NGK

On June 17, 2011, the National Assembly of the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK) will sit for its last day. Since it was convened on October 9, 2010, 48 delegates of the 12 classes have met for ten days in Houten, the Netherlands, to discuss matters that the churches have placed on the Assembly's agenda.



A selection of decisions that the 2010/2011 Assembly has taken:

- The NGK will endeavour to find a part-time pastor for the deaf, who together with colleagues from the Protestantse Kerk in Nederland and the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken will undertake pastoral care of the deaf within our congregations. We will also take up membership of the Interkerkelijk Dovenpastoraat (Interchurch Pastorate for the Deaf), which has for many years provided intensive support for our local congregations that have members who are hearing impaired.
- The NGK will continue its active involvement in the governing body of the Stichting Evangelie en Moslims (Foundation for the Gospel to Muslims). In our own day, when mosques arise next to churches in towns and villages throughout the Netherlands, and where debate about Islam increasingly flares up, this organization is more relevant than ever. Starting from the conviction that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, Evangelie en Moslims promotes contact between Christians and Muslims, with the understanding that Biblical truth cannot be imposed, but must be carried out and lived out in love.
- The structure and operations of Nederlands Gereformeerd Jeugdwerk (the organization for youth activities within the NGK) will be modified, to ensure that it can respond more effectively to the great need for advice and support in youth activities that local congregations request. Many churches struggle with the problem of reaching their own young people, in their own world, with the Word of God, and they increasingly seek help from this national youth organization.

About the author:

Ad de Boer (b. 1946) is a retired journalist and politician. He served as chairman of the 2010/2011 National Assembly of the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, held in Houten, the Netherlands.

Other Churches

There was a strong focus at the National Assembly on relations with the Reformed Churches (GK) and the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK).

In recent years, collaboration and unification at a local level has shown a marked increase: in 15 locations, the NGK and GKV have recognized each other as churches of Jesus Christ, and have opened the way to joint worship, pulpit exchange and access to each other's Holy Supper celebrations. In other places, respectful discussions are underway to come to the same agreements. At a national level, too, there is evidence of growing cooperation, for instance in diaconal activities. This growth toward unity is a source of joy for the Assembly, especially since relations were very negative in the first decades after the separation in 1969. However, as of 2011, the relationship has shown great improvement. Addressing the Assembly, Rev. Henk Messelink of the GK made reference to the positive discussions that have taken place between national deputies of the NGK and the GK. These discussions led to the release of a joint document setting out common understandings concerning the use of Holy Scripture. In coming years, discussions will focus largely on the position of women in the offices. In 2004, the NGK cleared the way for this; at the same time, the GK expressed objections in principle to such a step.

Likewise, in many places there is more intensive cooperation with the CGK. There are ten fully integrated congregations. At a national level, progress towards unity came to a halt in 1998, but at this Assembly Rev. Willem van 't Spijker reported with joy on a decision made by the General Synod of the CGK: the diverging emphases that are found within the two churches concerning the appropriation of salvation in Christ are no cause for division between them. With this decision, a barrier that for many years stood between the two churches has been removed.

Homosexuality

This was another topic that was intensively debated by the delegates to the National Assembly. The occasion for this discussion was the decision in



The Assembly's executive: from left to right: S.R.S. Datema, A.P. de Boer (chairman), Rev. K. Muller en K.H. Mollema.

principle by the NGK of Utrecht that members who live in a homosexual relationship may be ordained to the office of elder or deacon. This decision (which so far has not been executed) has given rise to broad objections within the NGK. Three classes requested that the Assembly deal with this matter.

Part of the Assembly's declaration reads as follows: *"Where the churches, without prior joint study of the Scriptures, permit congregations to open the offices to members that live in a homosexual relationship, this threatens to undermine the authority of God's Word within the churches. A common understanding of God's Word in this matter serves the unity of the churches of Christ"* (translation mine – AP). A decision was made to set up a study committee (preferably in collaboration with the GKV). This committee is to determine the direction shown by the Word of God in relation to the appointment of members, living in a homosexual relationship, to the office of elder or deacon. A declaration on this matter will be made by the National Assembly of 2013/2014.

De Lichtboog, the building owned by the NGK congregation in Houten, in which the meetings are held.



In addition, the Assembly decided to issue, together with other churches, a declaration opposing the

growing level of violence within Dutch society against homosexuals and lesbians. The Assembly takes the position that any form of violence (whether verbal or physical) against homosexuals is in conflict with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The churches are called to express that clearly, both internally and externally. This public declaration was made on May 17 in the Domkerk in Utrecht.

