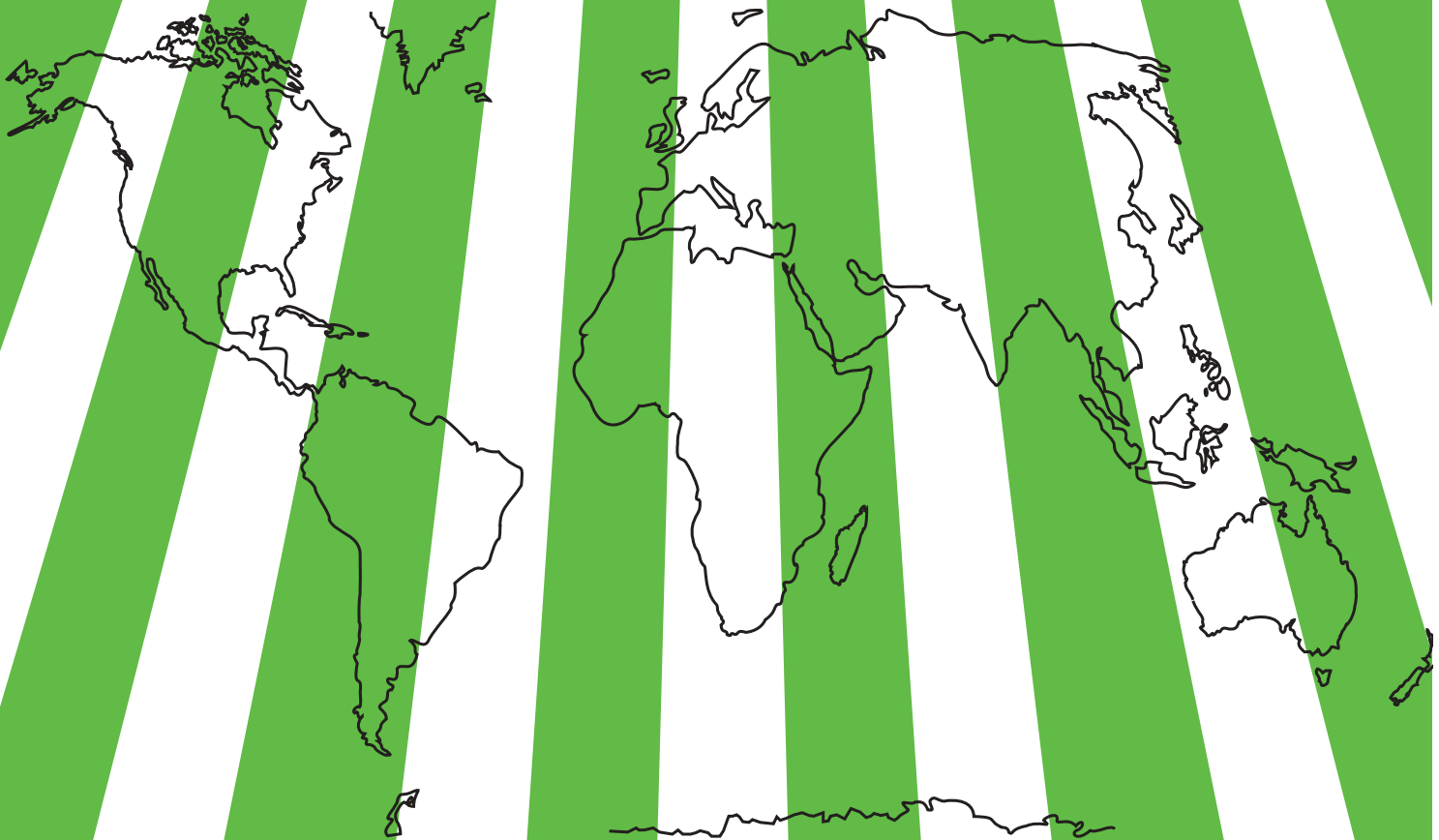


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the Netherlands

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Editorial

On June 1st a referendum about the European Constitution was held in the Netherlands. At this moment in time I do not know what the result is. The indications are that the majority of people who vote, will vote against it.

To all intents and purposes, this constitution is nothing more than a collection of the treaties and agreements into which the member states already had entered, and added to these a number of stipulations about human rights. It is interesting to note on the basis of discussions about the constitution within the Netherlands, that there is a greater fear of European government forming than was originally thought.

The Dutch government is a magnanimous supporter of more European unity. The small Christian parties have always been in favour of European co-operation, but opponents of the transfer of national sovereignty. This would make the larger countries too powerful as opposed to the smaller ones. This feeling now appears to be much more widespread than only amongst the Bible believing Christians.

The expansion of Europe from 15 to 25 member states (shortly maybe up to 27, with Bulgaria and Romania) is one of the consequences of the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Middle and East Europe are once more searching for friends in the West. The European spectrum is becoming greater. The centre of Europe is moving. This leads to interesting side effects. Europe is becoming more European and that means: less 'western'.

How do the European Reformed churches view all this? We are in agreement that the Reformation is a part of European history. The sixteenth century struggle for recovery of the church has left many trails in Europe, not only in West and Northern Europe. Not only in Switzerland, France, Great Britain, Germany and Scandinavia, but also in the Czech Republic, Poland, Italy, Spain, Hungary and Romania, even though the counter reformation has also done its work.

The Reformed Churches have organised themselves nationally, but in so doing, as Prof. Maris rightly suggests in his articles in this and the last issue, they have not given up the catholic character

of the church. According to their character Reformed churches do not shut themselves up within their own peoples. The gospel and the church are not reserved for certain cultures, peoples or regions. This is at one with the Holy Spirit's intentions, announced at His coming: praise for God's great deeds in all languages throughout the whole world. Culture, ethnicity, or language can at best only be temporary obstacles for the gospel.

Now that national boundaries in Europe have become less distinct, a question presents itself to the Reformed Churches in Europe: what do they have to say to one another? And: what do they have to say together to the peoples of Europe? It is worth making clear together to Europe: the reformation belongs to Europe, the gospel is at home here.

Viewed from the Netherlands, from Scotland or from North America, it may appear as though reformed churches could only just hold their ground at the very northwest edge of Europe. How does that appear from the perspective of a Europe to which the Middle and the East once more belong?

Here and there we hear the call for a conference of reformed churches in Europe, together with other churches which help and support Europe, or help to proclaim the

gospel, and rightly so. Surely in the face of Europe's diversity, collecting forces should be highly recommendable. Not in order to conquer that diversity but to win its service to the praise of God's name. Let not only all sorts of 'winds of teaching' freely blow through Europe. Let healthy reformed doctrine in any case, also be spread throughout the whole of Europe to live in Europe's heart..

Europe's spiritual capital is not Rome, nor Jerusalem, it is the heavenly Zion. Our King sits on the throne of heaven and earth, He is Lord of all peoples. In his kingdom there is no boundary but his fullness. According to the passport of faith, our nationality is 'new creation', Gal. 6:15. Our constitution is 'the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone' (Eph. 2: 20). Our future: heaven and earth united.



Using a variety of folders, the Dutch Government tries to convince citizens to vote for the European constitution

Voices, jammers and a heavenly calling

'The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it' (1 Thess. 5:24). With this text, I was ordained to the ministry in my first congregation in Driebergen by Prof. Dr. J. Douma on Sunday 29th June 1980. It is surely a beautiful text to begin with as minister. You have a special calling, but you can never fulfil it in your own strength.

Yet, it is not only an induction text for ministers. The you in Greek, is plural. In the verses 12, 14 and 25 of the same chapter, all the brothers and sisters of the Christian congregation in Thessalonica are addressed. It would be a misunderstanding to think only of church officers as soon as a text talks about calling or vocation. We all have a certain task, a commission. And there is certainly a need for a sort of confirmation of that. Just as ministers, elders and deacons are confirmed into office, so we, as church people would all like to be confirmed in our calling.

Who has called us after all? This question touches on the main thrust of this letter. Our calling comes from God (see 2:12 and 4:7). In Thessalonica, a heavenly appeal went out to the population. God had issued his call through the three men, Paul, Silas and Timothy who, as a missionary trio, have written this letter. You could call their letter a written confirmation. There it is, in black and white: God is calling you.

And that was not a one off event from the past. It does not say "the one who called you" but "the one who calls you". God keeps on calling. He keeps on speaking to people through His Word; urging to grow in faith, live as Christian, to let yourself be sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Again and again we are concretely confirmed in our calling. Surely God is not Someone calling in the wilderness?

Our problem is that we have such trouble with listening. And if we hear voices, they often come from our own surroundings or from our own heart. There are all sorts of jamming stations which create a lot of noise. Then the Godly call sounds far away as a voice from the past. Or the gospel is drowned out by sounds more pleasing to our ears.

But God keeps calling. Even if someone does see not the good of the church anymore. Is God not greater than the church? For this reason the church must always refer the people to the One who is calling.

God calls, also if someone is worrying about something else. But this has absolute priority, because God's voice comes from a higher world.

God calls, also if someone still doubts or hesitates. Heavenly calling does not come from within but from above. However much hesitating and doubting, you are still someone with a calling...

The point is, that the initiative comes from the other side. We did not begin with God, God began with us. We do not



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Prof. Dr. Rob van Houwelingen (*1955) is professor of New Testament studies at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches (liberated) in Kampen. In the *Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament (third series)* he published besides *Tessalonicenzen. Voortgezet basisonderwijs* [*Thessalonians. Elementary education continued*], volumes on the gospel according to John (1997) and on the letters of Peter and Jude (1991, 1993).

need to feel called in order to be called. If I feel myself called to do something, then that can disappear just as quickly. If other people say something about me, I might say: I do not feel addressed. But here, we have to do with Someone who is completely reliable and completely trustworthy. God does not change his mind about his call. On the contrary, he confirms his words time and time again.

God also suits the action to the word. He calls you and he will do it. But what will He do? Taken on its own, this text can mean: He shall make it possible for us to answer our calling. You do not need to do it alone. You receive the strength to complete your task.

That is true, but the verses 23 and 24 are to be taken as a whole. It is an encouragement which follows a benediction: the prayer that God really will do with the readers what the writers have asked for. May God himself, the God of peace, be with you. May he sanctify your whole life. May he strengthen you in the expectation of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and encourage you in all oppression.

Paul, Silas and Timothy could do nothing more for the church in Thessalonica. They had to cut short their visit to the city, and had travelled further in the direction of Athens and Corinth. Nevertheless, the Thessalonians were not left to themselves. The One who calls shall do it; he shall keep the church in the faith, in a Christian direction, in sanctification, all with a view to the last Day.

The prayer of verse 23 means for us that we remain unharmed, so that we appear completely untouched when Jesus Christ returns. We read something about being whole three times. God shall sanctify you 'through and through', keep your 'whole' spirit, soul and body 'blameless'. The Eternal One is busy guarding those chosen by Him, so that they are kept whole in everything.

God is so reliable and trustworthy, that He shall complete the work of his call. He oversees the whole process and wants to ensure that all parts will be finished. When He makes all things whole, man too is included in this: complete with spirit, soul and body.

Is it not unavoidable that we become damaged in this world? Nevertheless it remains sure, that God preserves us. Only, that is the end result of his work. Sometimes we shall

only experience that at the very end: when our Lord returns. But the damage we have undergone is not irreversible, thank God! He shall heal us by saving us. After all, our calling remains valid until the end!

This contribution was originally published in Dutch as 'Stemmen, stoorzenders en een hemelse roeping', in: Koert van Bekkum e.a. (eds.), *Gods Woord in mensentaal* ['God's Word in Human Language'], Barneveld: Nederlands Dagblad, 2003, pp. 140-142.

Singing psalms - but different

by M.Z. de Vries-Por

Do you like to sing the Psalms? Do you sing all of them? Or do you have your own selection of favourite Psalms? Do you sing the Psalms at home, or mostly in the church? How about your children and grandchildren? Traditionally, singing Psalms has been very important in the churches in The Netherlands, but their popularity is decreasing. A limited selection is still used, but people often sing something else at home.

Of course, it is not the Psalms themselves that are to blame. The Psalms are the most intimate, sometimes frightening, often comforting and always fascinating verbalisations of the relationship between the faithful and God. For many, however, the form in which the Psalms are currently available has lost its attraction. The language is archaic and the Genevan melodies no longer appeal. That is why *Psalmen voor Nu* ('Psalms for Now') began working on a new arrangement of the Psalms, using contemporary Dutch, and melodies based on musical styles of the last fifty years. It is the intention that all Psalms will be covered in their entirety, as the authors believe that anything less would not do justice to the Book of Psalms. Indeed, its balanced harmony is the reason why, people throughout the ages turn to this book, no matter where they are or what their circumstances are, time and again, to express their faith, hope, anxieties, doubt and anger to God.

