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In this issue we meet a few old catechisms: Calvin's Catechism of 1543 and its translation into Hebrew of 1553/54, the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 and the Westminster Catechisms of 1647.



Immanuel Tremellius, a Jewish Christian and expert on the Old Testament from the Reformation century, gave his Hebrew translation of Calvin's Catechism the title *Exercise book for God's elect*. He let some of Hezekiah's words be printed on the title page, from Isaiah 38:19b: 'A father makes your faithfulness known to his children'.

I cannot judge Tremellius' originality in choosing this text, but I have never come across it elsewhere on a title page of a textbook for young believers. Maybe brother Tremellius read the text christologically: God the Father does not forget his beloved children, his chosen ones and tells them about his faithfulness in Christ. In the Reformation century, there was an expectation that the rediscovery of the gospel would also make a great impression upon the Jewish people.

The text comes from a poem which King Hezekiah made because he was given fifteen extra years to live. King Hezekiah first told of his great sorrow, and then how relieved he was to be able to live on (verse 16):

*My Lord said: "Time to live!" (...)
You gave me new strength, you let me live again.*

King Hezekiah also said why he wrote this poem. He wanted to tell what had happened to him to his children. His children? Yes, because he also received a son, approximately three years later: Manasse. Maybe there were more children. God protected King Hezekiah, Jerusalem and Judah all this time against the Assyrian armies. Hezekiah saw the faithfulness of the Lord. And then he died, 39 plus 15 years old: approximately 54 years old, thus. Not that old in our eyes, but he had seen enough of God's faithfulness to leave his people and his country to God without worry.

Because Isaiah quotes the poem, not only Hezekia's own children have heard of his sorrow and his joy. We also read the words of this thankful father of 2700 years ago.

The making of poems and songs about what we have experienced of God's faithfulness, is always a characteristic of living faith. A living faith is a singing faith, it strums on the snares of praise and thanks in God's temple. How deeply the testimony of a father or a mother to God's faithfulness touches the children!

Which father can keep silent if God's faithfulness has saved his life? It is this personal urge in the intimacy of the relationship between parent and child which God uses in the preaching of the gospel. The one generation tells the next. It can also work the other way, as was the case with Tremellius, a son who learned to know the long promised Messiah, wants to tell his parents, his brothers and sisters, his family, the people to whom he belongs, about God's faithfulness in Christ.

A catechism in a church's set of confessions is characteristically reformed. But such an old document assumes a never ending activity. It means that as church, you invest in your children. The fathers and the mothers see to it that they lead the congregation's children in the truth about God's faithfulness. Not purely as teachers, but especially as experienced experts. Not just as missionary activity but because the children of the covenant have a right to learn to know their Father. ■

A living faith is a singing faith...(photo P.G.B. de Vries)



Prayer and anointing of the sick

“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:13-14; NIV).

For us as mature Christians (are we really?) it should go without saying that in this kind of situation we seek the face of the Lord in prayer and praise. However, this does not appear to be the case for the readers of James’ letter, which is perhaps the oldest letter of the New Testament. Apparently they had to be called on specifically to do this. Were they new converts? It appears they were used to seeking help elsewhere. Apart from the Lord. From heathen rituals or healers.



That James was indeed concerned with the question “To whom do you turn in times of sorrow or joy?” is clear from the example of Elijah which he mentions. He does not refer to a healing miracle performed by Elijah, but to his prayers, first for drought and then for rain. The first book of Kings does not mention these prayers. 1 Kings 17 and 18 do mention rain and drought, but not that they occurred at Elijah’s request. Apparently, Elijah’s prayers were of no great importance. Nor was Elijah himself considered important. He was not somebody with miraculous prayer or healing gifts, but merely a human being like all of us. Much more important is the One who first held the rain back and then gave it, i.e. the LORD, to whom Elijah turned in prayer. It was not Baal who gave rain, as many in Israel thought in those days. For Ahab and his followers, Baal was the god of rain, thunder and fertility. But the LORD exposed Baal for who he really was, an idol. It was the LORD who sent drought and Baal was not able to do anything about it. It was not until the LORD issued his command, that the rain finally came. Israel should have turned to the LORD and to nobody else. When Elijah prayed to him for drought and rain, his prayers were answered. This is what James wants his people to realize. When it comes to healing, they should not turn to heathen rituals or healers but to the LORD. It is *He* who will raise up the sick (vs. 15). It is *He* who makes prayer powerful and effective (vs. 16; Note that the passive voice ‘so that you may be healed’ refers to God as the agent).

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It is important to understand what James is saying here. In the last analysis, it is not our prayer that is powerful in itself. It is not our prayer that causes healing. It is the LORD who raises up. He makes our prayers powerful. Now and again, we talk about the ‘power of prayer’. But strictly speaking, it is not the power of prayer but of the One to whom we pray. We do not need to send up ‘super prayers’. Think of Elijah, says James. He was no Superman of prayer, but an ordinary human being. The Lord wants earnest and believing prayer. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective, no matter how lonely and clumsily it is sent up. Because God makes it powerful, i.e. Elijah’s God, the God who has done and is doing great things.

Anointing in the name of the Lord

So far I have said nothing about the anointing with oil which James mentions. I will turn to this issue now. The elders who are called to pray over the sick person must also anoint him with oil, in the name of the Lord. What immediately strikes us in this injunction is the ‘anointing with oil’, because we are not familiar with this ‘strange’ custom. But was it also strange for the readers of James’s letter? Or was there something else that was strange for them?

M.C. Mulder has written previously in *Nader Bekeken* about this custom of anointing the sick (cf. *Nader Bekeken*, Vol.10, No.3). I heartily recommend his detailed article, which I will briefly summarize here. Mulder concludes that the Bible mentions four kinds of anointing with oil:

1. As a personal hygiene custom: applying oil protects the skin in a hot and dry climate. Omitting it was a sign of grief and fasting;
2. As a welcoming gesture: anointing a guest’s head and feet (cf. Psalm 23:5; Luke 7:36-49);
3. As medicine. Examples are (a) the good Samaritan poured oil on the wounds of the injured man to take away the pain (Luke 10:34); (b) the disciples were sent out to heal the sick in the power of Jesus by simply anointing them in his name (Mark 6:13; by this method they distinguished themselves from Jesus who healed merely by the power of his word);
4. As a religious ritual: to sanctify holy objects and persons (cf. the Tabernacle, priests, lepers).

Mulder notes that the Greek word used for



‘anointing’ in the first three kinds is a different from the one used in the fourth kind. When anointing is a religious ritual, the word ‘chri-ein’ is used. It is the same word as in ‘Christos’, which means Anointed One. In the other three cases the Greek word is ‘aleiphein’.

‘Aleiphein’

Which word does James use here? The word! In other words, he does not use the word used for religious anointing. This should not surprise us, because the custom of religious anointing with oil had become obsolete in the New Testament. After all, religious anointing with oil was merely a shadow of the anointing with the Holy Spirit. This anointing, with the Spirit, we do find in the New Testament. It is mentioned in connection with Christ (Luke 4:18; Heidelberg Catechism - Lord’s Day 12) and the believers (cf. 1 John 2:20,27). In other words: anyone who still pleads for a religious kind of anointing, returns to the shadows of the old covenant!

Anointing with oil was nothing special in James’ days. It was used in caring for the sick. It was a means to relieve pain and an article for personal body care. It was a normal product, not only used by doctors but also by Samaritans passing by! When nowadays we visit somebody who is ill, we take a bottle of juice with us, or body lotion or a bunch of flowers. But in the Near Middle East visitors would rub a sick person’s skin with oil, especially when the illness was as serious as in verse 14, because that was more or less the only thing a visitor could do. The remarkable thing about James 5 is that this anointing should be carried out *in the name of the Lord!* This is the new element which James wants

to teach his readers. They must expect healing to come from the Lord. Not from their own prayer, nor by their act of anointing, but from the Lord. It is to Him that they should turn in prayer and praise.

What is the risk involved in all sorts of pleas for anointing the sick? It is the same risk already pointed out by the reformers in connection with the Roman Catholic rite of extreme unction: that the attention shifts from God to the ritual. Attention for the instrument instead of the great Agent who heals. Conclusion: the emphasis in James 5 is not on anointing with oil. That was not the issue. The readers of James’ letter were very familiar with this kind of anointing. The emphasis should lie on ‘in the name of the Lord’. That was the issue for James in verse 13 and following. It is the Lord who raises up the sick. He is the one that heals.

Conclusions

What is to be learned from all this? *Negatively*: the rejection of anointing the sick as a religious ritual. For a number of reasons.

1. Whoever expects results from a specific kind of prayer or from a ritual such anointing the sick, expects results from mere instruments. But in case of illness James teaches us to expect everything from the Lord. And this applies also when using modern applications of ‘oil’, such as medicine, therapy, sympathy and practical help for patients. The power is not in the means, but in the name of the Lord. He raises up the sick.
2. It is not altogether clear what the view of the protagonists on the ritual of anointing really is. I get the impression that they long for this as a kind of sign and seal of God’s grace. But clearly, God has not instituted this as a sacrament or ritual conveying his promises. Had He done so, we would be obliged to use this. But the anointing in James 5 is a ritual which accompanies prayers for healing. It is not a gift from God, but an activity initiated by man.
3. Where does the desire for anointing the sick come from? Is it the need for an (extra) ritual? Is it a desire for grace apart from its communication through God’s word and its confirmation in baptism and the Lord’s Supper? Is God’s promise not reliable enough, conveyed through the means of grace he has already given? Do we need any additions? Do we need a *third* ‘sacrament’? How many more will follow?
4. There is another question to be asked. If anointing of the sick were to be allowed, how often would it have to be practised, for example in case of a chronic illness? Only once? Or regularly? And on what arguments should that choice be based?