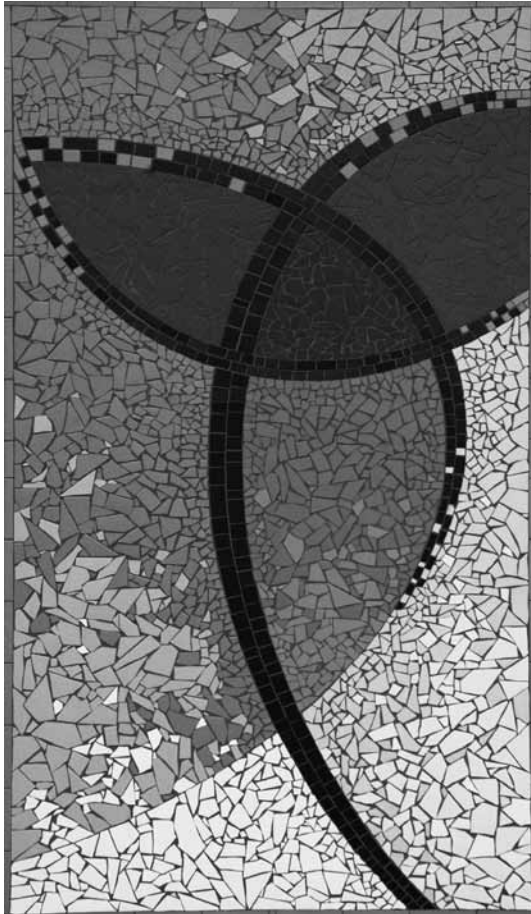
Workers in the church

The assembly made a number of decisions concerning workers in the church, particularly ministers, support workers and consistories.

- The assembly adopted a code of conduct for those who work in the church. Its purpose is to make them aware of behaviour that is unacceptable or improper, especially with regard to members of the congregation, and to prevent such behaviour. This code of conduct applies not only to office bearers, but also to leaders of youth and children's activities, and to pastoral assistants, caretakers etc. The comment was made that such a code ought not to be necessary within the congregation of Christ. Unfortunately, practical experience has sometimes shown the need for it.
- There appears to be a need among the churches to provide for members who, while not wishing to become ministers, might still be allowed to lead in the administration of the Word. Such provision could also apply to those who may have been ministers in the past, but who have chosen another occupation, such as teaching. A committee has been appointed to examine whether such a provision is desirable, and if so, what it should look like.
- In addition, the practice of ecclesiastical examinations of students for the ministry is to undergo scrutiny. Questions to be addressed: How can the quality of such examinations be enhanced? Should these examinations be conducted at a national level, rather than by the various classes, often before a public audience of friends and family? The purpose of this investigation is to ensure that only those are admitted to the pulpit who are capable and well equipped to instruct the congregations in the Word of God, and to lead them in walking with the Lord.

Ministerial Profile

In recent years, a number of difficult situations have arisen in the relationships between ministers or support workers and their consistories. Some



ministers – one each year on average – have been released from their congregations due to conflicts. Many consistories are struggling to cope with their task; they are having difficulties giving leadership to their congregations, and are looking for a new leadership approaches and/or structures.

At the request of the previous National Assembly, a special committee (Future Profile of Ministers) has devoted several years searching for solutions to these difficulties. During 2010, its report was extensively discussed throughout the churches, and at Houten the National Assembly decided the following:

- The core tasks of ministers: the administration of the Word, pastoral work and catechesis are laid down in a ministerial profile. This profile will guide the training for the ministry and will support consistories in their work of calling ministers and the division of tasks among ministers, elders and support workers.
- Once a year, on a footing of equality and mutuality, the consistory and the minister shall undertake an evaluative discussion. In coming years, an active career development policy for ministers and support workers will be set out.

Consistories and ministers ought to be able to discuss, in an open and spiritual atmosphere, the projected duration of their working relationship. This will help obviate ministers reaching a stalemate.

- Ministers shall pursue continuous development of knowledge and skills. Ongoing professional development (not less than five days per year) will be mandatory.
- The position of ecclesiastical support workers is to be formally recognized within the NGK, and a uniform statement of their legal status and conditions of employment is to be adopted. There will be a clear distinction between the (limited) task of the support worker and the (broader and heavier) task of the more highly qualified minister. An ecclesiastical support worker is employed by the consistory, and as such cannot be an office bearer, and will not be authorized to preach or administer the sacraments.
- In future, the NGK will have ministers-in-training. This will be a two-year intermediate phase between completion of ministerial studies and their official ordination. These trainees will work part-time (with a minimum of 40%) for two years within a congregation, to gain hands-on experience in the requirements of the ministry. In this way, the Assembly aims to reduce the number of ministers who, having been ordained to the office, find themselves unable to continue in their office.
- The Assembly agrees that consistories ought to undertake more development themselves, in order to be suitably equipped to build up the congregation, and to prevent conflict situations before they arise. A new website is to be set up, to serve as a virtual resource centre for the churches.