The members of *Psalmen voor Nu* are all Christians - and many of them are reformed - and focus very explicitly on the Christian community. They hope that these Psalms will find their way into the liturgies of the churches that have been singing Psalms for many generations, and that churches without such a tradition (such as the Roman Catholic Church or the Evangelical Churches) will re-discover the Psalms. Also, they hope that because of the chosen form, people outside the church will meet the God of the Psalms.



Photo of the 'Psalms for now' concert in Tivoli in Utrecht

Text

The Hebrew source text is the starting point for the project. The Hebraists in the group investigate the characteristics of the original. This includes special word usage as well as literary notions such as chiasmus and parallelism. The structure of the Psalm as a literary unit is also studied, making use of the techniques of modern literary research.

The poets use this information in their own creative ways. The resulting text, in contemporary Dutch, should be a single song that can be sung in its entirety. Some of the Psalms are very long to be sung all at once; in which case, the poets sometimes try to capture more than usual with fewer lyrics, or write the text in such a way that it is possible to sing only part of the Psalm.

Music

There are many among us (and not just the youth) who grew up with musical styles that can be described as "pop music". These are the styles that *Psalmen van Nu* want to use. One of the musicians composes the melody of each Psalm, to fit the character of the Psalm. The large variety of Psalms result in a large number of different styles of melodies, including easy listening, rock, jazz, and ragtime, and canons.

The new arrangements are not meant to replace the older, well-known arrangements. But new lyrics and new melodies do open up new possibilities. Psalms that are not very often sung nowadays, can suddenly become popular when they use a new language and a new score. Besides, the singing of a Psalm in its entirety, can shed new light on its meaning.

April 2005 the first CD, containing the Psalms 4, 9, 15, 22, 28, 53, 57, 73, 84, 90, 121, 130, 131, 136, 142 and 147, was released together with a book that explains the principles behind the project, and gives a justification of the decisions made for each Psalm. The title, *Totdat het veilig is* ('Until it's safe'), is taken from Psalm 57 : 1. The first fruit of a huge undertaking. Still more than 130 psalms to go!

CD: *Totdat het veilig is* [Psalmen voor nu], Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer; ISDN 90 239 2016 3

Book: Rien van den Berg (ed.), *Totdat het veilig is. 16 psalmen* [Psalmen voor nu], including (enhanced) CD with songs and musical notation; Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2005; ISDN 90 239 1804 5; NUR 709,666. More info: www.boekencentrum.nl.

Drs. M.Z. de Vries-Por is a Hebraist of *Psalmen voor Nu*

Sarfath - Material help for Romania

Sarfath is the Dutch spelling of Zarephath. Where have we heard that name before? Was that not the place where Elijah visited a widow? Indeed, this widow eventually came to realise that the flour pot would never be empty and that there would be enough oil until the day God would give rain (1 Kings 17). Those who named the foundation, had this Bible text in mind when they sought for a name which would represent the aim of the foundation. This was back in 1995, the year in which 'Sarfath' was set up.

For years material help was given to reformed churches in Romania as part of the work of the Fundament Foundation (cp. 'Reformed Believers in Central and Eastern Europe' in the March issue of this Lux Mundi volume). This began in 1990, when the first campaigns were organised to bring food parcels to Romania. At that time, Romania was just free of the dictator Ceausescu who left great chaos and poverty behind him after his execution. But the activities of Fundament began to take on large proportions. The Fundament Foundation specialised in pastoral help, which of course, is also very necessary in this part of Europe, and the material help needed to be taken on independently. For this reason the desire for this work to stand on its own two feet was realised and this was good for future developments.

'Sarfath' was born and grew up within the Reformed Churches (liberated) in Capelle aan den IJssel and Nieuwerkerk aan den IJssel. Currently Sarfath works together with numerous local committees and workgroups.



Food and furniture

Alongside help with basic food supply, 'Sarfath' has helped in special projects in Romania. For example, the delivery of materials for a Youth and Conference Centre and the Children's Village in Ilieni, but also many children's and old people homes have been helped by materials from 'Sarfath'. A few hundred cots have been made for various children's homes. A number of boarding schools in Odorheiu Secuiesc (approx. 120 children) and Rupea (approx. 60 children) and the Theological Institute of the Hungarian Reformed Churches of Romania, situated in Cluj Napoca, are supported on a more or less permanent basis.



About the author:

Koen Vliegthart (51) from Capelle aan den IJssel has been chairman of Sarfath for the last year. His regular job is financial director of Zeeman clothing, but he devotes his leisure time completely to charitable organisations. Alongside Sarfath, he assists World Servants (youth travel to developing countries) and Oikocredit (micro credit in the third world).

At this moment, together with the episcopacy in Cluj Napoca, 'Sarfath' is busy helping to arrange furniture for the poorest people within the churches. This is especially for old people, those who are unemployed, and handicapped. Much furniture also finds its way to various sheltered homes. 'Sarfath' has managed to lay hands on furniture from Center Parcs holiday homes in need of renovation. In this way a large number of dining room chairs could be put to use in a psychiatric hospital. Another example: a nursing home was knocked down in Capelle aan den IJssel; 'Sarfath' removed all the doors and radiators prior to the demolition. These are now ready for use in the boarding school in Odorheiu Secuiesc.

Clothes

Much help is offered by means of the sending of clothes, old as well as new. Various churches collect the clothes. These are then sorted, cleaned if necessary, and the good and usable clothes are sent to various locations in Romania who can put this to good use, especially during cold winters.

New clothes are also welcome of course, especially for children. This is because it is not allowed to use second hand clothes for certain sorts of children's clothing. And for the larger clothing branch companies, this is a good solution for clothes which remain unsold after the sales.

In Romania, clothing can be used in various ways. In the first place it is handed out via churches or other church organisations to people who cannot afford clothes. Especially in the first years of support, many clothes went along this channel. In order to avoid that the help channels were turned to too easily, many places have realised that it is better to sell the clothes. A reasonable price can be asked for them, and in some cases a symbolic price is enough. The funds from this are often used to cover the costs of the sale itself and alongside this, to finance certain projects. The boarding school in Rupea is financed largely by the profits made in the clothes shop. Other projects are also financed in this way.

Food collection

An annual food collection is held in approximately 30 churches. In the autumn and the winter food parcels or



...a large number of dining room chairs...

money are collected. The proceeds are intended for the institutions which are supported permanently and for the people who struggle materially.

The food collection is carried out in various ways. Directly asking for help by letting church members fill food parcels, is well supported. Some prefer to give an amount of money which covers the cost of one or more food parcels. An activity which has been successfully carried out on a number of occasions is the collection in supermarkets. 'Sarfath' workers stand at the entrance to a supermarket and hand out shopping lists (flour etc.) to the shopping customers, with the kind request to buy one or more products for Romania. The customers can then donate the product to 'Sarfath' at the supermarket exit. This is also a form of fundraising in which the giver sees that direct help is offered.

The food help in Romania is coordinated largely by local churches. Also the social kitchen in Sf. Gheorghe is helped. Here 190 poor inhabitants of the city can eat at an affordable price. In the autumn of 2004 and the winter of 2005, this activity will take place for the 11th time. Alas, it is still necessary. At least one third of all Romanians still live on the poverty line.

Computers

The need for computers in Romania is great. If there are computers in educational institutions or schools, they are often very old ones. Computers which are useless here are normal there. For this reason 'Sarfath' takes computers which are offered, to Romania, firstly to schools and boarding schools. Sometimes computers are given to a minister for example.

Theological students

'Sarfath' also gives much support to the Theological Institute of the Hungarian Reformed Churches in Cluj Napoca. Theological training has the foundation's heart. The Hungarian Reformed churches in Romania have approximately a million members, a large church! This needs a substantial theological training. The Theological Institute building is at the heart of Cluj Napoca housing about 200 students. Many students only just keep their heads above water: their financial means and those of their parents, are very limited. A number of students are sponsored from abroad including the Netherlands. 'Sarfath' has also adopted a number of students, making it possible for them to study.

Alongside the help for individual students, 'Sarfath' also offers food to the canteen. A part of the annual food parcel collection, goes into this canteen. In this way, the food prices are kept low and affordable. Indirectly, 'Sarfath' also sponsors a number of elderly people who are allowed to eat every day in this canteen.

The finishing students are also helped with furniture. Furnishing their parsonage is often very difficult because their finances are limited. About 200 parsonages have been furnished in this way.

A new project is home care in and around Sf. Gheorghe. This work is being taken on in collaboration with a local foundation. Many of the materials necessary for this project are waiting in Capelle aan den IJssel to be transported.

Organisation

In the meantime, 'Sarfath' has already seen to 130 transport trips. What began in 1990 as one journey a year has now



The Reformed boarding school in Odorheiu Secuiesc with the 'Sarfath' lorry.

become more than 15 journeys per year. This organisation demands much work. Searching for possibilities to lay hands on the right goods, maintaining the relationships with companies which help, unloading, storing and re-loading of goods; organising the transport; unloading in Romania; keeping up the contacts in Romania so that the right help arrives at the right place.

Gert de Waardt is a central figure in this. Gert is a man living in Capelle who has taken the lead in activities since the start and who since his retirement works full time for 'Sarfath'. His enthusiasm has made 'Sarfath' what it is today. Of course he is assisted by many other volunteers and 'Sarfath' has reached the phase at which the organisation itself must be shared out amongst more people. It is the amount of activities involved, which make it necessary to make use of more specialists, whether that is at the transport front, with the computers or in public relations.

Is 'Sarfath' problem free? Of course not, and as with so many other relief organisations, the fundraising is one of the most important issues. 'Sarfath' is of course very glad of the much furniture, materials and clothes which are given, but every pile which is donated, also has to be transported and money is necessary to realise this.

For this, various sponsor activities are being developed but these are not equal to the offer of materials. The motivation of the 'Sarfath' workers is so strong and the need in Romania is so big that people are prepared to do anything to get the help to where it is needed.

We hope and pray that 'Sarfath' can keep on helping for years to come. Until it is no longer necessary.

For more information see www.sarfath.nl



'Sarfath' help reaches these huts too, even though it remains a drop in the ocean.

The church is catholic (2)

The church's being catholic, means that the church of Christ is a world-wide church, encompasses the whole of history and shares in the fullness of God's grace in Christ. Moreover the catholic character of the church holds a purpose for the way in which the church views the outside. The church is called to be a light to the world, bearer of the message which speaks of healing for the whole of mankind. To confess that it is essential for the church to be catholic, simultaneously means: taking a look at yourself and your church in the mirror!

The church and our church

Since the last few centuries, the catholicity of the church has become an awkward theme, especially because the protestant church has broken up into so many denominations. To limit ourselves to the Netherlands: we have a book entitled *De kaart van kerkelijk Nederland* ('The map of ecclesiastical Holland'). Every church fellowship is described in a few pages, but the total has become a sizeable tome.

For almost every Christian, in practice the word 'church' refers to the fellowship to which he or she belongs. In what way are you a member, what your responsibility in the church is, what you expect from the church, how the church appears to those outside and all such questions - they are questions which make us think of a certain church community. In what way this church is catholic, is not a question which quickly springs to the Christian mind.

In the church of the Reformation, this question could be fairly satisfactorily resolved. There was the *Gereformeerde* or *Hervormde* (in English both: Reformed) Church and it crossed nobody's mind to hear anything different in that. It was not different. This church could have been called Christian Reformed Church with no concern at all. That was all the catholic, reformed church. In article 29 of the Belgic Confession, it was accepted that the Roman Catholic Church still existed, but with deep conviction and with good grounds, it was labelled as the false church. The true church - recognisable by the true administration of the Word and the sacraments, and by the exercise of church discipline - was that of the Reformation. This meant that the catholic church was not the one which had the word 'catholic' in its name...

Moreover, in those days, Anabaptists and that sort of groups were active, which are also referred to on a number of occasions in the confessions. These were just as equally on a trail which could not be that of the church of Christ.