Positive conclusions

However, there are also *positive* conclusions to be drawn. Because it simply will not do to point out what James does *not* intend. The appeal he does on his readers in chapter 5 is a very positive one, which we cannot afford to ignore. I'm thinking of the following conclusions:

1. In case of illness and the desire for healing, we are to seek the Lord. Personally and earnestly. If one thing stands out in my exegesis of this passage, it is our personal responsibility to pray. We cannot delegate this to other people without ourselves getting involved. "Is somebody suffering? Let him pray.", James says. So the sick person should pray himself. Even if he is too ill and too weak to do so himself, he should at least call others to pray on his behalf. And if there is sin that causes spiritual obstruction, it should be confessed. James 5 is a very strong appeal on the sick person to commit himself to the Lord and to seek Him in prayer. It is all too easy for patients to adopt a consumer role!
2. The second positive conclusion is that the sick person is not alone. He is part of a church, which is the body of Christ. Sick people can easily isolate themselves and feel isolated from the church. But they should not allow that to happen. Notwithstanding the fact that responsible church members intercede for the sick, the sick themselves should also call on the congregation and the elders to intercede for them if they can no longer pray. Call them! Speak to them. Ask for their help.
3. If you as a sick person talk to others about your illness and ask for their prayer, be open and honest. Do not get stuck in small talk and pious truths. Be honest about your own weakness and about possible sin which stands between you and God. Do realise that there is only access to the Father through Christ. And that therefore honesty is necessary and (perhaps) confession of sin. This way a period of illness can become one of spiritual gain!
4. How often do we as pastors allow ourselves to get caught in generalities and friendliness, without taking a clear stand before the Lord? We may be busy 'anointing', but not 'in the name of the Lord'. Do we realise how much loneliness this may cause on the part of the sick and how much unfulfilled yearning for a good conversation? Would we not be able to give much better and much more personal help if we talked about more than medicine and practical aid? By seeking the Lord and expecting everything in his name? ■

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W. van 't Spijker

A comparison Catechism and

Introduction. Shifts in theology.

For the discussion of this topic we have chosen the retrospective method: we will look back at the Heidelberg Catechism from the perspective of the Westminster Confession and the Westminster Catechisms. We travel back in history, which passed through several stages between the publication of the Heidelberg Catechism in 1563 and the Westminster Assembly of 1643 – 1649.



During this 80-year period a shift in mindset took place in European history¹. If we restrict ourselves solely to church and theology, a shift can be observed which became particularly manifest in three issues that were of primary importance to the Reformation². In the *sola fide* (by faith alone) the Reformation found a steady foundation for the assurance of salvation. Assurance of faith was firmly grounded in the reliability of God's promise.

Within a century after the Reformation the value of experience had become a prominent issue. On the continent, as well as in England, the *sola fide* had been asking for a complementary experience of faith. On the continent this became manifest in the rise of Pietism and the *Second Reformation*. In England Puritanism emerged, with the same longing for experience³.

Doctrine of justification

A second important issue, related to the first, was the doctrine of justification, which had received full attention from the Reformation. This was now joined by the issue of sanctification. It is not enough to be forgiven, a believer should also show signs of newness of life (*novitas vitae*), as evidence of the power of grace.

The third issue was the church, as the place where salvation is celebrated by the community. Due to certain developments, the individual with his personal needs had come more to the fore. The time in which the Westminster Assembly took place, shows clear evidence of this threefold shift

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between the Heidelberg the Westminster Confession (I)

in mindset as regards doctrine and experience. The problems that arose from this, are reflected in the decisions taken by the Assembly⁴.

These problems are much less prominent, however, in the Heidelberg Catechism⁵. After all, historically it stood closer to the Reformation and came into existence in a religious-political process of continuing reform. While it is true that the differentiation within Protestantism in the Palts had already adopted a specifically Reformed structure, the ground patterns of the Reformation itself were clearly recognizable in this Catechism, especially where the theological and practical value of the doctrines of justification, sanctification as well as the structure of the church are concerned.

The English background

We will now make an attempt to travel backwards from Westminster to Heidelberg. This method offers the possibility of briefly tracing the theological developments on certain issues. Generally speaking, we see that the breach with the Roman Catholic Church was accepted as a given fact. Both theological camps had expounded their views and defended them with arguments. Bellarmine had been refuted by almost every renowned Reformed and Lutheran theologian⁶. The Westminster Assembly was able to do its work at a time when the English monarchy, leaning towards Roman Catholicism, had lost most of its power⁷. Simultaneously, in England too the confrontation with the Anabaptists more or less came to an end⁸. Due to their opinions and behaviour they finally found themselves in positions outside of the Establishment, although their subjective ideas, be it in altered forms, were to play an important role after the Assembly⁹. Likewise, all attempts at normalizing the relations between the Reformed and the Lutherans turned out to be fruitless. Duraeus, who, on behalf of the English Parliament, travelled to the continent in an attempt to unify the two confessions (asking for more support from the English Parliament) was one of the members of the Assembly. However, he was not very welcome there and it was not until August 12th 1645 that he participated¹⁰. Apparently, the Assembly accepted the breach between the Lutherans and the

Reformed. There was more than enough tension already in the international Reformed world, for example concerning the question of the extent of the atonement¹¹. Baillie, a Scottish Commissioner, complained that the writings of Amyraut went from hand to hand in Westminster¹². It is evident that in its decisions the Assembly took deviations from Reformed doctrine into account, although it carefully avoided mentioning them explicitly in its documents.

A plausible method?

The question to be evaluated later on is whether our method enables us better to examine if, in the light of the Heidelberg Catechism, the history of theology can be said to have taken a favourable course. While doing this, we must avoid using our Catechism as a norm for the purity of Westminster theology. The 80-year period that lies between the recording of both documents covers two generations. Every time has its own nearness to God. The reverse applies even more strongly. Our concern is with the theological kernels of the two Confessions, as well as with a comparison between both. A comparison can always be made, regardless of whether we feel called upon to express a judgement.

Diversity in covenant thinking

While searching for the theological kernel of the Westminster symbols¹³ we soon discover that the framework of this theology consists of a widely fanned-out covenant structure. The confession is framed within its own system of coordinates, in which the Westminster theology is embedded. It is the system of the covenant¹⁴. The Irish Articles (1615) distinguish a covenant which was engraved in the heart of pre-fallen man, as a covenant of the Law, with the promise of eternal life on condition of perfect obedience and with the threat of death in case of disobedience¹⁵. In the Westminster Confession the covenant is part of the way in which God relates to man. The distance between God and man is infinitely great. As creatures of reason, we owe obedience to God. But the fruit of this, the enjoyment (*frui*) of God's beauty (*beatitudo*) can only take place because God wholly voluntarily comes down to man: *condescensio*¹⁶. It pleased

Him to express this by making a covenant with him¹⁷. This first covenant was a covenant of works with the promise of eternal life and the condition of complete and personal obedience. After the fall God made a second covenant, usually called the covenant of grace. In this covenant He offers sinners salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ. He demands faith in return for salvation and He promises all who were predestined to eternal life that He will grant them his Holy Spirit, who enables their will and gives power to believe. Here we see the relationship between covenant and predestination. At first sight, this looks at least like a narrowing down of the covenant of grace. However, we must not lose sight of the fact this kind of covenant thinking resonates within a very broad context that is characteristic of the Westminster Assembly. In Scotland a national covenant had been drawn up in 1638¹⁸. It was a religious covenant, adopted by the English Parliament on August 17th 1643 (with minor changes) as *Solemn League and Covenant*¹⁹. Thus, the concept of covenant was adopted with a political goal that was solemn enough to function within the context of the covenant of grace. The reverse applies too: the covenant of grace, confessing God's *condescensio*, also functioned in society on a wider theocratic scale. Robert Baillie, a Scottish Commissioner, said that while the English preferred a civil league, the Scottish opted for a religious covenant²⁰.

Within Puritanism there was also a 'church covenant', entered into by believers at the institution of a church²¹. It was similar to an independentist thesis and to a personal covenant with God, entered into on a strictly individual basis²². Examples of this are known. Thus, the idea of a covenant functioned within the reality of personal spirituality, the ecclesiastic and doctrinal sphere and even within a political context. Where this context is lacking, as was the case in later centuries, the theological value of covenant theology is seriously diminished. It is in danger of losing character and degenerating into a mere systematic *theologoumenon*. At the time of the Westminster Assembly, however, this was certainly not the case yet. There, covenant thinking functioned within a very broad structure of existential components.

A broad context

Moreover, it should be remembered that the Westminster symbols were part of a *corpus doctrinae* which - as is also the case with the Heidelberg Catechism - includes a church order and

liturgy as well. We should mention the *Directory for Public Worship*, which includes an important treatise on preaching the Word of God²³. In this homiletic treatise it becomes evident that doctrine loses some of its sharp edges in preaching, in the sense that it becomes truly transparent. In addition, there is the *Form for Church Government*. This document was sent to Parliament on July 7th 1645. Church government remained a difficult subject at the Assembly, causing tensions, not only within the Assembly itself, but also in the relationship with Parliament²⁴. Doctrine stands further away from life than the church order, which, for the benefit of doctrine, takes a defensive stance.

The doctrine of Scripture

Part of the kernel of Westminster theology is also a reasonably detailed doctrine of Scripture²⁵. It bears traces of scholastic theology, which is not surprising. In many ways the exposition is based on William Whitaker's *Disputations on Holy Scripture* (1588), which were primarily meant as a refutation of Bellarmine on the issue of the authority of Scripture. In this work Whitaker operated completely within the evolving Reformed tradition²⁶. Hieronymus Zanchius also began his lengthy Confession (1586) with a chapter on the authority of Scripture²⁷. And so did Salnar, who published his *Harmonica Confessionum* in Geneva in 1581, as a counterpart to the Lutheran *Formula Concordia*. In the first chapter, he presents a survey of what the Reformed symbols confess about Scripture. "The Scriptures are the Word of God", so we read in the Larger Catechism. The Shorter Catechism only has two short questions. The purpose of the Scriptures is to direct us to glorify God and enjoy Him.

Ordo salutis

Apart from the doctrine of Scripture, the description of the Order of Salvation is also typical of the Westminster Theology. It is a pointed sketch of the appropriation of salvation in which predestination and the covenant play a role on the path to assurance of faith. At the very beginning stands 'effectual calling'²⁸. All those predestined to eternal life, and they alone, are powerfully called by the Word and the Spirit. This calling is based on God's sovereign and particular grace, in which man is completely passive. This formulation is in some ways similar to what the Canons of Dort say about conversion²⁹. Man is passive until he is regenerated by the Holy Spirit and truly accepts the grace that is offered to him.