At first glance, these decisions appear to be largely practical and organizational. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Assembly's decisions in these matters are embedded in the conviction that it is the calling of ministers and other office bearers, as good shepherds, to lead and feed their flocks. They are fully intended, in this confusing time when God's children are beset from all side, to equip the congregations for faith and holiness, so that they may grow in the knowledge of God's Word and in living with the Lord Jesus Christ. ■

Translation by Aart Plug
Photography by P.G.B. de Vries

'Theological Education and Mission' Impressions of a European conference

During three days in the second half of March 2011 some 50 participants were united around the theme quoted above. Altogether they represented more than fifteen Reformed theological institutions, almost as many countries, and also quite a few languages.



The European branch of the ICRC, in its meeting in Scotland 2010, took the initiative to have a conference focusing on the close relation between theological education and the missionary commission of the church. This idea has proved to allow a useful and fruitful formula. The lectures were of high academic standard, and those present unanimously testified that meeting each other as theological academics, and sharing visions with regard to what the Lord has told us to do, is certainly a tradition worth maintaining in Europe.

It is hardly possible to summarize the lectures given. We hope to get a number of them published in *Lux Mundi*. They contained ample material for theological thinking and also for faithful reflection and discussion. The lecturers were Dr Stefan Paas, Amsterdam (on 'Prepared for a Missionary Ministry in 21st Century Europe'), Dr Benno van den Toren, Oxford, England (on 'Teaching Systematics in a Missionary Context'), Dr Jamie Grant, Dingwall, Scotland (on 'Proclaiming the Messiah to the Nations: The Old Testament as a Missional Document') and Dr Nupanga Weanzana, Bangui, Central African Republic (on 'Academic Excellence, Biblical Godliness and Compassion in Theological Education').

More than a fashion

For a couple of years, being missionary seems to be a sort of fashion in Bible-believing churches throughout the world. Sometimes this even leads to irritated reactions, especially when the opinion is expressed that the healthy shape of a 'normal' Reformed church is expected to develop into something filled with all sorts of fashionable missionary experiments.

About the author:

Dr. J.W. Maris is emeritus Professor of Dogmatics at the Theological University of Apeldoorn. He is also one of the editors of *Lux Mundi*.

Well, this conference certainly was not like that. Rather, it was about exploring the 21st century European society, and asking what the meaning of the gospel might be in this secularized age. Like the disciples, we are sent by the Lord into this world in order to be His witnesses. This situation has consequences for our institutions for theological education. Can we, for example, still afford to maintain a Christian attitude that is rooted in a sort of Christian society that no longer exists? Can we train young men for the ministry without teaching them what it means to have a zeal for the Kingdom of God, and being entirely dedicated to the message of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Questions and answers

But much more is involved than such questions. Can there be different church structures in various parts of a country, because a city where the name of Jesus Christ is hardly known and a village with some vestiges of a Christian past represent quite different outlooks? And if such differences can develop, how do we keep them together in a real biblical fellowship? Of course, the differences in context demand concentration on the task of how a faithful and relevant contextualization of the Gospel message should be directed. At the same time, we have to be aware of negative possibilities, of heretical forms of contextualization. Applying the gospel to a specific situation is not the same as adapting the gospel to the modern world!

A contribution in biblical theology was the lecture about reading the Old Testament as a missional document. Christians have to be aware of the missionary character of the Word of God itself! During the conference there were questions raised, and answers given. The situations did not appear to be the same in all countries. The lectures gave ample incentives for further thinking and debate, yet it could all take place within an atmosphere of devotion and fellowship.

It was a great pity that, because of visa difficulties, Dr Nupanga Weanza could not be present. His



lecture, presented by his former colleague Dr Van den Toren, nevertheless played a very useful part, perhaps most of all by the way students in Bangui are guided and judged in the fields of their biblical godliness and their compassion with others.

The daily devotions, in which Jerram Barrs from Covenant Theological Seminary preached a series of penetrating messages, made it impossible to attend this conference with the belief that it only dealt with some theoretical issues.

This spiritual aspect was felt to be of real and

necessary concern in all the contexts represented in Kampen.

The intention to have a subsequent conference, in Kiev, 2012, was welcomed by all.