The distinction between the true and false church however, can not easily be used in the middle of the discord in the church which came later. In the Reformed Churches (liberated), this was a tendency for years. Sometimes it was down to this: if a church did not immediately was ready to unite with the true (liberated) church, this was reason



About the author:

Dr. J.W. (Hans) Maris (*1941) has been teaching dogmatics at the Theological University of the Christian Reformed Churches (CGK) in the Netherlands in Apeldoorn since 1993. He is also chief editor of the official CGK weekly *De Wekker*.

enough to consider this church a false church. It may be clear, that making absolute this way of thinking, as this was found with Rev. Hoorn, was vigorously denounced years ago by the Reformed (liberated) synod. There now seems to be a certain embarrassment to use the words 'true church'...

In the meantime, the question remains of course: Is 'our church' the same as 'the church', the catholic church thus? Many have sought a solution for this question, also when they realised, that the label 'false' could not so easily be stuck onto other churches.



... Abraham Kuyper formulated his ambitious design of the multiformity of the church.

Multiformity?

Various attempts have been made to answer this question. Abraham Kuyper formulated his ambitious design of the multiformity of the church. To him, the diversity of churches was not a sign of the body of Christ being divided, but of the special character of the church. The diversity of the people of God cannot be expressed in one body. The existence of different churches should not accuse us, but should make us praise the greatness of God...

These thoughts have little influence today. We do not regret this. He who knows a little church history, and sees how the splits and divisions have crept into the church, will come across more lamentations than reasons for worship. There can be thankfulness about the faithfulness and obedience God has left intact, but that a split was necessary for this - as with the Secession of 1834, cannot make a Christian cheerful.

One way in which practically the same direction is taken in our postmodern times, is that in which many people share the idea: I myself choose a church. Where I feel good, where I feel addressed, where I fit easily, that is where I want to belong! Individual feeling and personal taste help you find a way in the many churches. That there is so much choice, with many gradations between reformed this or that and

evangelical is all the better. The question of *the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the catholic church which is God's people, Christ's body and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, means little to people at the moment. "Just as long as I feel at home. And if not - then I will look for something else..."*

Invisible church?

The downside of such an attitude can be found where people happily declare that the actual church is invisible. The visible church only is the human organisation with all its shortcomings. There must of course be something like that, how else can there be ministers, missionary work and all those expressions of church and christian life which a solitary Christian cannot realise? The real church however is there where believers meet right across all church boundaries! The communion of the saints is the surprise which you definitely not find in the church! Spiritual affinity and unity is sometimes much easier to find outside of the church than within it... That this is - fortunately - often true, I acknowledge with thankfulness! Only, this must not be the happy ending of all church responsibility. 'Long live the unity of the heart, and leave the toil and moil to the church', cannot be the confession of the Christian.

Is 'our' church the same as the catholic church?

Our confession also knows the invisible church. It is however, better to speak of the invisible side of the church. The church as God sees it, is not the same as the church which we see! In the church there are hypocrites,



Prof. dr. Ph.J. Hoedemaker

sanctimonious people, mixed in amongst the good (art. 29, Belgic Confession). Moreover, the church is spread out and scattered across the entire world, but still exists in one Spirit (art. 27, Belgic Confession). But that does not mean indifference as far as the 'visible' church is concerned. Every believer should join the church! And he who separates himself from the church, opposes God's ordinance (art. 28, Belgic Confession)!

It is thus right to recognise the invisible aspect of the church. In saying this we acknowledge that we cannot see what is in the heart. Only God can do that. But the catholic church is very visible! Just as the New Testament continually speaks of very concrete, visible churches, even including their concrete and visible sins. The apostles do not distance themselves from this church! On the contrary, they wrestle for its purity; they rebuke and comfort, and they call for obedience, love and faithfulness.

This is in any case, also for us, the way in which we should deal with the visible catholic church. The shortcomings we discover in it, ask for self-reflection, certainly when we remember that the Lord sees things more clearly than we do. And he sees us also as part of the picture that not always leads only to joy. To run away and hide in the invisible is, in any case, not the way of the Spirit of Christ!

A flight into the invisible church is not the way of the Spirit

A separate covenant?

In pointing out unusual ways of approaching the catholicity of the church - sometimes thus, also the avoidance of it - a distinct vision must be mentioned.

In the nineteenth century Dr. Ph. J. Hoedemaker was intensely busy with the church. Initially, he was a Kuyper supporter, later the relationship cooled off. Hoedemaker became the guide of the *Hervormde* grouping which distinguished itself by assuming a close connection between the church and the Dutch people. He was convinced of God's special involvement with the Netherlands. By virtue of divine election, the Netherlands is a protestant, reformed nation! The church, in which baptism as sign of the covenant of God is administered from generation to generation, is a natural part of the national character. Hoedemaker did not deny a distinction between church and people, but to him God's involvement with the church throughout the centuries is, in fact, an involvement with the Dutch people.

God has a covenant with the Dutch people, is his conviction. The church is therefore explicitly a national church. "All the church for all the people" is the slogan. At this moment I especially want to point out that a romantic thought such as God's private covenant with the Netherlands, cannot be born alongside the catholicity of the church. On the contrary, God has no separate covenant with whatever land, be it Scotland or South Africa where people have harboured similar thoughts¹. The church is catholic, and shall therefore want to look across the boundaries!

From the Lord

It is evident: the closer the word 'catholic' comes to our 'own' church life, the more the tension increases in what you have to say about it. But it is useful to look deeper into this.

The word 'church' is derived from the Greek word *kurios*, Lord. Without the Lord there is no church. The church is His, it is the church of our Head, Christ. This also sounds constantly when we consider the meaning of 'catholic'. Catholic had to do with the spreading of the one church through history and throughout the world, but also had everything to do with the content of the gospel. It is not the room and the time which are the norm, but the Lord, who gave His blood for the church, and who gives His Spirit and his Word to live in the church.

This constantly creates tension with the way in which we experience being the church, and how we express that. We honour those who have left their mark on the way the church thinks, and who have been decisive for the - separate, seceded or not - organisation of the church. We grasp on to historical facts and years which partly determine what our identity is: 1517, 1834, 1892. Church history is not insignificant! We honour the obedience of faith and the courage of our fathers in those moments which were important.

There is the tension immediately then. It is not difficult to recognise the surrender to the Lord in the Secession of 1834. There it was all about one thing: staying faithful to God and his Holy Word. In the same breath we can add, that in that same history, much which is human came along too. It was not all equally holy. Nevertheless, God preserved them. For me now, it is not so much about the history as about the way in which we deal with it. The catholic norm of the church shall urge us to be involved in that which is the Lord's, and not in that which is ours. With this I also do not mean to say that we shall pass judgement on all the ins and outs of the past. This is much more about us being deeply convinced that the Lord judges all the ins and outs of how we live as church here and now...

It is history especially which teaches us what the reality of the church is today. There are no saints in the Roman Catholic sense of the word, no figures from history or today who can be our guide and our norm. The best that we can learn from the 'true' fathers is that their concern was for the Lord. In this sense, Paul's words may show the way, when he says to Timothy that he must continue in what he had learned and been entrusted, because he knew from whom he had learned it (2 Tim. 3:14). It is clear from what follows that the essential emphasis falls upon faith in Christ Jesus!

The Lord judges all the ins and outs of how we live as church here and now

Spiritual character of the church

Because 'catholic' brings to mind the association with Rome, it always has the connotation of a bulwark. That catholic church, by means of human strength and influence is capable of controlling a worldwide bulwark. Protestants have understood that it should not be this way. That which is built

up in this fashion is more like Babylon than like Jerusalem.

However - the fascination for the great structures and the impressive shape of the church is not strange to us either. The aura of a huge church building, the efficiency of a church organisation, the ability of prominent figures who are also noticed outside of their own circle, swiftly have something of: look at us, we hold a position in the world. The temptation to think politically, permanently threatens the church. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is however, a spiritual community. Political strategy is completely out of order within it. I do not hesitate to include the work of a general synod in this. Who shall deny that forms of ambition for power have functioned also within our 'own' churches. There were - and are? - at least groups who wanted to ensure that one of them was placed in an influential position. In this way the church is taken out from the spiritual community. This is only found within 'own' circles. Church meetings are then a sort of necessary evil, but not gatherings in which spiritual life, and the fellowship of the saints can be found. Naturally, I am exaggerating by drawing this picture, but just as long as it is clear how great the distance between Jerusalem and Babylon, between the church and the world is. The church is about the Lord Jesus. That is the most characteristic of being catholic.

It is truly great if church meetings strike a pure note. Then the fellowship of saints is experienced there. Then the 'calling upon the name of the Lord' is not a formal issue which according to the church order should take place before the deliberations, but the expression that all participants together are willing to serve and to obey Him. I think that this is the reason why deputies should receive no instructions of their church councils, classis or particular synods, with regard to the way they vote. Being a church is being of the Lord. Then you may ask and desire together to understand His will.

Can you then not differ in opinion with each other? It would be folly not to recognise this. We already find this in the church of the New Testament. But what a beautiful example is given in the church meeting in Acts 15! They listen to each other. Their hearts come together, and the result is "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." (Acts 15:28).

It can sometimes be necessary to make a distinction between main issues and side issues. Then it is of course important that we agree about the assessment! If on the grounds of certain external forms or habits, a spiritual judgement is given, things can go wrong. It is especially the catholic character of the church which requires spiritual clarity in the way we deal with one another.

For this reason it is spiritually unacceptable when ministers or church members within the church are actually written off. We can sometimes note, for example, that the Protestant Church of the Netherlands has become a worldly church, where truth and lies are received with just as much right, where the power of numbers weighs heavier than the spiritual authority of God's Word. However, if things remain in our church as they always have been, then we are of the same un-spiritual sort. The catholic church is not like this.

Inside and outside of 'the church'

The catholic church watches over the holiness of her service. This is evident in the admission to the sacraments. Here, the tension I mentioned earlier, is built up, for we can do nothing other than couple admission to the sacraments in the church of Christ to the witness and decisions of christian reformed church councils. There, in the church councils, the door to Christ's table is opened and closed.

At the same time we know that the church of Christ is wider than 'our' church. We do not solve the problem of the different churches with an interdenominational policy. As though there could be various catholic churches! This opposes the word catholic, because it is contrary to the one body of Christ.

Interdenominational' is an absurd word

But the reality, which we accept so easily, exists. On all sorts of occasions within the church we behave as though the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* Churches form the body of Christ on earth. At other moments we meet earnestly about our contacts with 'other' churches and we pronounce judgements as though we ourselves are the Head. I do not say this as though I can produce a handbook of how we could do this better. It is too difficult for that! I do say it so that we are aware of the almost unbearable tension. Surely we cannot deal with the Lord's business as though we were the boss? Because of the catholic character of the one body of Christ, the unity of his body ought to be taken more seriously. It should bring us to humble prayer, on our knees before God. The word 'interdenominational' is impossible to work with.

The same with an indifferent way of dealing with the questions of unity. An attitude such as 'as far as I'm concerned, no thanks' with regard to the search for the one catholic church, is one of the most unspiritual statements that I have ever heard about the church.

Love the church

It may be clear that I do not plead for indifference with regard to our 'own' church life. It is not a negative attitude which will teach us what the way of the Lord is. Let us be thankful for all the spiritual blessings which we have received in our church life. Our heritage is a heritage from the Lord. I do not hesitate to say that for one minute. For this reason, our love for the church is fitting!

But let our love constantly be subject to discipline by the Spirit of Christ. It should not be about love for what we have built up but about love for what He has given us in his mercy. That distinction is necessary. That which is ours, can never be catholic. That which is his, surely is. This shall point the way. A spiritual way, that takes us further than the powerlessness we keep coming across. Loving what is the Lord's - that will last.

Note

¹ A story could be told about how Hoedemaker's ideas initially influenced the *Confessionele Vereniging* ('Confessional Association') in the *Nederlandse Hervormde* Church, and later, only since a few decades, also the *Gereformeerde Bond*. When the Protestant Church in the Netherlands was going to be formed, a number of *Hervormde* authors published a report: W.J. op 't Hof a.o., *Belijdenis en verbond* ('Confession and Covenant'), Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003.

This article consists of the parts 3 and 4 of the four part series 'De kerk is katholiek', originally published in *De Wekker* (2004). Parts 1 and 2 were published in our March issue.



"On all sorts of occasions within the church we behave as though the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* Churches form the body of Christ on earth". Photo of the CGK Synod held last year. (photo P.G.B. de Vries)

The 'Candlestand Statement'

Fourteen brothers from Kenya, Indonesia, the Netherlands, India, Zimbabwe and South Africa, church leaders from various churches and nationalities, drew up a document about the Holy Spirit. They addressed it to 'all Reformed believers, and to all who value healthy Biblical teaching'. You find the document in this issue of *Lux Mundi* as an easy to remove centerfold. It is the result of a process which was started two years previously: as an answer to the increasing influence of 'the charismatic movement'. In this article, we want to look at the history and the contents of this document, named the *Candlestand Statement*.