Justification does not consist in an infusion of grace, but in the forgiveness of sin³⁰. Christ's obedience and atonement are accounted to us. Justification leads to adoption, shared by all God's children. Justification thus becomes a treasure to every sinner that is powerfully called. Here, what Luther wrote about the justification of the sinner moves to the background. Luther was especially attached to the simultaneity (*simul*) of being justified and being a sinner. The Westminster Confession is more in line with Calvin, who applies the *simul* to the relationship between justification and sanctification. On this point the influence of both Puritanism and Calvin appears to be very strong. Where the Confession speaks of the path to assurance of faith, we recognize the tone of the Canons of Dort. It is an infallible assurance of faith which is grounded in the reliability of God's promise of salvation³¹. With John Murray, we can speak of a consensus of Reformed theology on this point³².

Christology

As far as Christology is concerned, we can say that it bears the same pattern, both in the Confession and the Shorter and Longer Catechisms, as we see in the Canons of Dort. It is embedded in the structure of election and the covenant³³. Christ Himself is a fruit of election. He himself was elect and receives, throughout all ages, a people who are to become his descendants. Here the covenant functions in a new way and not as an abstraction. In Christ eternal election takes shape in the course of time. Christ as Mediator, who in the course of time redeems, calls, justifies, sanctifies and, ultimately, glorifies.

Ethics

Remarkably prevalent, both in the Confession as well as the Longer Catechism, are the ethics, worked out in detail. On this point, the Westminster symbols have been blamed with legalism, which was to become characteristic of Puritanism. It fits the strong emphasis which the Puritan movement placed on the sanctification of life. It is striking that the description of sanctification precedes that of saving faith³⁴. In this way, ethics can easily lead a life of its own and become externalized. How explicit and balanced the discussion of ethics is in the Longer Catechism in particular, can be seen in the very detailed instructions for the Christian life³⁵.

Criticism

It is important to take note of the elements that received criticism. Apart from a very positive reception (Hodge, Warfield, John Murray) there is

also careful but principled reservation (Torrance, Kendall and Rolston). Especially the older Scottish and Presbyterian systematic theologians testified their faithfulness to the Westminster symbols in their writings. Charles Hodge and his son Archibald Alexander Hodge recognized their ecclesiastic and theological authority, and staid within the bounds of the Westminster Confession in their dogmatic writings³⁶.

The same can be said of the Scotsmen from the Free Church. James Bannerman wrote extensively about the authority of Scripture and ecclesiology in line with the Westminster Confession³⁷. With his study on the Westminster Assembly, Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield produced a standard work that is still valuable today. John Murray, whose papers have been published by Banner of Truth, presented a very positive image of the Westminster Assembly and its documents, even though he voiced criticism on certain elements. Far-reaching criticism came from J. B. Torrance in particular, who believed covenant theology as such to be a deviation from Reformed theology³⁸. For Th. T. Torrance the Westminster tradition was a 'product of a formidable Protestant scholasticism'³⁹. Others, like Kendall, Rolston and Bell were also of the opinion that Calvin's line of thinking had been severed and exchanged for a theology that instilled doubt instead of assurance, due to too strong an emphasis on decree and election⁴⁰. ■

Endotes:

1. Puritanism, the *Nadere Reformatie* and Pietism evolved at the same time that greater emphasis was placed on rationality and theology, also in Reformed orthodoxy. These, in turn, are connected to a transformation in European culture of which the 'crisis in European thinking' was clearly an exponent; cf. P. Hazard, *De crisis in het Europese denken. Europa op de drempel van de Verlichting 1680 — 1715*, translated from French by Frans de Haan, Amsterdam 1990.
2. W. van 't Spijker, 'De Nadere Reformatie', in: T. Brienens, *De Nadere Reformatie. Beschrijving van haar voornaamste vertegenwoordigers*, The Hague 1986, 5-16.
3. The actual resemblance between the three movements can, for the most important part, be traced back to the transformation in the culture of the seventeenth century, which affected both Rome and the Reformation.
4. The subjects mentioned are mainly of importance because of their theological value. In the mean time we do not forget that the simultaneous shift in the

- direction of scholastic Reformed Theology has *more* than just a formal or methodical meaning. About the conflict over this in the Reformation itself, see E. Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation*, Cambridge / London 1995; W.J. van Asselt & E. Dekker (Eds.), *Reformation and Scholasticism. An Ecumenical Enterprise*, Grand Rapids 2001; C. R. Trueman & R. S. Clark (Edd.), *Protestant Scholasticism*, Carlisle 1999; R.A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics. The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, Vol. I-IV, Grand Rapids 2003.
5. W. Verboom, *De theologie van de Heidelbergse Catechismus. Twaalf thema's: de context en de latere uitwerking*, Zoetermeer 1996; T. Latzel, *Theologische Grundzüge des Heidelberger Katechismus. Eine fundamentaltheologische Untersuchung seines Ansatzes zur Glaubenskommunikation*, Marburg 2004 [MThSt 83]; W. Verboom, *Hulde aan de Heidelberger. Over de waarde van leerdienst en catechismuspraak*, Heerenveen 2005; L. D. Bierma a.o., *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism. Sources, History, and Theology*. With a Translation of the Smaller and Larger Catechisms of Zacharias Ursinus, Grand Rapids 2005; W. van 't Spijker e.a., *Het troostboek van de kerk. Over de Heidelbergse Catechismus*, Houten 2005.
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 16. Confession VII, 1; Müller, *Bekenntnisschriften*, 558.
 17. '...quam ipsi exprimere placuit icto foedere', l.c.
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 19. A. I. Macinnes, a.w. (zie n. 7).
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- Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, 786: 'The English were for a civil League, we for a religious Covenant'.
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 26. W.R. Spear, *a.w.*, 88: 'There is hardly a concept in Chapter One of the Confession which does not have a parallel in Whitaker's Disputation'.
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 28. Cap. X: 'vocare efficaciter'.
 29. Canons of Dort, III/IV, 12.
 30. Cap. XI: 'Quos Deus vocat efficaciter, eosdem etiam gratis iustificat, non quidem iustitiam infundendo, sed eorum peccata condonando.....'.
 31. Canons of Dort, V, 10.
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 33. Cap. VIII, 1.
 34. With Calvin faith precedes sanctification: 'Fide nos regenerari; ubi de poenitentia', *Inst.* III, III, 3.
 35. Questions and answers 91-151. The last question especially is an example of scholastic ethics.
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 40. R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, Oxford 1979, 167-208; H. Rolston III, *John Calvin versus the Westminster Confession*, Richmond 1972; M. C. Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology. The Doctrine of Assurance*, Edinburgh 1985.

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Respect for what God has instituted - II

3. Sacraments

We come now to the third issue, concerning the sacraments. We begin with the matter of sacraments and the chaplaincy. The synod decided that “in exceptional situations in which military personnel are isolated for an extended period from regular church life,” ordained chaplains may administer baptism and the Lord’s Supper under certain conditions (*Acta GS Amersfoort-Centrum 2005, art. 102*). Why was such a synodical declaration necessary? Couldn’t these ordained ministers determine such matters themselves?



Other churches grant their ministers complete freedom or regulate the matter informally, without any formal constraints. From the time of the synod of Leusden 1999, our churches have opted to deal with this issue in full openness and frankness. This reflection on our own regulations was needed also because the top Dutch military chaplain requested this, inquiring about what he could expect in terms of the participation of our ministers. He was quite willing to respect our regulations, but he wanted to know then what they were!

The issue was in fact also a matter of honor for our own military chaplains, who encountered questions and circumstances with which they did not wish to deal on their own, but for which they sought assistance. For these involved rather complicated situations that required *searching* for a solution that honored both the Word of God and the particular situation.

You may be inclined to ask: If such regulation is so difficult, why not simply leave the matter alone? *Must* the Lord’s Supper be celebrated while on foreign military deployments? After all, in our ordinary situations it happens that people can’t celebrate the Lord’s Supper for a time. That’s true enough. But in the first place, Christ did give the command to his believers that they proclaim his death, and our Church Order prescribes that as well—at least four times per year (art. 61). In the

second place, those on deployment often face exceptional circumstances, where they are gone for an extended time, where they are not involved in normal church life, but labor in dangerous circumstances and without much spiritual support. In that situation they would like to use the Lord’s Supper to strengthen their faith.

Not easy

It is not very easy for synods, either, to establish responsible and useful criteria for evaluating this issue. Three synods have now dealt with this. That has yielded agreed upon categories within which military chaplains may administer the sacraments. Let me mention a couple of those criteria (cf. *Acta*, art 102, decision 3A). Such administration may not occur in a private or impromptu gathering. Rather, it must occur in an assembling together for which the determinative factor is that it is based on God’s Word and provides some kind of mutual supervision and discipline. Use is made, in administering the sacraments, of the Reformed liturgical formularies. Thereby sacraments with their promise and demand are kept intact. The military chaplain does not perform his work on his own authority, but in an ecclesiastical manner, under the supervision and guidance of deputies for the spiritual care of military personnel.

There is no open communion. Only professing members are admitted to the Table. With regard to the holiness of the Table, what is decisive is not the accountability of the individual participant. The military chaplain is ultimately responsible! He must see to it that those who receive the sacrament agree with us in the basics of the Christian religion, live a godly life, and are prepared to submit to mutual oversight and discipline. Yes, discipline too. That is important, not only in terms of maintaining the holiness of the Table, but also to give expression to the mutual fellowship being enjoyed at the Table. If a military chaplain is unaware of the sinful life of a participant, but that person’s compatriots are fully aware of such a sinful life, then they have the duty not to let that go. As Table participants, people hold one another accountable and are responsible for one another.