A valued aspect was the opportunity to meet teachers, lecturers and professors from sometimes very small institutions in Europe. How useful to be aware of each other! It has proven to lead to being of service and use to each other. Apart from meeting each other during breaks and meals, the workshops played a useful part to that end. ■

Promotion studies Apeldoorn

On Tuesday 29th March Dr M.J. Kater had his doctorate conferred at the Theological University of Apeldoorn by defending his thesis entitled '*Kom en zie. De pre-existentie van de Zoon belicht vanuit de existentie van Jezus, de Christus*'. This is the second part of a study on the pre-existence of the Son, in which the emphasis lies in the fact that one cannot say anything about the pre-existence of the Son apart from God's revelation in Jesus of Nazareth. From the existence of Jesus as Son, as Christ, anointed with the Spirit, light is shed on the 'pre' of his existence. The title's extension therefore tells us that the reflection on the pre-existence of the Son has taken place 'in the light of Jesus, the Christ'. That light shines all the brighter when this 'pre' is seen in the light of his 'post-existence' as the risen Kurios.

Less than a month later, on 20th April, Dr A. Huijgen obtained his doctorate with the thesis '*Divine Accommodation in John Calvin's Theology. Analysis and Assessment*'. In this study, Dr Huijgen did research on the extent to which Calvin's concept of Accommodation took root historically, analysed the breadth of this concept, and evaluated this concept by discussing criticism by I.A. Dorner, H.M. Kuitert and K. Barth. His study reveals the importance of this concept for Calvin's work, for his teaching on revelation and for our knowledge of God.

Both these promotion studies were within the field of systematic theology and were mentored by Prof. Dr J.W. Maris.

On 8th June 2011 doctorandus M.C. Mulder hopes to obtain his doctor's degree in the New Testament field by defending a thesis on the position of Israel in Romans ch.10. His dissertation is entitled '*Israël in Romeinen 10. Intertextuele en theologische analyse van de oudtestamentische citaten in Romeinen 9:30-10:21*'.

Excerpts of the dissertations and the accompanying theses that were defended can be found on the TUA website: www.tua.nl.

J.W.M.

Banning ritual slaughter

Reformed chutzpah in the face of colliding interests¹

A bill now pending in the Second Chamber of the Dutch parliament would ban killing animals by ritual slaughter. The Animal Rights Party is among those protesting this practice, claiming that freedom of religion ends at the point where animal suffering begins. The issue involves the collision between the freedom for ritual slaughter as part of the freedom of religion, and concern about animal suffering.



According to the Mishnah, for the *shechita* or ritual slaughter the butcher must sever the carotid artery and the windpipe without anesthesia with a single cut. Before the slaughter the animal must be able to walk a few steps. For that reason anesthesia is not permitted, for then the meat would not be kosher. For Islam, meat is *halal* (ritually pure) only if the animal was butchered by a Muslim, who must say a prayer in connection with the slaughter while facing in the direction of Mecca. It is not entirely clear whether animal anesthesia is forbidden in Islam. In foreign countries Islamic butchers sometimes use electric shock.

In recent years doubts have risen about the welfare of animals who are slaughtered ritually. If this form of slaughter unnecessarily intensifies and lengthens the suffering of these animals, there is much to be said in favor of a comprehensive prohibition. For animal suffering should be prevented as much as possible. Nevertheless, an important scientific study done by Stuart D. Rosen has concluded that the Jewish *shechita* is a painless and effective method of slaughter. If the *shechita* is performed properly, the blood pressure in the animal's brain falls immediately and the animal becomes immediately unconscious. Of course it is very troubling to watch an animal writhing as it is dying, but that phenomenon should not be interpreted to mean that the animal is suffering pain. A slaughtered chicken can still walk a few steps after its head is severed, but the head will not feel that sensation any longer. On the other hand, an animal can

appear to be unconscious and still feel pain, just like someone who is in a coma can be conscious of things without being able to respond to them. Of course the plea for anesthetizing is understandable. If an animal is no longer writhing, a person feels better at that point, but whether the same is true of the animal remains the question. Animal anesthesia may not serve simply to reduce butterflies in the human stomach.

Too strong

As long as so much uncertainty surrounds the matter of animal welfare, it is too strong a measure to ban ritual slaughter and thereby to restrict the freedom of religion. Ritual slaughter goes back to a centuries-old tradition. This method of slaughter seeks to express precisely this truth, that the life of each animal is valuable and each animal deserves respect. A person may not simply kill an animal, since there are strict rules governing that. These prescriptions presuppose a relationship between a person and an animal. The blood that flows is costly blood.