As training department of *De Verre Naasten* (which is the trademark of the general synod committee of the Reformed Churches [liberated] involved with Mission, Assistance and Training) the Intercultural Reformed Theological Training institute (IRTT) organises international meetings with church leaders from many countries, in order to build each other up. Churches involved share certain historical roots, or wish to become acquainted with reformed theology.

An urgent request from Africa

Within this framework, the IRTT received an invitation from a Presbyterian church in Zimbabwe (the CCAP) to organise a seminar for church leaders there. The argumentation was clear, and came straight from the experience within these churches. The subject requested was the 'charismatic movement' (a difficult concept, by the way); its influence was working its way more and more into the churches. The church youth, but not only the youth, were particularly receptive to it, especially to the evident manifestations of the Spirit: speaking in tongues, faith healing, miracles and prophecies and, not forgetting, the promises of success and prosperity. As churches with a Presbyterian conscience, the CCAP felt compelled to turn the tide, but at the same time, did not know how to and felt rather powerless. Their worship services are boring, for example, in comparison with the festive services of charismatic groups, to say nothing of the mass meetings, where talented foreign ministers come to perform miracles. Such 'competition' is more than they can match. In these services, which could also be followed on television via various charismatic channels, it was very clear that the Holy Spirit was at work, there at least.

Storm or fresh wind?

A 'charismatic hurricane', as it is sometimes negatively dubbed, is tearing at many churches and old church trusses. Members of established 'traditional churches' are beginning to withdraw, the familiar foundations are being damaged, fragmentation of complete church federations still looks like



About the author:

Rev. Gerrit Riemer (*1951) has been working as a missionary in Papua New Guinea for the Reformed Church (lib.) of Enschede-North. Since he has been back in The Netherlands, he has been writing theological books for the Reformed community in Indonesia. He is also involved in the organisation of Intercultural Reformed Theological Training for the general synodical committee for mission, assistance and training / *De verre Naasten*

merely a question of time. Many new groups assemble around new prophetic leaders. All established churches throughout the world are faced with it, ¹ specially because many feel attracted to the promises of healing, fertility and prosperity.

The IRTT wanted to help to look for an answer and to decide which attitude to adopt. Not only because this was a problem there, but also because in the Netherlands, increasing charismatic influences are drawing ever more attention. ³ The discussion about speaking in tongues, faith healing and baptism with the Holy Spirit is being carried on in all churches. Also in reformed churches, voice is being given to the desire for a renewal of the special gifts of the Spirit. ⁴ And do the Scriptures not speak clearly about this? Is it not time then, to free those churches bound up in their traditions, from the vigorous language of exegesis and dogmatics which stand in the way of the Spirit's work? Do we have to face another diverging of opinions? Or should we be praying that these developments also gain ground in our country, and, like a breath of fresh air, prove to be a blessing for the proclamation of the gospel and the coming of God's kingdom?

Looking at our Calvinistic selves

After the first seminar in Zimbabwe, the IRTT organised two international meetings in The Netherlands entitled 'The Power of Reformed Discernment' (2002), and 'Do Not Quench The Spirit' (2003). Together with about 50 church leaders, an attempt was made to understand what the Bible says about the work and methods of the Holy Spirit. It became clear that a different way of working with God's Word (hermeneutics) had to be a major issue.

We studied the charismatic urge to recover all the gifts named in the Bible, such as apostleship, prophecy and the gift of healing. We studied the intense experience of glossolalia, dreams and visions. Should Presbyterian and Reformed churches not desire more room for these experiences? Should they not agree that the Reformation of the 17th century was more or less incomplete and that it was only completed when on January 1st 1901 the Pentecostal



From left to right - Sitting: Hiralal Solanki, Lungawiruol Khawbung, Samson E. Akoru, Kees Haak, Yohanes Budhi, Gerrit Riemer. Standing: Yusup A. Lifire, Paul Bukenya, Jeremiah Mhlanga, Simon van der Lugt, Alexander Malemalo, Siphon Phungula, Joseph M. Mutei

Movement was born in the trail of Methodism and the Holiness movement? Finally, the Spirit could blow again wherever he pleases! Should we not be speaking with a little more subtlety about all sorts of dusty doctrines? For example: does not the tight connection between Word and Spirit confine the Spirit, and actually imprison God in the canon of Scripture? Are Reformed hermeneutics not too interfering, and does the Reformed view on the origin of the Bible not seal too much questions up? Do complicated explanatory rules not stand in the way of unrestricted and frank use of God's words, because of which they lose power in daily life?

An open mind

It is clear that the charismatic movement raises important questions which the churches cannot avoid. At the same time they are suddenly being placed with their backs against the wall: are not you trying to control everything? Are you afraid that things will otherwise get out of control? Give some space! Open the doors and windows! 'Do not forbid speaking in tongues!' (1 Cor. 14:39). Do not forbid miracles of healing, use anointing with oil and laying on of hands, exorcise evil spirits and drive out demons. Don't be afraid, the presence of the Spirit shall become visible as light, or as flames of fire. God's angels are no longer far away, but just around the corner, in a real encounter, in a word which we can directly

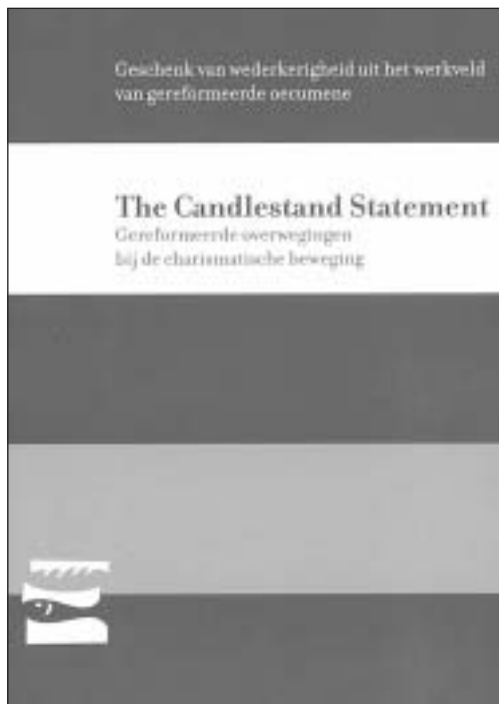
receive. Also our ministers and prophets can thus just stand up in the service on Sunday and say: "Brothers and sisters, I have a word from the Lord for you".

The many shifts and faults in the church landscape are, in that case, not loss but gain! Christ renovates his church via a sort of re-allotment procedure, and in that way prepares a people of disciples for himself.

Reformed-Presbyterian challenge

The church leaders gathered at the IRTT-meetings set themselves the task of looking into the charismatic way of thinking and to form an opinion. They wanted to take home a valuable standpoint, which would be of service to the churches (including the churches in The Netherlands). They could call upon a whole range of experience and knowledge. There were those who had enjoyed charismatic experiences, who had spoken in tongues, themselves who had witnessed miracles and ecstatic moments. All the ingredients for a good discussion were present.

As work method, they aimed high: drawing up a document in the form of a confession. Originally only meant as a feeler, a trial run document, but then later to be used as means of providing fellow church leaders with something concrete as a help to discuss charismatic influence with the congregation. Considering sound doctrine. They realised that they stood the chance, just as charismatic leaders suggest, of



"The Candlestand Statement" was sent as gift from 'De Verre Naasten' to all Reformed (liberated) Churches in the Netherlands

going astray themselves, having become false teachers. This recognition brought them on their knees before God time and time again, to ask for wisdom and insight and the Spirit's guidance. But while going down this road, they hoped to come to a clear proclamation, formulated in a document, which both rejoices in the riches of the work of the Spirit, and names and publicly refutes, the heresies concerning that work.

The Candlestand Statement

In 2004, a number of participants met for the third time, in the *Kandelaarkerk* ('Candlestand church') in Amersfoort, the Netherlands, to go over the results of the previous years one more time. They gave themselves no rest until the whole document lay on the table, including a preamble which consisted of a letter "to all believers of Reformed faith, and for all that desire to have sound Biblical teaching." They called the document after the church where they had enjoyed such a warm hospitality: *The Candlestand Statement*. They promised together to offer this working document to the churches they belong to, and to spread it further via these churches. They then returned home, each with a copy of the document in his luggage.

The reception of the Candlestand Statement in the various lands is difficult to follow. We hear positive reactions from Uganda, South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Australia. A copy was sent to all churches and to all ministers of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. A website has also been opened: www.candlestand.nl. It is the intention that all translations of the Candlestand Statement be put on this site. At this moment in time, there are only Dutch and English versions available. An Indonesian translation is almost ready

and there is a push to make translations in French, Hungarian, Portuguese and Spanish. The Statement is being used in India at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Dehra Dun. The Dutch participants are regularly invited to give lectures about it in local churches.

The blessing of giving and receiving

We sincerely hope that the Candlestand Statement can function as a beneficial example of ecumenical reciprocity. This, too, is fruit of the Spirit! The time is ripe for this. The relevant subject is not a subject which churches with a reformed identity can merely skip over. It touches the very fibre of being reformed. Thorough discussion is required, as is giving honest account when it is clear that a change of direction may or may not be necessary. As churches throughout the world, are we open towards each other, to such an extent that we can also learn from each other and warn each other?

For now the Candlestand Statement is intended as a helping hand in a world-wide discussion. The authors of this working document have called themselves The Candlestand Fellowship for the time being. They present their document with the prayer that the Lord bless their work in such a way that it supports responsible choices within the process of ongoing church renewal or reformation. If this were to happen, they would be glad. They, too, are adverse to traditionalism and weak Christian life. Their motivation can be found in the Biblical charge to obey and to remain in the Lord of the church. That is why they desired to examine the charismatic claims for compatibility with the word of our God.

Notes

1. As far back as 1994, Paul Gifford wrote about 'Some Recent Developments in African Christianity' (*African Affairs* Vol. 93, No. 373, p. 513): "The most significant development within African Christianity during this decade was the mushrooming of new churches. (...) It is clear that most of the members were formerly members of mainline churches".
2. 'Health and Wealth' is a central theme within the *Charismatic Movement*, propagated by many charismatic groups including the worldwide operational *Word/Faith Movement*. Gifford: "It is obvious that the faith gospel of health and wealth is central to many, probably most".
3. Increasing charismatic influence will unavoidably affect the churches, the Dutch Dr. Cees van der Kooij predicted in 2004: It will "undoubtedly take a few generations yet before the gap between the charismatic movement and the conservative mainstream within the traditional churches will be closed. The inroads made by charismatic elements will increase in the years to come." (via the *Nederlands Dagblad*, Aug. 14th 2004).
4. This is for example promoted in the Netherlands by Rev. Dick Westerkamp (Netherlands Reformed Church [NGK, combined with CGK] in Houten), director of the Dutch branch of the New Wine movement. Since early in 2000, this movement has drawn much attention and has managed to harvest some sympathy, also amongst ministers of the Reformed Churches (lib.). See also the news on the Zwolle conference of 'Gods Geest werkt' ('God's Spirit works') in this issue. In the Netherlands a wave of predominately positive attention came into being for faith healers such as T.B. Joshua and Victor Emenike of Nigeria and for someone like Jan Zijlstra of Dutch origin.

This article was adapted from "The Candlestand Statement. Een werkdocument over de Heilige Geest", *De Reformatie* 80 (2004-2005) 207-209 (also published on www.candlestand.nl).

Reformed and Presbyterians in Myanmar

Just above the pulpit, on a supporting pillar against the ceiling, I see the gecko - a small lizard which lives on flies and mosquitoes. He is sitting by the strip light, which is meant to banish the twilight from the church. I have to preach there in that pulpit later. Imagine if that creature drops itself onto my head. I try to think of something else and look into the congregation. I am sitting on the podium, facing the people in the church pews of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Yangon, the capital city of Myanmar (old Burma). Rev Robert Thawn Luai is leading the service. He will also translate simultaneously as I start to preach the Word about the Lord Jesus who calls and liberates Zacchaeus.

We have come here as a result of exchanges of letters. We, Ben Bolt and I, together with Mr. Bruce Hoyt of Hastings, New Zealand, prepared for this journey last year because we wanted to visit a number of Reformed and Presbyterian churches in this land. After some correspondence, which spoke of a desire for contact, we wanted to meet the letter writers and e-mailers in person. For us from Holland, this is the first time, but in New Zealand they have more experience of journeys to Myanmar. Bruce, for example was in Burma two years ago. He got to know a few churches. Our request for a travel companion was received warmly in New Zealand. It is good to work together amongst international contacts.