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Baptism

Regarding baptism, similar questions have arisen in recent times. One of our military chaplains was, for a period of three years, the only orthodox minister stationed in a wide territory belonging to his assignment abroad. What must he do when military personnel come to faith and desire to be baptized? What must he do when believing military personnel desire to present their children for baptism, but cannot do so in their circumstances of deployment? Guidelines were established for those situations as well. For adult baptism, those guidelines correspond entirely to our own practices here at home, though access to baptism is then granted not by a consistory, but by the military chaplain, who does so *after receiving positive advice from the deputies* for the spiritual care of military personnel. If what the situation involves the baptism of children of believers who belong to other churches, a sort of guest privilege is granted. Such a privilege may be granted only if the baptismal parents are allowed to come to the Lord's Supper in their own church, if they are receiving instruction in Reformed doctrine concerning baptism, and if one of the Reformed liturgical formularies is used. Their children are then registered as members of their home church. Naturally that continues to be a nettlesome matter. No one affirms that covenant children of God ought to be excluded from baptism, when they live abroad. We will need to acknowledge the catholicity of the sacraments. But a decision like this *continually* presses home the pain of ecclesiastical division.

The synod declared explicitly that what we have here are exceptional situations (*Acta*, art. 102, decisions 3A and 3B). The synod made no new rule for these. Nor did the synod want to render the existing rule empty, but wished to establish the rule and relate it with maximal effectiveness to exceptional situations.

After the decision was adopted, as chairman I stated the following: "Let anyone who disagrees with the adopted decision also ask about what military personnel must do with Christ's command to proclaim his death, and in what manner the administration and celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper may be done in extreme situations and in long-term isolation. Or is the administration of the sacraments really tied after all to the normal conditions of our ordered church life, so that a military person is by definition excluded if he or she is isolated from regular church life for an extended period? That may well be a theoretical question for us here in the Netherlands, but for military personnel living in constant danger or in long-

term isolation it is an issue of spiritual concern. Let no one accuse us of not providing adequate attention to, or applying sufficient resources to, the significance of the signs and seals which Christ himself instituted to accompany his gospel for them" (*Acta*, art. 102).

Guests

A second issue relating to the sacraments dealt with by the synod involved granting Table access to guests from churches with whom we are not in ecclesiastical fellowship.

A request came to the synod of Amersfoort-Central 2005 from the Particular Synod Holland-North, that synod make a declaration about admitting to the Table those who are not members of one or another of our sister churches. The Particular Synod of Holland-North had been asked to adjudicate an appeal against the practice in one of the churches, but decided that this was an issue involving not merely one church or one classis or one particular synod, but rather that the churches in common should make a decision about this, and they thus brought their overture to the synod. As you perhaps know, discussions of this issue have occurred in recent times among other churches and classes among us. More than that: decisions have already been made. The real danger exists that differing protocols and standards will be applied among our churches.

The question before the synod was not theoretical, but had arisen from our practice. People come from other churches and want to celebrate the Lord's Supper with us. How must we evaluate this and deal with this? On the one hand, we have Christ's command given to all his believers that they proclaim his death. On the other hand, according to Christ's command we must honor the holiness and ecclesiastical character of the Lord's Supper. The question becomes: How does one do justice to both the catholicity and the holiness of the Lord's Supper?

Some people have an easy answer. The true church described in Belgic Confession, Art. 27-29, is to be found exclusively in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and her sister churches, and thus there is no other route to the Lord's Supper than by becoming a member of or joining one of these churches. This opinion, in my estimation, ignores the imperfection of the Reformed Churches; it ignores the fact that these churches with all their idiosyncrasies are usually not very well known; it ignores the fact that there are churches concerning which we have not yet formed a



After the decision was adopted, as chairman I stated the following... (photo P.G.B. de Vries)

judgment as a national federation (the Restored Reformed Church [Hersteld Hervormde Kerk] and the continuing synodical Reformed Churches [synodaal Gereformeerde Kerken²]; and it ignores the declarations of the synods of Heemse 1984-85 (*Acta*, art. 131) and of Spakenburg-North 1987 (*Acta*, art. 172), which pointed to the breadth of Christ's work and the compassion of God in gathering the church. Let us not make the mistake of thinking that fellowship with Christ is possible only "through us" (cf. Mark 9:38-40).

Church Order Art. 6o

But what has the synod concretely decided regarding those guests at the Lord's Supper? Among our churches we adhere to Church Order, Art. 6o. Here we learn that only *those who have made profession of faith according to Reformed doctrine and who live godly lives* shall be admitted

to the Lord's Supper. Does that not close the discussion? The synod declared that this article was not written for such a purpose, since it contains a rule which applies *within* our churches (*Acta*, art. 50, ground 1). But can we not apply it toward those outside, namely, to guests? The synod declared (*Acta*, art. 50, decision B) that the two criteria of Article 6o—agreement with Reformed doctrine and living a godly life—apply also to guests coming from outside our sister churches. But in their case, something else is added. For the Lord's Supper is also the meal of fellowship with *each other* in the church of Christ. Justice must be done also to that aspect. The synod decided that the consistory must have a conversation beforehand with guests from other churches, to discuss not only their agreement with Reformed doctrine and their godly living, but also to discuss the ecclesiastical division and Christ's call for the ecclesiastical unity of those who believe ("Why do you wish to celebrate the Lord's Supper here?"), and to discuss the question of what the participation of such guests contributes to the edification of the congregation which is celebrating the Lord's Supper ("How are you putting into practice the fellowship enjoyed at the Lord's Table?").³ In this way the ecclesiastical character of the Lord's Supper is honored according to the capacity of each.

According to Reformed church polity, a consistory is responsible within established categories for its own governance. No church is obligated by the synod to admit guests to the Lord's Supper. The declaration of the synod may well mean that a number of churches must back away from an admission protocol that is too broad.⁴

4. Ecclesiastical unity

The proposals of the deputies for ecclesiastical unity occasioned significant commotion in the days leading to the synod of Amersfoort-Central. These involved the new guidelines for local ecumenical discussions. The guidelines we used to follow dated from the synod of Berkel and Rodenrijs 1996. At that time, we were at the starting point of entering into local discussions. Since that time, local contacts have grown robustly, resulting in congregations and deputies having to face problems. The deputies discovered that supplementing the guidelines was inescapable. They were not united, however,

about the specific content of such a supplement. There was a majority report and a minority report. The majority report made no distinction between our local contacts with the Christian Reformed Churches (CGK) and contacts with other churches. The objection was also registered that the place and role of the church federation was inadequately emphasized and honored in their proposal. The minority came with proposals which emphasized especially the latter.

At this point I will not comment any further on the proposals of the minority and majority. In the first round of synodical discussion, it became clear

that the sizable majority of the synod had difficulty with the majority proposal from the deputies, because the synod delegates wanted a stronger role for the church federation. With the help of Prof. M. te Velde, new proposals were formulated which found wide acceptance among all the deputies and the entire synod, and after amendments, were adopted by the synod (*Acta*, art. 132, decision 3).

Congregation and federation

A separate guideline was adopted regarding contacts with the CGK, concerning whom we have declared as a federation that they stand on the basis of God's Word and are committed to the confessions of the church. In the guideline for contacts with *other* churches it was indicated that this basis was indispensable for all our contacts; contacts and activities in the context of ecclesiastical unity must occur on the basis of Holy Scripture and commitment to the Reformed confessions. At the same time, for relations with other churches, the relevant declarations and decisions of broader assemblies must be taken into account (which already directly entails the church federation!). Consistories must expend efforts to prevent the search for unity from injuring the truth. In the new guidelines, the focus on the place and role of the *congregation* is important. From the very beginning they must be well informed and regularly updated. They are also the ones most immediately affected in the exercise of ecclesiastical contacts. There must be a foundation within the congregation for decisions that are adopted there (*Acta*, art. 132, decision 3, guideline for local contact and cooperation apart from national consent, *guideline 3*).

Within the context of classis, the churches shall regularly update one another (*guideline 4*). Before proceeding to the step of admitting members of each other's church to the Lord's Supper, or exchanging pulpits, or holding joint worship services, not only the consent of the congregation but also the approval of classis is required. What is new in terms of the guidelines of Berkel is the explicit requirement that the congregation must be polled and the advice of classis must be sought before sharing ecclesiastical duties such as pastoring and catechizing (*guideline 5*).

Whereas the directives of Berkel required the advice of the provincial deputies, according to Church Order, Article 49, in the new guidelines those provincial deputies now have no duties, but rather written advice from the national deputies for ecclesiastical unity must be requested (*guideline 6*).

This advice must be communicated to inform the congregation and the classis. Here again you find the involvement of the national church federation!

Classis

For a classis to grant approval for the requested contacts, it must be clear that there indeed exists unity in acknowledging and receiving the Word of God and the confessions of the churches, as well as ensuring that the rules based upon that apply to ecclesiastical life. Further it must be shown that the objections which at the level of general synod obstruct the expression of ecclesiastical unity do not affect the local situation (*guideline 6*). Here also you see again a link between the local congregation and the national church federation. You cannot ignore points of difference that exist at the national level!

Guideline 7 states, "Realizing extensive forms of ecclesiastical fellowship at the level of the local congregation, in the absence of such fellowship at the level of the national church federation, ought to be an extra stimulus for continuing to desire and to pursue the full spiritual unity of both church federations."

Guideline 8 adds this: "The absence of unity at the national level is also relevant for the local situation. Therefore, both churches should commit themselves to put forth efforts within their respective national church federations to achieve the necessary national consensus on the basis of Holy Scripture and in commitment to the Reformed confessions. In this situation, local cooperation is limited and incomplete, the forms of cooperation possess only local validity, and these shall not lead to the forming of one congregation." Here as well the national church federation is involved explicitly in the entire enterprise.

In those cases, state *guideline 9*, where these guidelines are inadequate, the consistory shall request the advice of the deputies for ecclesiastical unity appointed by the general synod.

With this new set of guidelines, within the complex ecclesiastical situation in our country (see note 5), the opportunities and responsibilities of congregation and classis are expanded, on the one hand. On the other hand, these guidelines prescribe a more emphatic role for the general synod's deputies for ecclesiastical unity than did the regulations of Berkel. Honoring the national state of affairs is just as essential a component as in the Berkel regulations. The most important, naturally, is the predominant stipulation that all activities in this arena occur on the basis of Holy Scripture and in commitment to the Reformed confessions.