That understanding is far removed from many Westerners, who get their meat from the supermarket, whether or not it is weighed and packaged behind the counter. In farming communities people occasionally slaughter a calf for themselves. Occasionally several families will divide and process the meat of a cow. At that point you know in principle exactly what kind of animal you'll be eating. Here there is a relationship between people and animals. However, in many slaughter houses the slaughtering process is highly mechanized. No human hand needs to touch the animal. Perhaps ordinary slaughtering appears less offensive, but it is rather ironic that a centuries-old tradition that clearly expresses the connection between people and animals is now being discredited.

Because anesthetized ritual slaughter is not by definition forbidden in Islam, a prohibition against non-anesthetized ritual slaughter would affect the Jewish community in The Netherlands the most. Advocates of the ban are actually suggesting

About the author:

Nelson D. Kloosterman is Executive Director of Worldview Resources International [worldviewresourcesinternational.com]

that orthodox Jews should then simply become vegetarians. That is going rather far. Not without reason the Council of State has therefore responded very critically to the proposed legislation of the Animal Rights Party. The impact on animal welfare, according to the Council, is not of such a nature as to warrant a comprehensive ban on non-anesthetized ritual slaughter. In addition there is the painful fact that in the long history of antisemitism, ritual slaughter has often been used as an argument for inciting hatred of Jews. In the 1940 movie, *The Eternal Jew*, there is a scene where a cow is slaughtered in a gruesome way, designed to show how beastly the Jews were, compared to the humane Germans.

Reformed chutzpah

With a view to reflecting on the relationship between church and state, we thought readers might be interested in the approach to this legislative issue being taken by one group of Reformed churches in The Netherlands, the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. Their synodically appointed Deputies for the Relationship between Church and Government have judged this matter serious enough to make their voice heard. The deputies have written a letter to the Second Chamber that declares on behalf of the churches that the proposed ban against this ritual slaughter goes too far.

By synodically-given mandate, these deputies maintain contact with the national government regarding matters that concern the churches, and on such occasions they appropriately acknowledge the churches' respect for the government (Church Order, Art. 27). In addition, they work for a greater societal involvement of the churches and their members on local, regional, and national levels. The societal functioning of the churches need to be strengthened and worked out practically, for example, by maintaining contact with the appropriate local and/or provincial governments. The deputies also seek to promote the higher public visibility of the churches. For this purpose, the president of the 2008 general synod, Rev. A. de Snoo, serves as national coordinator. He represents the churches at official occasions, and is authorized by the churches to raise matters for discussion and to participate in public debate. Where possible, this ecclesiastical voice will be strengthened by cooperation with other church denominations. Here is the letter drafted by the deputies and sent to the Second Chamber on 26 April 2011²:

Most highly esteemed ladies and gentlemen,

You must soon make a decision regarding a bill that seeks to prohibit the non-anesthetized slaughter of animals that is part of Jewish and Islamic religious ritual.

We are not doubting the intentions of those in your Chamber who sponsored this bill. Nevertheless, we urge you to consider seriously whether this legislation does not unnecessarily disturb the balance between government intervention and the freedom of religion, to the detriment of constitutional justice.

We appreciate the intention to reduce animal suffering, because that is a mandate belonging to a responsible dominion over the Creation. This issue involves more, however, than animal suffering. In our opinion, more weight should be given to the freedom that has been granted for a long time now to the adherents of these religions for giving expression according to their conscience to the experience of their religion also with respect to this point. The relatively narrow restriction of animal suffering envisioned by the proposed bill is, in our view, not worth this violation of freedom of conscience.

We wish you wisdom for your deliberations.

With respectful greetings,

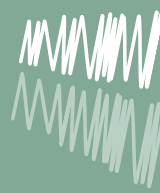
*On behalf of the Deputies for the Relationship Between Church and Government
of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated),*

A. de Snoo, chairman

Interestingly, the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands have judged this issue to involve religious liberty - not their own (at this point), but the liberty of Jews and Muslims in their land. As they done so often in the past, our Reformed Dutch co-believers are once again showing their *chutzpah* as they stand up to defend the liberties of others, including their religious opponents. And I, for one, applaud their ecclesiastical style.

Notes:

- 1 This contribution summarizes an article written by H. van den Belt for *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, a translation of which is available at <http://cosmiceye.wordpress.com/2011/04/16/banning-ritual-slaughter-is-not-justified/>. The above material was originally posted on *Cosmic Eye*, the online blog by N.D. Kloosterman.
- 2 The Dutch original can be found at <http://gkv.nl/downloads/gkv-deputaatschap-rko-brief-over-ritueel-slachten-26-04-2011/6691/>



**Jesus said, “I am
the light of the world.”** John 8:12