The building in which the church service is held, is beautiful: it is made of stone, it is clean, put together for church and Bible school, it is a large compound. There must have been help from abroad in building it. The population of Myanmar, the normal Christians, earn too little to save enough for something like this. The majority of churches have to make do with a simple church building made of wood or bamboo. The first Sunday, Ben and I were guests of the United Reformed Church. A few hundred church members sat on the pews of a small bamboo church hall. The few halls of the theological school next door, were anything but luxurious. We understand on the basis of the stories we heard, that the situation is even simpler and poorer in Chin State, where many church fellowships have the most members. The more you hear and see, the more uncomfortable it becomes for you: the riches of many western churches seem to be made to solve the poverty of churches here, but at the same time, you know that this cannot be the solution to their problem. Worse, it could create a new problem: that of immature dependence upon foreign churches.

Corruption

In the sermon about Zacchaeus, I talk about the system of corruption that the tax collectors of that time were involved in. But that was not only something peculiar to the first



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century. It is practice up until today in many countries, and can also be found in Burma. I try to show them how money can make slaves of people and how the liberation through Jesus is also a liberation from that form of slavery. It is a real danger for churches in Myanmar. They present themselves as helpless and surrender some independence in this, which can stand in the way of the growth of the churches. For that matter, I had not deliberately set about to preach about Luke 19:1-10, even though I now give a real message to the churches in Burma. I had a small number of English sermons with me and this was one of them. And while I was preaching, I realised that the issues in this sermon touched on the themes we had come across in our search for information and the process of getting acquainted.

It turned out not only to be money which made them turn to the western churches. The influence of western Christianity is noticeable in more areas. For example, we sang the spiritual songs accompanied by a keyboard. I have nothing against this instrument but at any rate, it cannot be called native Burmese. I assume that they used to sing and dance to a drum, flute or stringed instrument. In Pakistan you sing accompanied by the *dholok* or the *tabla* and in Manipur (North East India) by a large drum. Probably first missionaries



The Church Service in the Grace Church of the United Reformed Church of Myanmar (photo: Ben Bolt)

taught young Christians that they should abandon their own cultural forms since it would be contaminated by unbelief. Likewise, certain forms of clothing or hairstyle have been lost in the process of Christianisation. In retrospect, you can regret this, although I do not want to judge the people who in that time, had to leave their 'former way of life' and 'to put on the new self'. The disadvantage now though, is that the impression is given that Christianity is a western imported product, that you must wear trousers with a crease in them and a tie. This forms a threshold for the interested Burmese Buddhist clothed in his saffron robe.

We sing many hymns to English hymn music, sometimes even in English. The order of service is very familiar, only the arrangement that most women sit on one side gives an eastern impression. The services are well filled and afterwards we stand at the exit to shake hands with the church members. This is a good habit which we miss in the Netherlands. Just like the prayer after the collection. The prayer takes away the break character of the collection and underlines that giving, in the church, is a spiritual matter, not merely an administrative or material one. Also the mass intercessory prayer is impressive. We had come across it previously in the churches in Kalumpang (North East India), but also in this service, points for prayer were brought up, and then brought before the Lord in a half loud mumble. I would love to see this introduced in our churches in the Netherlands.

Mirror

In this way, the visit to churches abroad is always a mirror. Through the differences, you learn to look at yourself and that is beneficial. It is not easy to pick up where you left off, when back at home again. You cannot help judging the standard pattern by comparing it with what you have seen elsewhere. Not that everything back at home has to be turned on its head. On the contrary, after a few weeks you are used to it again and at the end of the day, very little changes. But nevertheless, it is less normal, than it was.

Should it be like that on the other side of the line as well? Should the churches in Myanmar have to change because of our visit? It is difficult to say after such a short visit. We did notice the strong need of a few churches to stay in contact



Group discussion during the seminar for the representatives of 13 churches. (photo: Ben Bolt)

with us. We also see how western churches are the model to which the churches want to conform. But especially on this point, you hope for a measure of restraint. Because the churches in Myanmar surely may and must find the form that the Lord Jesus Christ has especially for them in the context of that Buddhist land. The Reformed tradition in Myanmar is yet brief and as far as that is concerned, much can yet be expected. We, in the international reformed community, are benefited by strong, independent Christian churches which are aware of their place and own style in their own land.

For that matter, we were surprised at how short a time Reformed thinking has been present in Myanmar. It is a latecomer in the line of Protestantism (which arrived in the 19th century via the American Baptist, Adoniram Hudson). It went something like this: first the Baptists, then the Methodists and the Presbyterians. In the middle of the last century there was a great development of the Pentecostal movement, which led to there being independent churches. But only at the start of the eighties did the first reformed churches come through men who studied abroad (USA, Korea and India) and who were deeply affected by the Reformed Confessions. The Arminian character of many mainstream churches was very evident! In this way the Evangelical Presbyterian Church came into existence, as did the Christian Reformed Churches and the Evangelical Reformed Churches. People welcomed the Westminster Confession and the Three Forms of Unity. The Church Order of Dort were used as a basis for their own church government.

Seminar

In the meantime, there are now 22 denominations at least. We managed to discover this many anyway. We organised a short seminar for three days in order to come into contact with the various churches. We attracted at least 80 interested people from 13 different Reformed and Presbyterian churches with subjects like 'The elder according to the pastoral epistles' (Bruce Hoyt), 'Christian family life in the covenant of God and his people' (Simon van der Lugt) and 'The development of churches' (Ben Bolt). We had talks with these 13 churches individually and so obtained some insight into the church situation. Sometimes we were amazed. Difference in doctrine hardly plays a part. It is all about people, power and money. This is not our interpretation; this is what the church leaders say themselves. If we ask about this, people are clear: the one calls the other a dictator while another calls someone else money mad. In general people are glad about the diversity which has grown up: in this way there are even more churches busy upholding and extending the reformed inheritance. That there is scarcely any co-operation, seems to be of lesser importance.

We return full of impressions. The general feeling is a good one. We were received hospitably, taken good care of and warmly treated. In the two Sundays in Myanmar, we could visit few church services. You would like to experience more of the overwhelming number of churches, but from what we have seen, first and foremost we draw the following conclusion: God the Lord is gathering His church; there too. To Him be the glory!

Experiencing the Holy Catholic Church



'Like cold waters to a thirsty soul, is good news from a distant land' (Prov. 25:25 NIV). One sometimes wonders about the significance of sending delegates to each other's synods. It is not 'economics' which guide the churches in respect to this part of the work of our Interchurch Relations Committees but a 'thirsty soul.' By the speeches of delegates from abroad, addressed to us at the sessions held during our General Assembly 2004 at Nunspeet, we have received 'refreshing cold water' from several places in the world.

In this article, I shall not mention all the addresses held during our General Assembly 2005. What I would like to do however, is to elucidate some aspects from some addresses. Next time, God willing, it may be possible to mention some other speeches and their special points of interest.

Pie and prayer

As you might already know, alongside our Interchurch Relations Committee contacts, we also have contacts with other churches via our Mission Committee. Those churches originated from mission work: Geraja Toraja Mamasa (Indonesia), the Synod of Soutpansberg and the Synod of Midland (South Africa). We were also very glad to be able to receive some of the brethren from these churches in our midst.

Rev. C. Pronk addressed us on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of North America. They could be mentioned as 'daughter'- churches, because they originated from the emigration which took place after the Second World War. Rev. Pronk painted the historical background very well and showed that being 'Christian Reformed' is not just being confined to one denomination called the Christian Reformed Churches nor is it restricted to only one country.

A 'regular customer' at our assemblies is the highly esteemed Prof. Dr. David McKay, delegate from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland. He portrayed the ongoing secularization in Ireland and the effects on church life and church people. They stand in need of preachers of the Gospel and we were asked to remember these churches in prayer. On behalf of our Synod Rev. J.G. Schenau (Leiden) responded to this address. He mentioned pie and prayer. In this union he saw the puritan piety.

Dr. Ho-Jin Jun from the Prebyterian Churches in Korea has also been our guest. Brethren from Korea are still following courses or studying for a degree at our University in Apeldoorn because they want to be familiar with the continental reformed theology. One remarkable fact I want to emphasise, is that these churches have sent about 240 (!) missionaries to several countries in Asia. Our sincere prayer was and is still, that the Lord will bless the Gospel message by means of those brethren.

About the author:

Rev. Maarten Kater (born 1962) has been minister of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Church in Zeist, his first congregation, since 1994. He is a member of the CGK committee for Correspondence with the Churches abroad.

Voices from Scotland 1

Rev. Fergus MacDonald was given the floor as the delegate for the Free Church of Scotland. In order to give an impression of topics which were often mentioned by other speakers as well, I have taken a quote from his address:

"Our churches are called to witness to Jesus Christ as God's unique word of reconciliation at a time when European society finds itself enveloped in deep tensions that are putting great strain on traditional social and moral values.

The first tension is between modernity and post-modernity. Most social analysts acknowledge the paradigm shift that is taking place in popular western thought at this time, as those with a mindset described as 'post-modern', enthusiastically refute grand narratives, suspect institutions, dismiss history and deny universal truth. At the same time most people don't want to let go of modernity with the multiple benefits it has brought through science and technology. As a result, twenty-first century westerners find themselves living 'in parentheses between the modern and the post-modern. It is to people caught in this parenthesis that we are called to preach the gospel.

The second tension is between the West and Islam. The current 'war on terror' puts many Christians in an invidious position. They are fearful of Islamic fundamentalism, yet sympathetic to some aspects of Islam's critique of the West's blatant materialism and gross sensualism. In addition, Christians are uneasy that the West's reaction to global terrorism is so strongly militaristic and so weak in ideas. They defend the civil right of Muslims to practise their faith in the West, but resent attempts by some Islamic bodies to persuade Western governments to make the evangelisation of Muslims illegal. In this complex situation, many Christians feel confused and are looking to the churches to provide a lead.

The third tension people face is between God and mammon. Conspicuous consumption has become the unofficial religion of the Western world. Shopping malls are replacing cathedrals as the places where people discover meaning and purpose for their lives. 'The market is sacred' has become the mantra of both business and government. And yet, Jesus' warning that human life does not consist in the abundance of possessions (Luke 12.15) is being vividly illustrated by the resurgence of interest by a growing number



Photo of the CGK Synod held last year in Nunspeet: chairman Rev. J. Westerink and the assessor Rev. J.M.J. Kievit (photo: P.G.B. de Vries)

of westerners in multiple forms of spirituality. True, much modern spirituality may be an expression of the autonomous self, but it is evidence that rationalistic materialism is failing to meet the deepest felt needs of a growing proportion of westerners, suggesting that we may be witnessing a new openness to the gospel.

It is in the midst of tensions such as these - between modernity and post-modernity, between Islam and the West, between God and materialism - that we are privileged to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ. How are we to do this faithfully and effectively? Surely this is a question to which there are many answers than cannot all be enumerated in the space of a brief greeting. But perhaps you will allow me to share three ways in which the Free Church of Scotland is attempting to communicate the unchanging gospel in this changing situation.

The faithful proclamation of the Word of God is, of course, the primary 'mark' of the church, and in Scotland we are increasingly seeking to make this proclamation by meeting people where they are, addressing them in a language they readily understand, and responding to their felt needs. Allow me to say just a few words about each of these emphases.

First, in our evangelism we are seeking to meet people where they are and to share the gospel with them there without first of all persuading them to attend church services. A course entitled 'Christianity Explored' is being used

increasingly by our congregations with considerable effect in reaching people who are outside the formal worship of the churches. The course follows the Gospel of Mark over a period of eight to ten weeks. Each weekly meeting begins with a meal. After the meal a short video highlighting key aspects of the gospel is shown. The video is followed by group discussion focused around specific sections of Mark with the help of questions from a study guide. Each group has a well-informed Christian as leader. These Christianity Explored courses are reaching significant numbers of outsiders, drawing them into faith and into the church.

Second, our congregations are increasingly using a version of the Bible in contemporary English, and in 2003 the Free Church published 'Sing Psalms' which is an entirely new translation of the metrical Psalms of the Bible for use in public worship. Having both a Bible and a Psalter that use popular language is enormously helpful in making the gospel intelligible to the growing numbers of people in our society who have been brought up outside any church. In addition, we are finding that the Psalms rendered in a modern idiom speak in a quite remarkable way to young people in their twenties and thirties who are seeking a spiritual meaning to human existence, but who tend to think of churches as unspiritual places.