5. Positively Reformed

We will suffice for the moment with this analysis of these decisions. When I was at the synod of our sister churches in Australia this past July, I was asked whether I had any concerns whatsoever about our churches. That question shocked me. If I had no concerns about our churches, I would not be a good representative of our churches! Especially since our synods themselves have identified those concerns! I remind you of what I mentioned about this at the opening of my address. Our synods have identified several matters within our own churches!

Precisely here, then, lies one of my problems with the “restored Reformed” (Hersteld Gereformeerden”) and certain concerned members⁵ within our churches. My conviction is that their accusations are focused in the wrong direction. The problems lie not with the synods, but with the influences of secularism and of charismatic thinking which are taking hold in our churches. The synods desire to be Reformed, and desire to investigate various dangers. They must not be attacked, but supported in their struggle to remain Reformed. I would say to all those who are disturbed about the developments: what you are doing accomplishes precisely the opposite. By laying everything at the feet of the synods, you are clothing the unreformed tendencies that you are supposedly discovering with the authority of the synod, and you make it possible for others to employ the same technique when you insist that “the synod also takes this view.” I would say to you: Focus on the Reformed intention of the synod, identify that feature of their labor, and with just as much intensity clarify that aspect. And hold brothers and sisters and ecclesiastical assemblies to that.

A *second* problem I have with the restored Reformed and certain concerned members is the narrow track they are following. I am intentionally not speaking of the Scriptural “narrow way.” For we all have to walk that path. What I am referring to is the impression I have that the path of God’s Son and of the catholic church is being reduced. All of this is so typically and characteristically—perhaps introvertedly—liberated Reformed. I miss the depth and breadth of the 16th century Reformation. Within these discussions I spot all kinds of assertions and standpoints and convictions, but I see no real disagreements about

the overarching issue of faith in the Christ of the Scriptures. A number of these issues are completely unintelligible to unbelievers and Muslims (which, after all, is our context as churches in the Netherlands).

Looking to the past

The *third* problem that I have with the restored Reformed and certain concerned members with our churches is that they are looking to *the past* for the solution to the problems they have identified. Sermons from decades past—no matter how much I myself also enjoy them and use them in my own sermon preparation—are today no longer the sole and superior means for combating secularization. Certainly, the Word of God endures through all ages. But that is not true of our sermons. We are living *now*, and we must confront the questions and problems and sins of today. We must apply the Word of God very concretely to life *today*, to *people living now*. Otherwise the gap in our lives between Sunday and the rest of the week will only increase. I am very afraid of that, afraid of the lack of attention to people and circumstances of today. The devil went around as a lion not only in the past, but he does so today as well. And he uses the methods and influences of today.

Our most recent synod wrote to the restored Reformed:

But in the midst of all of this [amid all the dangers and concerns that we identified] we also recognize our Savior. He prayed that his Father would not take us out of the world, but would preserve us in his holy name in the midst of the world (John 17). We realize our obligation toward him, that we live as Reformed Christians in the midst of the world, a world that comes from him, and that we do so in a time that has not been removed from his authority and care; it is not for nothing that we call 2005 and each year that may come thereafter *annus Domini* [year of our Lord]. We cannot retreat from the questions and dangers of today. Nor do we want to retreat. We want to confront them openly and honestly. Our discussions about the missionary committee appointments, about our relationship to our governmental authorities, and about the room we want to provide for the work of spiritual care in the chaplaincy, in penitentiaries, and in other care-giving institutions—these discussions help to clarify our place in society and help to shape the public character of our testimony. We want to serve the Lord and to follow our Savior not only in our worship services, but in all our living.



With the help of Prof. M. te Velde... (photo: P.G.B. de Vries)

We believe that you also cannot avoid the issues of the day. You also want to be Reformed in a post-Christian world which in many respects is experiencing emptiness. What a wonderful gift it would be if in such a context we could stand together with each other: you with your gifts, we with ours. For the Word of God has come not only to you or to us, and is not limited in its power to you or to us. It is the Word intended also for the 21st century, for today's people, people sitting with you and with us in the church pew" (*Acta*, art. 20). ■

■ Endnotes

1. I am thinking here of "new" believers, whether native Dutchmen or immigrants. I am also thinking of those who want to be confessionally Reformed, but for whom the Separation of 1834, the Doleantie of 1886, and the Liberation of 1944 mean very little, because they have never heard anything good about them.
2. You would call a church false when on the basis of God's Word you must break away from it. So when we "broke away" from the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformed Church [Hervormde Kerk], and the synodical Reformed Churches, we called each of these "false church" in terms of Belgic Confession, Art. 29. In such situations, true church and false church are easily distinguished (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). There are also churches concerning which—since we did not need to join them in breaking away—we have never expressed a judgment. Specifically, we have never up to now begun discussions toward ecclesiastical unity with

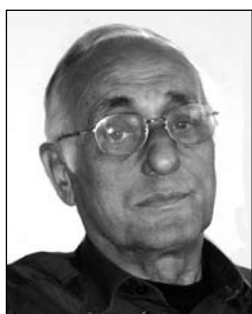
the Reformed Congregations [Gereformeerde Gemeenten], on account of extra-scriptural synodical declarations which they made in 1931, but as far as I know, we have never called them "false churches." We have never said that the Restored Reformed Churches [Gereformeerde Kerken Hersteld] are false churches. On the contrary, we have stated that the differences between them and us are like those between Paul, Peter, and Apollos, and that therefore breaking the unity within the temple of God (1 Cor. 3) is impermissible. Nor do we as churches subscribe to the position that there is but one true church and therefore all others are false. In 1946 our synod declared its willingness to exercise fellowship with all true Reformed members, and its willingness to unite with every gathering that was based upon God's Word; and it decided—"for practical reasons limiting ourselves for the moment"—to seek contact with the Christian Reformed Churches [Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken] (*Acta GS Groningen 1946*, art. 88).

3. So it is inadequate for a consistory to place a guest register in the foyer, where those desiring to come to the Table, who come from other church than sister churches, declare with their signature that they agree with Reformed doctrine and live a godly life. Let this be stated explicitly and with all clarity!
4. Cf. regarding the synod decision also "Answer to a Question," by P. Niemeijer, in *Examined Further [Nader Bekeken]*, 13,5 (May 2006): 145-147; and "Ecclesiastical Hospitality at the Table of the Lord," by P. Niemeijer, in *Examined Further*, 13,5 (May 2006): 147-150.
5. I use the word "certain" intentionally. I refuse to lump them all together.

■ Originally published in Dutch as 'Eerbied voor wat God heeft ingesteld' in *De Reformatie*, Vol.82, No. 6, pp. 117-121. Translation by Nelson D. Kloosterman

Calvin's Hebrew Catechism

Yes, you read it right, Calvin saw to it that his new catechism of 1542¹ was translated into Hebrew. We know this from Theodorus Beza (1519-1605), good friend and fellow believer of John Calvin. For a long time, he worked together closely with him. After Calvin's death in 1564, Beza was his successor as chief minister of Geneva. He tells us about the Hebrew translation of Calvin's catechism in the small book he wrote about Calvin's life².



This important catechism was translated into a great number of European languages like Italian, German, English, Scottish, Flemish, and Spanish³. Calvin himself translated it into Latin for the sake of the ministers of the gospel in East Friesland. But also and especially he wanted to have it translated into Greek and Hebrew, in order to teach Greeks about the gospel and to win the Jews for Christ. According to Romans 1:16 ('I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes - the Jew first, but the Greek also') Calvin first wanted to make his catechism accessible for the Jew, but also for the Greek. A certain Henri Etienne translated it into Greek and Emmanuel Tremellius was responsible for the Hebrew translation.

Tremellius

Who was this Emmanuel Tremellius? Tremellius was born in 1510 as son of Jewish parents in Ferrara, Italy. He received the traditional Jewish upbringing, which also involved a thorough study of Hebrew. His scholarly education in Hebrew and Syrian languages came from the University of Padua.

From his 20th year, Emmanuel came into contact with Christians. He gave his life to Christ, and was baptised in 1540 by Cardinal Reginald Pole, a man with Protestant tendencies. In 1541 he was given the task of Hebrew teacher at the newly established monastic school in Lucca. In 1542 the by now Protestant Tremellius fled for the Inquisition and became a Hebrew teacher in Strasbourg. He later tried for a post in Geneva, but despite interferences of Calvin and Farel, he was unsuccessful. In 1549 he became regius professor of Hebrew at the University of Cambridge. After the

About the author:

Drs. ing. C. van der Spek (1937) lives in Broek op Langedijk, The Netherlands. He is a member of the general synodical committee 'Church and Israel' of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland. As a pioneer he was involved in setting up the christian settlement Nes Ammim in the years 1963-1965. There he learnt modern Hebrew.



Catholic Mary became Queen of England in 1553, he had to flee again. After much wandering he was appointed professor of Old Testament at the university of Heidelberg in 1561. His final position was as teacher of Hebrew at the College of Sedan in France, where he died in 1580³.

The Hebrew edition

In Theodorus Beza's book about the life and work of John Calvin, I found the reference to the Hebrew translation 'by chance'. In the historiography of the Reformation (for instance in the *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexicon* article) I did not discover one single reference to a Hebrew translation of Calvin's catechism. For this reason it is more noticeable that in the online *Jewish Encyclopedia*, it is stated that Tremellius also translated Calvin's Catechism into Hebrew, and that this translation was published in Paris in 1551. This date and place makes me curious about the edition the authors must have seen, because the edition I have consulted gives as publication data: Genève, Stephanus, 5314 (the Jewish year = 1553 / 1554 A.D.).

The title of the Hebrew catechism is 'book for the instruction of God's chosen'. The translator introduces himself as 'Immanuel Tremellius from the city of Padua in the land of Italy'. Isaiah 38:19b is quoted: 'a father tells his sons about your faithfulness'. Tremellius begins with a long introduction, in which he indicates the importance of this teaching for 'the seed of Abraham' as he

called the Jews. Thereafter he follows the questions and answers as written by Calvin.

It may be obvious: Calvin saw a special place for the Jews and applied himself, following the apostle Paul, to bringing the good news of the gospel of Christ also to them. And he found his Jewish brother Tremellius at his side. ■

Notes

1. For the French text of 1542: *Catéchisme*, OC I, 1-134; for the Latin version of 1545: *Catechismus Genevensis*, *Calvini Opera* VI, 1-146; *Opera selecta* II, 72-151. For a modern French edition Jean Calvin, *Catechisme de Genève* (Choisis la Vie), Kerygma, 1991; ISBN-10:

2905464208; ISBN-13: 978-2905464200; or older *Le Catéchisme de Genève* par Jean Calvin (éd. << Jersers>>), Paris, 1934².

2. Theodore de Bèze, *La vie de Jean Calvin*, Lausanne: Edition Europresse, 1993, p. 43.
3. ³ Erich Wenneker, *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, 'Tremellius, Immanuel', Vol. XII (1997) 444-448 (www.bautz.de/bbk/); Crawford Howell Toy & Joseph Jacobs, *Jewish Encyclopedia* (www.jewishencyclopedia.com), 'Tremellius, John Immanuel'.

Translated and adapted from 'Een Hebreeuwse Catechismus van Calvijn', *Vrede over Israël*, Vol. 51/1 (January 2007), also: www.kerkenisrael.nl.

J.M. Batteau

Confessing Election Together

Canons of Dort Conference

Almost a year after a conference is a bit late to report about it, but that's what I'm going to do! On April 6 and 7, 2006, an international conference of about 30 historians, philosophers and theologians was held in the Dutch city of Dordrecht (also called "Dordt" or "Dort"), under the auspices of Aza Goudriaan, from the Philosophy Faculty of the Erasmus University of Rotterdam and Fred Lieberg, of the Faculty of Letters of the Free University of Amsterdam.



Various international researchers reported on their findings and analysis regarding different aspects of the great, and also international Synod of Dort, held in 1618 and 1619 in the same city as the conference and in an historical building which was in existence at that time (the building where the Synod was held is no longer standing). This gave the conference an extra flair. The occasion was the publishing of a book by the Reader in History at the University of Sheffield in England, Anthony Milton, called *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005). In this work original documents are published connected to the presence of a delegation of the Church of England, under the leadership of Bishop George Carleton, at the Synod.

About the author:

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The crisis

The Synod of Dort was an intensive and costly event, supported financially by the Dutch government of that time, and dealing with a thorny issue: the matter of God's eternal election to salvation. In the years leading up to the Synod, heated polemics created an extremely tense atmosphere in The Netherlands, not only theologically and ecclesiastically, but also politically.

On the one hand were the Remonstrants, members of the established federation of Reformed Churches (*de Gereformeerde Kerken*, sometimes designated by a singular: the Reformed Church, *de Gereformeerde Kerk*), but not in agreement with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, which since the 1560's had been the confessional standards of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, in which the doctrine of election was expounded. On the other hand were the confessional Calvinists in the churches, in The Netherlands, but also spread throughout Europe, holding to the accepted confessions and to the Biblical doctrine of eternal election to faith and salvation in Christ.

This was the issue: what to think of God's eternal election to salvation? Arminius, pupil of Calvin's successor in Geneva, Beza, but since his return to The Netherlands in 1588, basically opposed to the Augustinian and Calvinist doctrine of election, had as a Professor of theology in Leiden, starting in 1603, begun to cause waves



The famous painting of the synod, prepared in 1621 by Pouwels Weyts junior, by commission of the council of Dort. The original can be found in the city hall in Dort.

in the theological scene because of his views. In Leiden he came in conflict with his colleague, Gomarus, on this point, although Gomarus had initially accepted Arminius' appointment. When Arminius died in 1609, his followers continued to propagate his theological convictions, publishing a "Remonstrance" in 1610 which construed God's election as dependent upon a person's faith and perseverance in faith. This "conditional election" became the bone of contention which finally led to the convocation of the Synod of Dort in 1618.

The British Delegation

It has been the opinion of some scholars that the British delegation to the Synod, sent by King James I (of "the King James Bible" fame, published in 1611), was tacitly at odds with the Calvinist doctrine of election, and that their apparent concurrence with the Canons produced by the Synod was more a political statement, trying to keep the peace between Great Britain and The Netherlands, than a theological one. Milton's book has conclusively proved this view to be wrong. The English delegates, in the spirit of the very much Reformed King James, were as committed to God's sovereign grace as the rest at the Synod. While there were real differences among the delegates, the greatest reservations about the Calvinist doctrine of election came not from the English delegates, but from various German ones.

At the conference last April, Anthony Milton had time to clarify his research and conclusions, with ample room for discussion. His book was acknowledged to be a milestone in the Synod of Dort research, and has stimulated others to intensify similar research on other aspects of the Synod.

Related topics and persons

Among other speakers were Aza Goudriaan, who spoke about "Arminian Anthropology and the Synod of Dordrecht, Donald Sinnema, of Trinity Christian College (U.S.A.), dealing with "Popular and Catholic: The Modus Docendi of the Canons of Dordt," William J. van Asselt, of the University of Utrecht, treating "The Maccovius Affair," and Fred van Lieburg, who clarified an example of "The Remonstrant split of the Dutch Reformed Clergy."

Goudriaan described the Arminians' anthropology as seeing human reason being affected by sin, but as highly valuing the "light of nature." According to this view, when a person uses his natural ability in a good way, God will give him more grace. This in contrast to the Calvinist view, by which the will is "free," in the sense of being spontaneous and not forced to sin, but still "bound" (as Luther maintained), because human beings are, after the Fall into sin, spiritually blind and dead and can only be regenerated by God's grace.

Van Asselt defended the (in)famous theologian Maccovius against the accusation (by his colleague in Franeker at that time, Lubbertus) that his overly "scholastic" method of doing theology had led him into entertaining dangerous and even heretical opinions. Maccovius seemed to Lubbertus to be saying that God directly "willed" the Fall into sin, thus causing it in some sense. Van Asselt, who is preparing a book on Maccovius, showed that Lubbertus had not read Maccovius closely enough. If he had, he would have seen that Maccovius is keen to absolve God from blame, showing that the Fall was not (logically) necessary. We await the publication of Van Asselt's book on Maccovius with great anticipation!

Van Lieburg described his archive research on the Flemish immigrant minister, Gisbertus Samuels. Samuels had a lot of trouble with Article 16 of the Belgic Confession, about eternal election. In 1591 he was officially condemned by a Zeeland synod and publicly confessed his guilt from the pulpit of the church in Scherpenisse. A few years later he was active again in Brouwershaven and taught that human beings have a free will and can be perfect, without sin. Again he retracted his opinions, but this time he could not be restored to his office as minister.

Looking back at the conference I can say that all who attended appreciated the opportunity to learn more about and discuss the Synod of Dort in detail. It was a step on the way to commemorating the Synod in a more extensive way in 2018 (if the Lord gives us that much time!). International interest and research on the Synod will hopefully increase till then! ■

In-depth theological contemplation on government and society

Political theology is both within The Netherlands and further afield, a subject which is drawing much attention. The Theological University of the Reformed Churches (liberated) is also contributing to this discussion. In a short span of time, two important studies have appeared: first *Levend in Leviathan*, the dissertation of Dr. Ad de Bruijne (*'Living in Leviathan'*, see *'Christians have a political calling in a secular society'*, *Lux Mundi* Vol. 26 / 1, March 2007), and now *Vrede stichten ('Peace making')* by Dr. Stefan Paas, written on the basis of a postgraduate position at this university.



This appointment was made possible thanks to financial support (out of a legacy left for this purpose) from the scholarly institute of the ChristenUnie, an orthodox Christian party in the Dutch Parliament, which is part of the government coalition since recently. This does not alter the fact that the study has been written independently.

Freedom and equality

In this book, Paas chooses on the one hand against the Liberal-Democrats who want to ban religion from politics and society, and on the other side against the theocratic standpoint as this is represented in Dutch politics by the Staatkundig-Gereformeerde Partij ('Politically Reformed Party', holding two seats in the Dutch Lower House).

Paas sees Dutch politics characterised by the debate about freedom and equality, two cultural values which are the mutual love of Christians and non-Christians and which have made our society what she is. The public debate is about ways to understand these values and to give status to these in emerging situations. Decisive in this, is the choice between heteronomy (recognition of a law above man) or autonomy (man decides himself what is good or evil). Paas proclaims that autonomy is a dead end street. It is only on the basis of heteronomy that criticism of the government is

possible; otherwise, the electorate rules and this degenerates politics into negotiations about clashing interests. Paas argues therefore, in favor of a public debate about freedom and equality that is inviting for others, that recognises the deep roots of these values and that bridges the gap between private values and public facts. He pleads for a 'committed pluralism' (term from Leslie Newbiggin) as middle road between theocracy and subsuming convictions under the private domain. Christians take part in this debate in the realisation that public models, legal measures and social rights cannot be traced back to the Bible just like that.

By the way, Paas realises that people will never be completely at one about the common good, but that is not that bad: the soul of society is not harmony, but discussion. Nor is it true that people of different convictions are always in disagreement. Morality is not the same as following commandments, but is the interpretation of reality. Moral choices are the answers people give to the reality in which they live, and that is the reason why there is often agreement between Christians and non-Christians. The same is true of freedom and equality, because God has placed these in his creation as goal.

He who does not recognise values superior to him, has no instrument by which to criticise the insights of others. He can only reject the other as member of another group. Human liberty and equality are threatened by this. What society needs, is a liberty which does not dissolve, and an equality which does not make all the same. Freedom in the biblical sense is the means of answering God's invitation. Man does not have to choose between heteronomy and autonomy, but between a restraint which makes him a slave, and one which liberates him.