And third, we are discovering in our evangelism the value of listening to our audiences. By meeting people where they are, listening to their aspirations and frustrations, we are

able to bring the gospel message to bear on their felt needs. It's easy to dismiss felt needs as superficial. But so often these felt needs are symptomatic of deeper and more basic needs of which people are not yet aware. But we find that when we direct the gospel to people's felt needs this very often deepens the sense of inadequacy, uncovering an underlying basic need of forgiveness of sins. In addition, feed-back from the audience helps us to evaluate whether the message we send is the message that is received. In our post-modern world, audiences tend more and more to negotiate their own meaning from messages directed to them, so it's important for us to hear what that negotiated meaning is and to be able to respond to it, thus carrying forward the gospel conversation."

Voices from Scotland 2

The next day Rev. Donald Fraser, one of the Scottish brethren, addressed our synod by addressing us as '*Fathers and brethren*', as is usual in Scotland. In this way, these opening words truly addressed us: "Are we really spiritual fathers to our younger brethren?"

I quote briefly from his speech too:

"You represent a faithful and courageous stand for the principles of the Reformation maintained at unparalleled cost by martyrs of the 16th Century, in the face of the fanatical onslaught of the Duke of Alva. These principles are largely at discount prices today and so it becomes those of us who prize them, to make every endeavour to preserve and promote them.

Although they find little favour in our continent and culture at this time, it is surprising to notice that in the heart of the 'Dark Continent' there are eager disciples of the doctrine of justification by faith and students of the Reformed Confessions. It has been my privilege to institute a seminary for training pastors called Covenant College in the

Eastern Province of Zambia. (...) It was my joy to see 16 of these men graduate last year and return to their churches to infiltrate the flocks with sound doctrine. (...)

On my return home, I have been allocated to a degenerate part of the city of Glasgow. In many ways this is also a mission field in which one encounters the social and spiritual problems common to inner cities. I can mention drug addiction and alcoholism, gang warfare and prostitution. The results are many broken lives and broken homes. We need not despair; these conditions often lend themselves more to the presentation of the gospel than more prosperous and self-satisfied levels. In addition, asylum seekers are placed in increasing numbers within the reach of our church and we are happy to afford them a spiritual home.

I mention these personal matters as, I hope, an encouragement to men among you labouring in like places and to declare that the truth has not lost its ancient power. Brothers, press on with the task, "work while it is day, the night comes when no man can work".

Pulpits around the world

This then, is a short impression of that part of our synod in which we were encouraged and admonished by brethren from all over the world. During mealtimes we shared fellowship with each other. Quite a few members of our synod used the opportunity of conversing with our guests. We are looking forward to the next ICRC conference to meet each other, teach and to be taught.

Last but not least, I would like to quote but one sentence, which in my opinion, contains a clear message to humble ourselves before the Lord and to call upon Him for His Spirit who will guide us into all truth: '*The world is largely what it is because the pulpits are what they are*' (Walter J. Chantry, in: *Banner of Truth* (May 2003).

Reformed theology: between ideal and reality (I)

Making people enthusiastic about reformed theology - this is one of the aims which is being worked upon at this moment in the Theological University in Kampen. To reach that aim, it must be clear what reformed theology actually is.

Oldfashioned?

Is reformed theology still worth fighting for? There is enough reason to take time to consider the question. A positive answer definitely does not speak for itself.

150 years ago, the churches of the Secession, founded a school in Kampen for reformed theological education. In the decades which followed, reformed theology blossomed bountifully, not only in Kampen but also at the Free University in Amsterdam. Men such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck and later Klaas Schilder spearheaded new impulses. They engendered enthusiasm for reformed theology in many students. But how is that today?

The Kampen Professor, Lucas Lindeboom, founded a monthly magazine in 1900. From 1912 onwards, it was known as the *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* (*GTT*: Reformed Theological Magazine). Theologians from Kampen and Amsterdam worked on this magazine for a century. At the end of 2003, the last issue appeared. The Reformed Churches (synodical), the *Nederlands Hervormde* Church and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church have fused to become the Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PKN). In connection with this, the ministers association of the Reformed Churches (synodical) decided to discontinue its work. In this way, the *GTT*, which was closely tied up with this ministers association, was brought to an end.

The church fusion as much as the discontinuation of the *GTT* have to do with theological developments in the Reformed Churches (syn). At the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the *GTT*, a thick jubilee issue was published, entitled *Theologie op de drempel van 2000. Terugblik op 100 jaar Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* ('Theology at the threshold of 2000. Looking back at 100 years of Reformed Theological Magazine'). The last issue of the *GTT*, spring 2003,



Prof. dr. L. Lindeboom



About the author:

Dr. Gert Kwakkel (*1959) has been professor of Old Testament studies at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches (liberated) in the Netherlands since 1993. He graduated from the State University in Groningen with a study about the Psalms of innocence: 'According to My Righteousness.' Upright Behaviour as Grounds for Deliverance in Psalms 7, 17, 18, 26, and 44 (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

offers a sort of follow up to this, entitled *Heroriëntatie in de theologie* ('Reorientation in theology')¹. In both issues, a very honest expression of how people have grown away from the reformed theology in the tradition of Bavinck and Kuyper since the sixties of the last century. Their theology, under the name of neo-Calvinism, has become a piece of history.

That the enthusiasm for reformed theology in the classic sense of the word (or: the 'neo-Calvinistic' theology) has drastically decreased in the 'synodical' churches, is well known. But how is that with us 'liberated'? According to more than one writer, the Reformed Churches (lib.) are at this moment in a time of confusion. We see much radical self-criticism. Many former attainments appear to be out of date and are thrown overboard. This is true of things which are known as 'typically liberated', but also the word 'Reformed' has clearly lost its lustre. What Rev. H. de Jong wrote some time ago, is very familiar: "Reformed - for many it means the same as rigidity, shortage of flexibility, strictness, gloom, clumsiness, and a lot more, even including hypocrisy".²

The *Nederlands Dagblad* has scrapped 'Reformed' from its sub heading. Instead of this, the formula 'involved in a Christian way' has been chosen. Not because the ND does not want to be a Reformed newspaper. On the contrary. An important reason why the word 'Reformed' has been removed from the front page is, that it no longer calls forth the positive associations, desired by the editors.

Practising theology does not stand above all this. Various reformed (liberated) theologians say that they seek their inspiration in all sorts of sources. Undoubtedly, the familiar Dutch reformed theological tradition has a place in this, but it no longer holds the prominent position that it once had amongst reformed (liberated) ministers and theological students.

Reformed' has lost its lustre

Here, at the Theological University in Kampen, the connection with our own reformed theological tradition is still strongly present. For this I can point at the book

Gereformeerde theologie vandaag ('Reformed theology today')³. But that does not mean that the theological sparks are flying off it, or that we would succeed in filling a reformed theological magazine (as for instance *Theologia Reformata*, which also appears in the Netherlands) with inspiring articles.

What is reformed?

Is reformed theology still something worth fighting for? If you want to answer this, you must of course, first agree together, what you understand by 'reformed theology'. For this reason, this is the question to which I give attention now. The emphasis in this shall not lie upon the word 'theology'. In other words, it will not be about the characteristics of academic exercising of theology or the relationship between theology and other disciplines.⁴ I am concentrating upon the adjective 'reformed' as hallmark of our theology.

The great Reformation

What is reformed theology? What is characteristic or distinctive in this? One very important characteristic of the theology of Kuyper and Bavinck is the emphasis upon the absolute authority of the Scriptures. It is not for nothing that Kuyper's speech against liberal criticism of the Bible is one of his most famous publications. The fundamental conviction with regard to the inspiration, the infallibility and the authority of Scripture permeates many reformed theological publications of the first half of the 20th century. Many 'synodical-reformed' theologians have by now, already distanced themselves from the 'neo-Calvinistic' reformed theological tradition. This farewell has everything to do with an altered conviction with regard to the Bible. In the recent, already mentioned edition of the *GTT*, this is frankly recognised.

But the reformed theology did not start with Kuyper and Bavinck. Nor is it only something thought up by Kampen or the Free University. Reformed theology is also practiced in our sister institute in Apeldoorn, and by reformed theologians elsewhere. Nor is reformed theology exclusive to the Netherlands. Kuyper and Bavinck would have not neglected to point this out. The word 'reformed' brings you unavoidably to the great church reformation of the sixteenth century. Then, in opposition to the Roman Catholics and the Anabaptists, the three sola's were forged; *sola fide*, *sola gratia* and *sola scriptura*. Three sola's which culminate in one solo: *solo Christo*, by Christ alone.

**Sola fide, sola gratia and sola scriptura, which
culminate in solo Christo**

What was then rediscovered, was written down and defended in confessions. Since then the convictions laid down in the Confession de La Rochelle, the Belgic Confession, the Catechism of Geneva, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession, to name no others - were to be decisive for reformed theology. To these, in the seventeenth century, the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confession were added.

H. Bavinck: God at the centre

But not everything in these confessions is exclusively reformed. For example the 'sola fide'. This was confessed with no less conviction by Martin Luther and his followers in his Augsburg Confession than by Calvin and the Reformed. And, to quickly step into to our own times, with regard to the doctrine of Scripture, many evangelicals and Reformed people can go a long way together down the same road. What is then distinctive about the reformed and their theology?

In the preparation for this speech, I pulled volume I of Herman Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* ('Reformed Dogmatics') down from the shelf. He gives his four volume standard work extensive prolegomena (introductory opinions). I assumed I could expect that he would not only pay attention to the term 'dogmatics' but also to the adjective 'reformed'. He does this up to a point: he offers a very interesting description of the history of reformed dogmatics, from the sixteenth century until his own time.⁵

Bavinck begins that section with a description of the characteristic difference between Lutheran and Reformed Protestantism. The last began with Zwingli, but received its fixed form through Calvin. What are the characteristic differences between these two types of Protestantism?

According to Bavinck, it is characteristic of Luther's followers to think anthropologically. The central question for them is how man reaches salvation. Justification is the subject with which the church stands or falls. In contrast to this, reformed people think theologically. They climb up to God's eternal decision. The first question is: 'how does God receive his honour?' Election is at the heart of the church. "The reformed believer has no peace before he has traced everything back to God's decision and has found the *dihoti* (the why, GK) of things and gone forward to make all things serve God's honour; the Lutheran is satisfied with the *hoti* (the that, GK) and enjoys in the salvation which he has received through faith".⁶

First question: 'how does God receive his honour?'

Characteristic of the Reformed conviction is thus, according to Bavinck, that God, his honour and his election are central. And this is, at the same time, characteristic of reformed theology. Bavinck still lived in the time in which theology was just about the same as dogmatics, although the end of those rough days was in sight.

No favourite themes

Bavinck's description of that which is characteristic of reformed theology certainly gives insight. Nevertheless, there is one disadvantage. The impression could be given that for reformed people a preference for certain themes, such as God's honour and God's election, is characteristic. Opposite which, the Lutherans would have their own favourite themes, and the Roman Catholics or the evangelicals of today, as well.

But that would do no justice to the intention of the Reformed of the sixteenth century. For them it was not about their own preferences, for which they claimed a place next to



Prof. dr. C. Trimp

other preferences and idiosyncrasies. They did not want to be a special, separate group within the whole of the church. They wanted to be catholic indeed. They wanted to hold onto the ties with the church of every age and with her faith. I suspect, by the way, that Bavinck would be one of the first to recognise this.

C. Trimp: everything which is scriptural

What is *reformed* theology? In this connection I still find very instructive what C. Trimp wrote in 1964.⁷ At the background of his writing is the fact that very different theologians claim to be 'reformed'. He names, for example, the nineteenth century modernist J.H. Scholten and the twentieth century theologians Karl Barth and Hendrik Berkhof. Besides this, the struggle about binding to the reformed confessions, which would end in the church split in 1967, plays a part.