Public tolerance

In this we have indicated something of the contents of the first four of the eight chapters of this book. It is a fundamental and in-depth argument, that requires a certain effort in order to follow it. In the chapters

About the author:

Jurjen P. de Vries (1940) studied theology at the Theological University of the Reformed churches (Liberated) in Kampen. For many years he has been editor-in-chief of *Nederlands Dagblad*, a Reformed daily newspaper, and from 1999 until 2003 he was a member of the Senate of the Dutch Parliament.



that follow, Paas becomes more concrete. The fifth chapter deals with the relationship between church and state, with a discussion of the doctrine of the two dominions, also in the light of history. In the sixth chapter, he discusses the question of whether religion can be a peace making factor in a plural society. He notes a growing moral strictness against others and confronts that with the Christian doctrine of sin. In the seventh chapter he addresses the question of whether the government is capable of making peace in a plural society.

The eighth chapter contains a fundamental plea, with historical and theological arguments for tolerance in the public square. An integer Christian politics protects the spiritual freedom and is not directed at ideological monism. Here, the influence of the Anglican theologian, O'Donovan is recognisable e.g. when Paas writes that recognition of Christ's kingship can bring earthly kings to insights in the non or pre-Christian nature of their work and this should then bring them to a very modest view of their task. A government that recognises Christ's new order, will not want to use powerful weapons to establish God's Kingdom on earth. A Christian witness in politics, has two aspects according to Paas: (1) politics embodies actual authority, which cannot be traced back to the will of the people or the law of the strongest, and (2) the government recognises itself as secular, which means: as a part of an order which will pass away.

With this, Paas emphasises the principal nonviolence of Christians. Sometimes we suspect some sympathy for the anabaptist line on this point (nowadays represented by Hauerwas), from which we would have liked to have seen him take

a little more distance. But rightly Paas states that the idea that a society takes its form and content from words instead of weapons, is the result of the civilising effect of Christianity on Germanic Europe. The recognition of government and society as different forms of power and responsibility, has biblical roots. A healthy distance between government and society is the best guaranty for the freedom of citizens and the responsibility and approachability of those in authority. A government which does not rightly see the borders of her task, can become guilty of excessive good and against this too, society should be protected as against evil.

Unlike Calvin and the Modernists, Paas does not consider public tolerance as an interim until everyone has seen the light. In the footsteps of Viret (who influenced Willem of Orange), Paas sees tolerance as fundamental necessity. He turns against the thesis (defended by J.W. Sap in his dissertation in 1988) that a tolerant approach cannot come from a Calvinistic source. Paas mentions three arguments for tolerance: (1) ideological differences will remain; (2) tolerance must not be a favour, but a legal matter; (3) the government is not entitled to bring the people up to salvation.

The government is not neutral with regard to religion as is the case with liberals, who do not want to pay for Christian education. She should impartial, in the realisation that the full breadth of righteousness cannot be realised with political methods, because we expect this on the new earth (2 Peter 3:13).

This book from Paas is an important contribution to reformed political theology, even though there are discussable points here and there. ■

Review of: Dr. Stefan Paas, *Vrede stichten – politieke meditaties* ('Peace making – political meditations'), Zoetermeer, The Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2007; paperback; 436 pages; € 25,00.

Dr. Stefan Paas (1969) gained his doctorate in theology in 1998 on an Old Testament subject (Creation and Judgement, 2003). He earlier wrote books about evangelism and church building. He is teacher of church building in higher education, teacher of missiology at the Free University in Amsterdam and missionary worker in Amsterdam. He is a member of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK).

Enns on Scripture and Incarnation

The Bible is the unique and authoritative word of God. Yet, several data produced by modern biblical scholarship seem to undermine such a conviction. The more the biblical writings were studied in their own Ancient Near Eastern context, the more it turned out that the biblical authors were children of their own time. Their works resemble non-canonical literature in many respects. If the Bible is thus conditioned by its historical and cultural context, can it still be considered the unique word of God?



Peter Enns, associate professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, addresses these questions in his book *Inspiration and Incarnation* published in 2005¹. The primary readers envisioned by his book are evangelical Christians who want to hold on to the conviction that the Bible is God's authoritative word but who feel that the data just mentioned make this element of their evangelical faith unviable. Enns, likewise, wants to stay with the confession that the Bible is God's word and that it corresponds exactly to how God desired it to be. However, he takes the view that the evidence produced by modern biblical studies should cause evangelicals to rethink *how* the Bible is the inspired word of God. So far, evangelicals have been negligent in considering the implications of the data for their doctrine of Scripture. Enns hopes to help his readers by filling this gap.

Three Problems

Enns discusses three areas of problems which puzzle believing Bible readers. **First**, he considers several specimens of Ancient Near Eastern literature that parallel passages from the Old Testament, such as myths about creation and the Flood, laws and historical documents. If these texts have much in common with the Old Testament and if they predate the biblical texts in question, as is often the case, what is left of the uniqueness of the Bible?

Second, Enns discusses the problem of theological diversity in the Old Testament. Amongst other things, he points to differences between laws in Exodus and Deuteronomy, divergent accounts of

the same historical events in Samuel and Kings on the one hand and in Chronicles on the other, and tensions between texts which affirm that the LORD is the only God and others which seem to accept the existence of several gods. Can the Old Testament still be considered a unity if there is so much diversity in it?

Third, Enns treats the way in which Jesus and the apostles make use of Old Testament texts so as to underpin their teachings. Often they lift texts out of their contexts and their interpretation deviates from the original intention of the authors of the texts which they are quoting. Does not this amount to misuse of the Old Testament?

Incarnation and Inspiration

According to Enns, conservative scholars have often tried to play down the phenomena which give rise to the problems just mentioned. He vehemently opposes such attempts. Instead, he contends that these phenomena should be treated in a much more positive way by allowing them to adjust the evangelical doctrine of Scripture. In this connection, he suggests that the incarnation of Christ can be called upon as an analogy or parallel, which may help to build a better model for the inspiration of Scripture. In the incarnation of his Son, God revealed himself within the historical and cultural parameters of First Century Jewish Palestine. By the same token, in revealing himself through the writings of the Old Testament, God did not obliterate the historical conditions of the era but rather made use of them so as to really enter the life of his people. Therefore, the human marks of Scripture should not be considered a problem. On the contrary, they demonstrate how deeply God loves his people.

How does this work out with respect to the three areas of problems just described? First, as far as the Ancient Near Eastern parallels are concerned, Enns points out that, for example, the similarities between Genesis and Babylonian myths show that God really met people where they were. In the second millennium BC, all people made use of myths when thinking about the origins of the world and so did Abraham. In using mythical categories, God addressed his people in a way they would

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Dr. G. Kwakkel is Professor of Old Testament at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in Kampen.

understand. Thus he made his point as clearly as possible, namely, that they should worship him and no other god.

Second, the theological diversity of the Old Testament corresponds to the diversity of the situations in which God's people lived. It demonstrates that God fully participated in the history of his people and that he made himself part of their story.

Third, in interpreting the Old Testament, Jesus and the apostles applied the same methods as other writers from the Second Temple period. Moreover, they unconsciously referred to interpretative traditions which have no footing in the Old Testament, for example, the idea that Moses' opponents were called Jannes and Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8). For modern readers of the Bible, this should not be troublesome. The arguments of Jesus and the apostles had to be convincing for people living in their own time. They must not be judged according to modern scientific standards. What made the interpretation of Old Testament texts in the New Testament unique is that the texts were read out of the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth was the end and the fulfilment of Israel's story set forth in the Old Testament. This christotelic approach, as Enns calls it, is normative for Christian readers of the Old Testament and not the interpretive methods applied by the authors of the New Testament.

Appreciation

In his book, Enns takes the problems with which evangelical Bible readers may be confronted very seriously. He openly sets forth what is involved in these problems and refrains from appeasing his readers by means of cheap arguments. He is to be complimented on that (although he might have given more information about traditional evangelical solutions for some of the problems in question).

Enns rightly stresses that the historical nature of revelation must always be taken into account and that in the Bible, God addresses people where they are, in the concrete circumstances in which they are living. He is also right in emphasising that Scripture should be judged according to its own standards and not ours, scientific or others. Moreover, his warning against conservatives being led by the same assumptions as liberals in assessing scriptural data, must be taken to heart.

In the rest of this review article, I will discuss four

elements of Enns' argument in more detail. While doing so I will also make some critical comments.

Doctrine and Evidence

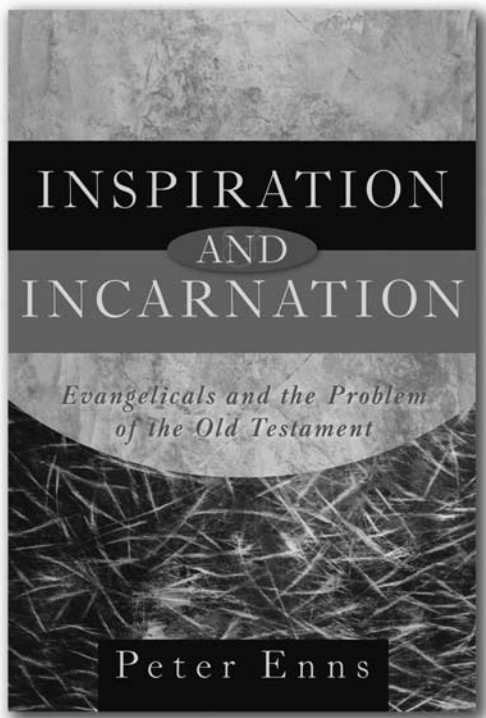
The confession of the church as to the nature of Scripture should not be guarded from any confrontation with data produced by scientific or other investigations. This applies all the more to theological theories that attempt to flesh out what the church believes. I fully agree with Enns that such theories must be related to the evidence found in biblical and historical research.

Obviously, if the doctrine or a theological theory about Scripture does not agree with the evidence, some readjustment is needed. This readjustment may be necessary with respect to the doctrine or theory in question but also with respect to the interpretation of the evidence (or both of them). If, however, it is thought that the doctrine or theory must be modified, the modification must be tested against what Scripture itself teaches about its own nature. In this context, I think especially of passages which explicitly address the status of the Old Testament, for example, John 10:35: 'the Scripture cannot be broken'. In addition, I think of how Jesus finished off discussions by means of quotations from the Old Testament introduced by 'it is written' (see, e.g., Matthew 4:4). If the modification cannot be squared with such testimony of Scripture about itself, it cannot be accepted².