Amongst other things, Trimp discusses Helenius de Cock's view. De Cock was one of the first four teachers at the Theological School in Kampen. According to De Cock, the *confessions* state what is reformed. Everything which is written in the confessions is reformed; what is not stated therein, is not; what opposes this, is not reformed. The *Holy Scriptures* say what is *true*. But the question of the truth is a different question to that of 'what is reformed?' The last question bears a pure historical character.⁸

Trimp's objection to de Cock's approach is, that in this way, the confessions threaten to become a complete whole over and against the Holy Scriptures. But that is just what the reformed confessions do not want to be. They want to be transparent before the Holy Scriptures. They want to reflect the truth revealed in Scripture. They want to confess the catholic faith and not codify the doctrine of a certain church federation.⁹

Trimp states that whoever wants to decide what 'reformed' is, must open the Bible. For this he refers to article 5 of the Belgic Confession: "we believe without any doubt all things contained in them (the canonical books, GK)". And according to article 7: "we believe that this Holy Scripture fully contains the will of God and that all that man must

Reformed Confessions want to be transparent before the Holy Scriptures, they want to confess the catholic faith

believe in order to be saved, is sufficiently taught therein". In this way the reformed churches have expressed themselves, what reformed people believe and what every person must believe. In the time of the Reformation it was not about certain favourite opinions. "The Reformation lets itself be brought down to the simple formula: Back to the Word of the only Master".¹⁰ That inspired Trimp himself to the simple formula, as answer to the question 'what is reformed?': "everything which is Scriptural, is reformed".¹¹

In this Trimp demonstrates his agreement with the founder of the *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift*, Lucas Lindeboom: "it is characteristically *reformed* to teach nothing, to want nothing but what the Scripture says".¹²

Notes:

1. The jubilee issue and the last issue have also been published separately by Kok, Kampen.
2. H. de Jong, 'Voorrang van Woord op antwoord. Wat is gereformeerd?', in: *Radix. Gereformeerd wetenschappelijk tijdschrift* 29 (2003) 72. De Jong's article offers a useful description of the differences between evangelical and reformed.
3. A.L.Th. de Bruijne (ed.) *Gereformeerd theologie vandaag. Oriëntatie en verantwoording* (series: TU-Bezinningsreeks, 4), Barneveld: Vuurbaak, 2004.
4. These questions are extensively handled in *Gereformeerd theologie vandaag*, especially in the chapter named after the title of the book, 'Gereformeerde theologie vandaag' by A.L.Th. de Bruijne (pp. 11-29).
5. H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerd Dogmatiek*, Vol. I, Kampen: Kok, 1928⁴, pp. 150-179.
6. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. I, p. 151. Further, Bavinck states elsewhere, in the discussion of the order of salvation, that the theological viewpoint absorbs all that is good in the anthropological standpoint, but the same is not true the other way around (cp. *Gereformeerd Dogmatiek*, Vol. III, Kampen: Kok, 1929⁴, p. 577; with thanks to Hans Burger who pointed out this passage to me).
7. C. Trimp, *Wat is Gereformeerd?*, Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1964; originally published in ten articles in the reformed weekly *De Reformatie*.
8. Trimp, *Wat is Gereformeerd?*, p. 17, cp. Helenius de Cock, *Wat is Gereformeerd?*, Groningen: Reits, 1885, esp. pp. 5, 10, 17f. De Cock wants to stop the wrong use of the labels 'reformed' and 'not reformed'. Somebody who does not agree with a certain viewpoint which may have followers amongst reformed theologians, but which is not expressed in the Three Forms of Unity (e.g. the theory of the justification of eternity), may not be labelled 'not reformed'.
9. Trimp, *Wat is gereformeerd?*, pp. 27-29 cp. also p. 31: "the confession wants to be a glass wall, which creates no obstacle at all for someone who wants to see God's Word".
10. Trimp, *Wat is gereformeerd?*, pp. 29-31; the quote on p. 31.
11. Trimp, *Wat is gereformeerd?*, p. 33.
12. L. Lindeboom in: *Wat zegt de Schrift?* 8 (1907) 4f (*Wat zegt de Schrift?* ['What does the Scripture say?'] was the name in this time of the magazine which would be called *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* from 1912 onwards).

This article is the first part of the address prof. Dr. Kwakkel, president of the Theological University of the Reformed Churches (lib.) in Kampen, gave on September 6th 2004 when the lessons were opened; the second part will be published in our next issue. This speech was originally published in the reformed weekly magazine *De Reformatie* 79 (2003-2004) 851-854; 80 (2004-2005) 7-10.

For God's exaltedness and his nearness

Last year, on the 25th October, A. Baars, teacher at the Theological University of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Apeldoorn*, obtained his doctorate with a thesis about the Trinity in Calvin's thinking. Dr Baars has been a teacher in practical theology at Apeldoorn since 1995. His thesis is an impressive and thorough study. During its presentation and defence some commented that nobody who wants to make a serious study of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity can ignore this research.

Calvin's development

In a chapter consisting of more than 200 pages (the second of his book), Baars describes the development which Calvin made in his doctrine about the triune God. Noticeable in this is how much all sorts of issues with which Calvin became embroiled, are incorporated into his theology. This began at a very early stage of his career in the so called "question of Caroli". In 1537 (Calvin is then 31 years old), Pierre Caroli, minister in Lausanne, accuses Calvin of holding heretical opinions about the Trinity. He even went as far as saying that Calvin and other ministers in Geneva were followers of Arius. This accusation seems to be based especially upon Calvin's refusal to use terms such as 'Trinity' and 'Person'. Nor was Calvin willing to sign the Nicene and Athanasian creeds. Apparently this does not mean that Calvin distances himself from old church dogma but that he wants to remain as close to the Scriptures as possible. Also he puts great emphasis on the bearing of doctrine on the practical life of faith.

Baars uses more than 80 pages of this chapter to describe the conflict between Calvin and Michael Servet. Servet was a Spanish scholar, who ended his life at the stake in Geneva, condemned of heresy. Calvin especially was responsible for bringing forward the material for this accusation. This issue has often been discussed already and Calvin's role in this has been viewed from all sides: how could a follower of the Reformation approve of a practice which looked so much like that of the Roman Catholic Inquisition? The value of Baars' handling of the issue is that he thoroughly investigates Servet's theological system as well as the debate about it which he carried on with Calvin. Here, Baars offers an important contribution to the history of theology.

Servet appears to have been an adherent of a theory in which God and the creation were mixed up together. From that basis he also developed various weird and wonderful ideas about the Trinity, which Calvin had to reject radically: the eternal Word of God would have played the same role in the process of Jesus becoming flesh as the seed of man in the conception of a normal child; the Holy Spirit began to work as an independent Person only after Whitsun, to mention but a few. In confronting Servet, Calvin had to rethink the value of the old church dogma anew. To do so, he was intensely



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busy with the works of early church fathers such as Tertullian and Irenaeus, whom Servet liked to quote. All this was very important for the final modelling of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity.

The last years of his life (he died in 1564), Calvin is especially involved in discussions with various Italian opponents of the doctrine of the Trinity. Names such as Gribaldi, Biandrata, Gentile and Stancarò are mentioned. Because Italy was too unsafe for them, they worked elsewhere and especially in Eastern Europe. They exercised much influence in Poland and in Transylvania. In 1563, Calvin directed two writings at the brothers in Poland. In the first he expresses his concern about Polish heresies in the doctrine of the Trinity. In the second, he expresses his gratitude that some have listened to his exhortations and condemned the heretical ideas. The Italian opponents of Trinity, state amongst other things, that terms such as 'Being' and 'Person' are unbiblical concepts. Calvin opposes this, standing up for the good right of these old church concepts and demonstrates that they really can be found in the Bible and are of essential importance for the maintaining of pure doctrine.

A gradual approach to the old formulations of the doctrine can thus be seen in Calvin's development. As far as the content is concerned, Calvin always stood for the doctrine of the Trinity, but the familiar terms became more and more important for him as a consequence of the conflicts surrounding them. It remains typical of Calvin that he attaches great value to the Biblical foundation of the doctrine and of its practical meaning.

Calvin's individuality

In the following chapters, Baars discusses Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity from various points of view: how does he speak of it in his sermons, in his commentaries, in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*; what is noticeable if you compare him with predecessors such as Augustin and with contemporaries such as Erasmus and Luther; what impact do Calvin's standpoints have upon modern discussions about the Trinity? I shall not discuss these elements of the book any further here.

Consistently evident is how expert Baars is on this subject, how carefully he sets to work and how kindred his own thoughts are with those of Calvin, yet without losing his own independence. A book of 700 pages on one subject cannot avoid becoming a bit tiring but until the end it remains rich in content.

I gladly share what Baars has to say about the individuality of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity. He has summarised this beautifully in the title of his book: 'For God's exaltedness and his nearness'. On page 696f, he explains that this title is composed of three elements. First of all the word 'for': this was the reason for Calvin's effort. "It was his passion to know, to serve, to proclaim and to honour God". For this reason he fought so much for the doctrine of the Trinity. In the second place: God's exaltedness. The whole Reformation was about letting God be God, completely

thesis. It was an honour for me to appear as one of his tutors. Of course some questions remain. They were also asked when the thesis was defended: should Baars not have distanced himself at some points a bit more from Calvin; should Calvin's stand in the conflict with Servet not be more clearly denounced; does Baars use the right terms to characterise Calvin's standpoints?

My own question had to do with this last point. It was about the description of the concept 'Person' in the doctrine of the Trinity: in God's one Being there are three Persons, Father, Son and Spirit. Baars says that according to Calvin, this concept has a substantial and a relational moment in it. Substantial: they actual exist as distinguished Persons. Relational: they are deeply bound up with each other. I asked the doctoral student if the term 'substantial' is suitable: does the emphasis not then come to be upon the distinction, at



The Reformation monument in Geneve (photo P.G.B. de Vries)

different from his creatures. Calvin's prayers offer "an impressive witness to his respect for the elevated majesty of God". The exaltedness of God is expressed especially in the doctrine of the Trinity but no less so his nearness. That is the third element in the title. "In Christ and through his Spirit he comes very close and touches us". These are the last words of this large book.

This characterisation of Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity indicates beautifully, at the same time, what its value still is. The doctrine of God as the Triune is not something like a complicated theory about God. No, it is a confession of the highly exalted God who nevertheless wants to be our God in Christ and through his Spirit. Baars succeeds in letting his thorough study be of immediate importance for the witness of the gospel today. The deep secret of God, Father, Son and Spirit, is the secret of the gospel itself.

Appreciation

As the above indicates, I am very impressed with Baars'

the cost of the unity of God? Calvin himself did not use the word 'substantial' either. In his answer, Baars made clear that he had sought long for an appropriate word but had been unable to find a better one. As I see it, that term, in the light of the history of the doctrine of the Trinity, is not really suitable. Maybe it is better only to speak of the real distinction between the three Persons of the Godhead.

But in spite of this type of questions, the appreciation is foremost. The University in Apeldoorn may be congratulated for this doctoral degree for one of her teachers. His further research will probably be into the field of practical theology. After all, this is his area of teaching. On the basis of this study, we await the results with interest.

Reviewed:

A Baars, *Om Gods verhevenheid en zijn nabijheid. De Drie-eenheid bij Calvin* (series: Theologie en geschiedenis), Kampen: Kok, 2004; 751 pages; euro 42.50. This review originally appeared in Dutch in *De Reformatie* 80 (2004-2005) 171-172 (4th Dec. 2004).

NEWS UPDATE

Opening of the General Synod

[Photo's and text: P.G.B. de Vries]

On March 12th, the General Synod of the Reformed Churches (liberated) in the Netherlands was opened in the Kandelaarkerk (Candlestand Church!) in Amersfoort.



In preparation for the meetings, the representatives were instructed about what a synod should and should not do by Prof dr M.te Velde, Professor of church law at the Theological University in Kampen.



Mrs D Zomer-Harwig, gave instructions on behalf of the communication deputies, as to how to communicate with GKV members. With hammer and nails in hand, she illustrated clearly that there is much work to be done.



Elected as synodal board were (from left to right): Rev. C. van den Berg as assessor, Rev P Niemeijer as chairman, elder Joh. A.Kisjes as secretary and Rev. H. Pathuis as stand in secretary.



View of the meeting room. In the foreground, the podium complete with laptop for Powerpoint presentations. It appears that not everybody can handle such modern technology!

GKv Synod accepts New Bible Translation

In *Lux Mundi*, Vol 23, nos. 3+4, an article about the New Dutch Bible Translation appeared, written by mr. R.A. Scholma. On 13th May 2005, the General Synod of the Reformed Churches (liberated) in the Netherlands, accepted this translation for use in the church services. Recognising this important landmark in the history of the churches, the chairman of the synod, Rev. P Niemeijer gave a speech, from which we quote the following in this issue of *Lux Mundi*.

"Deputies have tested the New Bible Translation (NBV) according to the criteria of the Synod of Leeuwarden and according to the criteria fixed by the Dutch Bible Society. In their extensive survey, they report objectively. They note fine discoveries, good readability, care and reliability. But they also point the finger at texts which they would have liked to have seen translated differently. The translation cannot be accused of anti-reformed sentiment, but the translators lacked a clear reformed feeling in certain places. In various letters received, critical notes could be read, which were not always unjust. But as a whole, when put in the balance, the NBV and the criticism of it, weighed up clearly as positive both for deputies and synod. In the time which lies ahead, more negative points are likely to be discovered in the NBV, but also more positive points! And in this way the balance will not be endangered.

These comments appear frugal but they take nothing of our thankfulness away. Because nobody must think or behave as though there were no objections which could be made to the translation of 1951.

Above all, the NBV brings important gain. I think of a comment from Prof. Van Houwelingen, in the first round. It is a translation in our own modern Dutch. Rescued from the stiffness of 1951, texts suddenly come alive. And passages which you always used to read per verse, you can now read as a whole, curious as to what happens. All sorts of passages and sentences which were beloved to us and which, because of this, were also worn out, have been worded surprisingly so that new treasures can be dug out of the Bible.

Sometimes it is as though a certain proof text or a certain expression which supported a part of the reformed doctrine has been lost. This is shocking! But when you read the entire Bible you rediscover, fortunately, that our doctrine does not hang upon one, maybe even disputable translation of the text, but is supported by the whole of Scripture. And where the Scripture as a whole is now at hand presented in a clearer language, this is also true of what Scripture teaches as this can be found summarised in our reformed confession. The foundation of our confession is expressed much more clearly and accessibly in the NBV, and in this the NBV is an important support for the reformed doctrine. We find what is necessary for God's honour and for our salvation, clearly worded in the NBV.

It is also fine that another translation is available which can be used everywhere: in church, at home and at school. As far as that is concerned an undesirable situation had come about in the last few decades thanks to all sorts of different translations. This new translation offers the opportunity once more to read from the same translation everywhere, so that it can find a home in our heads and hearts and become our spiritual property. This is something we greatly need today!

Also the fact that as church, we do not have a separate Bible, but one which we share with other churches and with society, is of importance. Naturally, you can serve society with your own Bible translation but that often creates the impression that we have a secret code and that makes our public confession difficult to check. For this reason that we are glad that there is now a translation which can be used across the whole of society, and which makes our witness verifiable for everybody".



Chairman of the General Synod, Rev. P. Niemeijer, receives a special edition of the NBV from Drs. R.A. Scholma (photo: P.G.B. de Vries)

News from Kampen (GKv)

by G. Kwakkel



...In the last years, several students of Dr. Mees te Velde... (photo: P.G.B. de Vries)

On December 6th, 2004, board members, professors, students, and several other people met for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Churches (Liberated). The main speaker was Dr. Barend Kamphuis, who lectured about 'Chalcedon in Kampen'. In his clear and interesting lecture, Kamphuis compared the views of Herman Bavinck and Klaas Schilder, both former professors of Dogmatics at the seminary, on Christology. See 'Chalcedon in Kampen' (Dutch), *Theologia Reformata* Vol. 48 (2005), pp. 27-40 [March].

The jubilee celebrations were continued in various ways during the first months of this year. Six meetings were organized in different places across the country. The central question discussed during the meetings was: what do you expect from the seminary in the next years? The discussion focussed on the training of ministers of

the Word. Should ministers concentrate themselves more on preaching and teaching and leave the other tasks to other people? Or could churches be served better by several different types of ministers who specialize in one or two fields, such as preaching, catechism, pastoral care, evangelism and missionary instruction, or parish development? The outcomes of the meetings still have to be analysed, but they will certainly affect the development of the seminary in the near future.

The regional meetings did not herald the end of the celebration of the 150th anniversary. We are still expecting the completion and publication of a study on the history of the seminary. In the mean time, a short monograph was published by Dr. Frank van der Pol and our librarian, Geert Harmannij. It deals with the history of one of the buildings in which the library of the seminary is housed, the house of the guild of linen-weavers, which is a monument and which dates from the Middle Ages.

One of the main themes of the book on *Reformed Theology Today* (announced in 2004's last issue of *Lux mundi*) was discussed in a conference for all students and professors. During two days they attended lectures and workshops in which the issue at stake was: what does it mean to be a theologian who is fully competent in hermeneutics? Being and working together in this way was a very stimulating experience.

In the last years, several students of Dr. Mees te Velde wrote master theses on aspects of the history of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) since the Liberation ('Vrijmaking') of 1944. They presented the results of their studies in a symposium on March 17. Several historians and other specialists interacted with them. Publication of the lectures and the responses to them is yet in preparation.

A very comfortable aspect of having a theological seminary in Holland is that the seminary is free to work according to its own reformed principles while being recognized by the Dutch government. Students receive scholarships from the government and the seminary can even apply for state aid. For some years, however, official recognition implies that the seminary must accept visitation by international evaluation committees for education and research respectively, once in every five years. In February the seminary's education was evaluated. The official report of this committee will be published later this year.

The relationship to the government will also be discussed by the National Synod of the GKv, which meets this spring. Synod will have to decide whether it is acceptable to apply for state aid or not. Apart from that, synod must appoint a successor to Prof. Meijer, who has taught Greek and Latin for many years and who will retire on September 1st. If possible, his successor will also work for the Theological Seminary of the Christian Reformed Churches in Holland (CGK) in Apeldoorn, with which our seminary cooperates in several respects.

Prof. dr. G. Kwakkel is rector of Kampen Theological Seminary of the GKv 2003-2006

International Symposium Reformational Philosophy August 2005

The Association for Reformational philosophy in the Netherlands organizes an international symposium about every five years to bring its members and sympathizers from all over the world together and to promote Christian-philosophical thinking. August 15-19, the Reformational Philosophers have their International Symposium 2005 at the resort Bovendonk in Hoeven, a small town in the South of the Netherlands. The official language will be English.

The subject will be 'Ethics: Person, Practices and Society'. Under the chairmanship of Prof. Dr. Roel Kuiper and Prof. Dr. Sander Griffioen, and with the help of many expert speakers, the participants will search for a Christian-philosophical orientation for the individual person, the professional practices, as well as society as a whole. An extensive Position Paper can be found on <http://come.to/reform.philos>. There, too, you can view the complete programme, the biographies of the speakers, and fill out the registration form.

Source:

Centre for Reformational Philosophy, P.O.Box 2156, 3800 CD Amersfoort (Neth.)

God's Spirit works

by Sue Wieringa-Tucker

The third congress organised by the workgroup 'God's Spirit works' in April 2005 was visited by some 2500 people. Young, old and somewhere in between, all were represented abundantly in Zwolle.

One of the main speakers was Rev. Orlando Bottenblei, minister of a thriving Baptist congregation in Drachten. The other was Rev. Gert Hutten, Reformed (liberated) minister of an equally thriving church in Franeker, author of the recently published book *Verrast door de Geest* ('Surprised by the Spirit'; Heerenveen: Barnabas, 2004). Both men addressed the theme 'Free in Christ'. At least, that was the title of the conference, although the focus was more explicitly upon 'the liberation which God can and wants to give through the power of His Spirit' (Rev. Bottenblei), liberation that is, from everything which threatens to bind us. Jesus is not only Redeemer but Lord. Freedom from bondage is possible through Him, He is Lord of all!



Animated discussion between a participant and Rev. Gert Hutten.

Rev. Gert Hutten recounted a strange tale. A stranger rang him asking to know more about Jezus Christ. He visited her, talked with her and offered to pray for her. While he was praying, she began to growl, roll around on the floor and foam at the mouth. Never having come across this before, he called, in his terror upon the name of the Lord, and kept doing so until she became calm. Is there demon possession in the Netherlands today? Apparently! Since then, he has come across it more frequently.

Those visiting will have been made aware that we should not take the power we have at our disposal too lightly. It is not our own, but it is in 'earthen vessels that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us'. We do not need to be, cannot afford to be DIY Christians.

The hot issue is of course cessationism, and the reality of slavery to powers other than Christ also amongst Christians, was thrown wide open for those present to go home and think about. Responses to the newspaper report indicated the existence of two positions. The one position - that believers live on the basis of hope for fulfilment of God's promises in the future, and the other - that the Lord, by his Spirit, already fulfils much of his promises to the believers here and now. The first position gives us hope which does not disappoint us, an amazing perspective which holds us steady in a world in which we are strangers. Nothing which happens in this life is outside of God's hand or care; nothing can separate us from Christ in life and death (Lord's Day 10 HC.). But could resting all our expectations of the Lord, who is Lord of all, on the future, be restricting our expectation of what our Lord Jesus can and wants to do today? Does it make passive Christians of us, who ask but do not really expect the Lord who is Lord now, notwithstanding what He will be, to make a change in our lives here and now? Will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious (2 Corinthians 3:8)?

2500 attendants - a drop in the ocean of the 100,000 plus Reformed (liberated) people in Holland it may be, but yet an ever growing number which confirms that those churches are sailing into new and maybe turbulent waters. The numbers present alone should suffice to give the signal: there is a need that this be channelled fruitfully. In the Reformed press there also was a call for serious reflection to take place on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

More info:

see www.godsgeestwerkt.com

Foreign delegates visiting the GS May 27 and 28



From left to right: - **First row:** Rev. Donald N. Macleod (FCS-c, Scotland), br. Alexandr Makeev (ERCUR, Russia), Rev. Jacob Teghtegh Orkuma (NKST, Nigeria), Rev. Dr. Mbanonghon Kurugh Antiev (NKST, Nigeria), Br. Yumba Musoya (DVN-ERCC, Congo), Rev. Richard Holst (EPEW, UK).

Second row: Rev. S. Abraham (SIRC, South India), br. Henk Hoogstra (CanRC, Canada), br. Mark T. Bube (OPC, USA), br. Illunga Ntala a Kuibondo (ERCC, Congo), Rev. Andrew James Lucas (EPCI, Ireland), Rev. Kishimba Nyombo Kasantika (ERCC, Congo), br. John Heerema (RCUS, USA), rev. M.H. Subba (PFCK, North Bengal)

Third row: Rev. Fritz Harmes (URCNA, Northern America), br. Anthony Torres (Curaçao -IRV), prof. Dr. John R. Mcintosh (FCS, Scotland), Rev. W. Huizinga (FRCA, West Australia), Rev. J. Huijgen (CanRC, Canada), Rev. Cesar Rodriguez (IRV, Venezuela), br. Antoon C. Breen (FRCA, West Australia), Rev. José de Segovia (IRE, Spain), Rev. Jack Peterson (OPC, USA)

Missing on this picture: rev. Peter Naylor (EPEW, UK) (photo Tjerk S. de Vries/De Vries Naasten)

The Church Says Amen

by J. Van Bruggen

An Exposition of the Belgic Confession

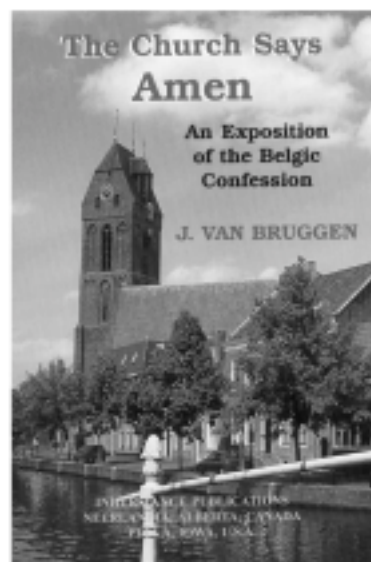
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— from the Preface by C. Bouwman

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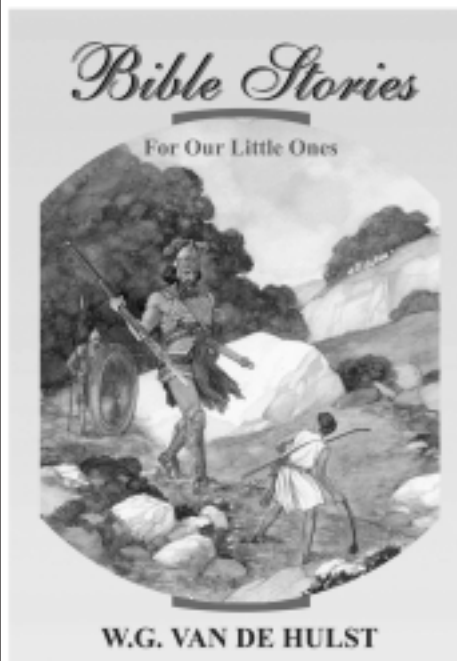
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until in the fulness of time
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