In his book, Enns has not carried out this test. That is to be regretted, because, in my view, such a test is an absolute requisite for any theory about Scripture which takes the principle of *Sola Scriptura* as its point of departure. By virtue of this omission, Enns runs the risk of giving more weight to our observations as to the way in which the Bible behaves or to the scholarly consensus about this matter than to what Scripture teaches about itself.

The Incarnational Analogy

According to Enns, the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ provides an excellent analogy or parallel to the inspiration of Scripture. This contention, which may be considered the central thesis of his book, has surprised me a little bit. The history of theology shows that both conservatives and liberals have appealed to this analogy in order to substantiate their views on Scripture. Enns himself has admitted that the analogy can be used to argue for very different, even opposite opinions³. Furthermore, he rightly points out that the incarnation is itself mysterious. As such it can hardly be expected to clarify another mystery, the



inspiration of the Bible⁴.

However, these objections are not the only ones that can be made and perhaps even not the most fundamental. To be sure, Jesus Christ and Scripture are connected in that a union of divine and human is involved in both. Moreover, they are related in that both are called the word of God. Yet the differences are great. In Scripture everything is divine and human at the same time, but Scripture is not God and man as Jesus is. The mystery of Scripture is that human words are inspired by the Spirit of God and that God himself is still speaking these words to us as his own words. This union of divine and human in Scripture has a structure which is different from that of the union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ, which implies, for example, that although our Saviour bore the burden of God's wrath by the power of his divine nature, he did so in his human nature, not in his divine nature (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 6, Answer 17)⁵.

Because of these differences, the unity of divine and human in the incarnation of the Son of God does not have much predictive potential as far as the nature of the divine and human aspects of Scripture is concerned. To put matters plainly, the incarnational analogy can only be used to help people in accepting conclusions about the human nature of Scripture (including its historical and cultural marks) which themselves are based on other grounds. In fact, in his book, Enns does not make much more of the analogy than that (or so it seems to me). If that is correct, it is not clear why this analogy is so important for him.

Genesis and Myth

Enns wonders why God could not have used 'the category we call "myth" to speak to *ancient* Israelites' (p. 50; his italics). He says that God 'adopted the mythic categories within which Abraham – and everyone else – thought' (p. 53) and that Genesis has 'a firm grounding in ancient myth' (p. 56). When reading this it must be kept in mind that Enns defines myth as 'an ancient, premodern, prescientific way of addressing questions of ultimate origins and meaning in the form of stories' (p. 40). Myth, as he uses the word, does not simply stand for 'untrue'.

In spite of these clarifications, the reader of Enns' book does not get a clear idea of what exactly the mythical elements in Genesis are, nor of how he must deal with them. Evidently, Enns thinks of the worldview according to which the earth is a flat disk with a dome above and waters beneath it. Is that all or does he also think that no historical value can be attached to, for example, the stories of creation, the Fall and the Flood? Enns affirms that the biblical account 'assumes the factual nature of what it reports'. The same, however, applies to its ancient Near Eastern counterparts, such as the Babylonian myths (p. 55). If, it may be asked, modern readers cannot be supposed to accept the factual nature of the latter, do they still have to accept it with respect to the former?

I ask these questions with an eye to the intended reader of Enns' book, namely the general evangelical Christian. This reader, supposedly, looks forward to an answer to these questions, but the only answer he gets is that there is not much value 'in posing the choice of Genesis as either myth or history', as 'this distinction seems to be a modern invention' (p. 49). Whatever one's opinion on the last comment, Enns' answer is unsatisfactory for the intended reader⁶.

I add a more general question about the implications of the term 'myth'. In biblical studies, one cannot escape from using technical terms that do not correspond to words occurring in the Bible itself. There is nothing wrong with that. But the case of 'myth' is a special one inasmuch as it seems improbable that the community in which myths were passed down would ever have used a similar term for its stories, which in the view of the members of the community had, as Enns admits, a factual nature. If that is right, does it not imply

that one who makes use of this term actually positions himself outside the believing community concerned? This question is not a rhetorical one and it is far from me to suggest that Enns takes a stand outside the evangelical community, let alone that he wants to do so. It is a real question, which is presented here for the sole purpose of stimulating further reflection.

The Old Testament in the New

I really appreciate 'christotelic' as a term for describing a responsible Christian reading of the Old Testament. I also like the analogy that Enns presents in this connection, namely that of reading a novel for the second time (see, e.g., p. 153). If you know how a story ends and then read it again, you will see many things that escaped your notice when you read it for the first time.

The analogy, however, implies that those things are really present in the story. That is also what is claimed by the New Testament, that is, that Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection are indeed announced in the Old Testament. In this context, Luke 24:45, for example, could be mentioned as a significant text. It says that after Jesus had opened the minds of the two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus, they understood the Scriptures. This means that so far, they had not rightly seen what is taught by the Scriptures, but thanks to Jesus' intervention they were given a clear view of their real meaning. Similarly, the fact that the apostles appealed to the Old Testament so as to convince Jews who did not yet believe in Jesus Christ, only made sense if the claims of the apostles could be tested against the Old Testament itself (as the Bereans did; Acts 17:11). In other words, if somebody did not find Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, this was due to his own blindness and not to the Old Testament.

Enns affirms that Jesus and the apostles made use of the exegetical methods that were in vogue in the Second Temple period. These methods involved, among other things, that the interpreters began with what they knew to be true, that is, that the biblical texts were about the events they experienced in their own days. Besides, they felt free to change, add or omit words from the text in order to make their point. This description of the interpretive methods gives rise to two sets of questions.

Right and wrong

First, how could people in those days decide which interpretation was right and which was wrong?

They apparently had to make such decisions, for although discussions could be finished off by quoting a text from the Old Testament not every appeal to the Old Testament was considered valid (as can be inferred from Matthew 4:5-7 and Acts 17:11). How then were decisions made? Did it all depend on an unverifiable divine revelation, which told the Qumran sect that the prophets spoke about its experiences and the disciples that they spoke about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Second, Enns points out that modern readers of the Old Testament had better not make use of some of the interpretive methods of the Second Temple period, which, in his view, were applied by Jesus and the apostles. Of course, I fully agree with him that modern interpreters should not change or omit words to make their point. Yet the question remains as to what readers must do if, for example, Paul's argument is based on the application of such an outdated method. Can they still accept the point the apostle is making? If so, on which basis?

In asking these questions I do not suggest that the answers can easily be given and that Enns has simply failed to present them. However, such questions can well be expected to rise in the minds of the intended readers of his book. For that reason, Enns would have done well to treat them more explicitly, even if he felt unable to present definite answers.

As for myself, I would like to make a small contribution to the discussion by elaborating upon one aspect of these matters, namely the question as to what can be considered contextual exegesis of the Old Testament. When reading Enns' book, one gets the impression that for him contextual exegesis is almost limited to reading the texts in accordance with the original intentions of the human authors. Enns only rarely refers to the wider perspective of the intention of the divine author. In my view, contextual interpretation of Old Testament texts also implies that the texts are read from the perspective of the larger compositions of which they are part, as well as from the perspective of the Old Testament canon as a whole.

I mention two examples. If Psalm 3 is read from the perspective of the original author, David's experiences when he fled from Absalom will dominate the interpretation (cf. the title of the psalm). If, however, it is realised that this personal prayer of David was later included in the Psalter, the new and larger context may well lead to additional meanings, which were never present in

David's mind. Similar things could be said about the prophets. When, for example, the Book of Hosea was included in the Book of the Twelve Prophets, Hosea's prophecies received new meanings which did not yet apply in the prophet's own days.

It goes without saying that this approach to contextual interpretation does not solve all the problems involved in the New Testament's use of Old Testament texts. Yet I am convinced that in some cases this use can be better understood if the Old Testament texts are allowed another reading than just from the perspective of the original intentions of the human authors. Enns might have helped his readers by pointing this out more explicitly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it must be affirmed that Enns has raised a number of important questions, which might trouble evangelical readers of the Bible. Moreover, he has discussed them in a courageous way. However, it is understandable that his view has provoked critical comments in evangelical circles⁷ and will certainly do so in the future. It is to be hoped that the discussion about the nature of Scripture will be continued in the spirit of humility, love and patience advocated by Enns at the end of his book, and, most of all, in respectful obedience to what God himself has taught us about his holy word. I have attempted to write within these parameters. I hope that the result will convince my colleague from Westminster Seminary of this intention. ■

Notes

1. Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation. Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005; paperback; 197 pages; ISBN 10: 0-8010-2730-6; ISBN 13: 978-0-8010-2730-7; US\$ 17.99.
2. Cf. B. Kamphuis, 'Systematische theologie', in: A.L.Th. de Bruijne (ed.), *Gereformeerde theologie vandaag: oriëntatie en verantwoording*, Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2004, 68.
3. See Enns in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (2006), 323.
4. Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 18, 168.
5. For a penetrating critique of the use of the christological analogy in relation to the divine and human in Scripture, see P.R. Wells, *James Barr and the Bible. Critique of a New Liberalism*, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980, 340-349. Wells himself points to the sovereignty of divine grace

and the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion and in the renewal of covenant community as a better analogy; see *ibidem*, 363-364, 374.

6. Note that Enns, in his response to the critical review of G.K. Beale in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (2006), affirms 'the basic historical referential nature of the opening chapters of Genesis' (p. 317). He also agrees that Genesis records 'real events of the past' (p. 319). He adds, however, that such assertions can only be the beginning of a discussion about the nature of Genesis. In the next paragraphs of his response he explains what is involved in such a discussion, but this does not lead to one or more unequivocal conclusions.
7. See, e.g., the discussion between G.K. Beale and Enns in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* and in *Themelios* and the review of D.A. Carson in *Trinity Journal* (for further references, consult <http://www.reformation21.org> and search for 'Enns', or google on 'Beale' and 'Enns'). In writing the present review I took advantage of these publications, although I do not share all critical comments found in them.

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