

Lux Mundi

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

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Editorial

This summer version of the *Lux Mundi* is a combination of the March and June editions. Our most sincere apologies for the delay. At last we can bring you up to date with the events of the General Synod of the Reformed Churches (liberated) held in 2002 and the one meeting held in 2003.

Just about everything current in the Reformed Churches (Liberated) was discussed during the synod. This did not leave the 36 brother delegates cold. There was much for which to praise God, which they did. But there were also many issues which were worrying. They saw the helplessness of the churches with regard to divorce and remarriage. They witnessed the dead end discussions on the subject of liturgy. They saw the problems in relationships between ministers and churches or church councils, and having heard the complaints about sexual abuse in pastoral relationships, they saw the need to set up a desk where complaints could be made.

For these four reasons, the synod called the churches to humble themselves. In many churches, the services held between Sunday March 2nd and Good Friday, April 4th had a supplicatory character. Urgent prayer was made for forgiveness, reconciliation and renewal, for the mighty work of the blood and the Spirit of Christ.

The churches in the Netherlands struggle in their journey through these times. Man sits on the throne in today's culture. It is an aggressive and attractive world for old and young. Aggressive, because man who decides himself what good and evil is, has surrounded us, and rules the media. Attractive, because he does not bare his teeth, but advertises his lifestyle with his glamorous smile and his daily happiness. Satan has many opportunities..

The brethren at the synod, with all the help surrounding them, have seriously tried "to see to it that true doctrine takes its course, that evil men are disciplined in a spiritual way and are restrained, and also that the poor and all the afflicted are helped and comforted according to their need" (Belgic Confession art. 30).



This is not to say that they have made no mistakes. Even the twelve disciples did not automatically walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ! For this reason, the churches themselves check the work of the synods. This time they were helped in this by brothers and sisters, who, shortly after the closure of the synod, published a "call to reformation" in the *Nederlands Dagblad*. According to them, the Synod of Zuidhorn has moved further down the wrong road, away from the Scripture and the Confession. For this reason, they call for reformation.

Every Reformed believer, every church, may reflect every Sunday morning on God's faithfulness. This raises the question: where is my faithfulness, our faithfulness? This is God's own question as represented in Micah 6:8, the "vocative of the reformation": "He has showed you, o man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God". This brings believers to their feet. Together they seek a place in following after Jesus Christ the only Saviour, and "flee from sin and pursue righteousness, love the true God and their neighbour without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works, and, although great weakness remains in them, fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life, and constantly appeal to the blood, suffering, death and obedience of Jesus Christ, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him" (Belgic Confession, art 29). This is the straightforward liturgy of the reformed life, the office of all believers, from the first until the seventh day of every week. In the church you are free to ask each other about this. He who asks his brother a question, is also prepared to take the answer seriously. In the reactions to the "call to reformation", you read justifiable doubt on this point.

The Lord Jesus on the throne in your daily life, in the life of your church. Submission to his kingship is our salvation, our happiness. It is the only way to defend ourselves against the misery of the devil, the world and our own flesh. It is also the best medicine against division in the church: confess Jesus Christ and deny yourself.

The General Synod of Zuidhorn, 2002-2003

An overview

Introduction

The 36 delegates of the 9 regional synods of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) finished their work: the general synod of Zuidhorn completed its agenda during its last session at January, 24, ending a Synod which stretched across two different years. Normally a general synod is convened once every three years. The Dutch refer to a synod by the place where it was convened and the year in which it was convened. Zuidhorn 2002-2003 takes its place in the row Leusden 1999, Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, and Ommen 1993.

The church's heart beats in the Sunday services. The Spirit is busy throughout the congregations reshaping sinners into servants of Christ through faith. Within local churches the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is lifted up. The general synod helps the churches to do this. It is the place where the churches discuss matters of common concern. At the same time, the general synod functions as the final court of appeal. In line with the polity of Dordt, a synod is a meeting of the churches. This implies that a synod's decision is a decision of the churches, and is binding without requiring further consideration by the local churches. On the other hand, churches do continue to maintain the right to appeal about any decision of the synod and to refuse to conform to it if it proves to be contrary to God's Word or the adopted order.

In the service of prayer prior to the synod, Rev. P. Groenberg preached on Psalm 48. He pointed out that the



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emphasis in this psalm is placed on the terms 'firmness' and 'safety'. We shall not find firmness and safety in traditions. However, constant renewal will not satisfy and serve us well either. Firmness and safety can only be found in the Lord our God.

According to prof. M. te Velde in his opening speech as advisor, this synod gathered in a changing cultural situation. There is an increasing measure of plurality among the Reformed (liberated). It is important for the synod to seriously consider the identity of our churches and to decide how we can best avoid being a church in which pragmatism rules, decisions are always ad hoc, and no clear line is taken. The Synod should deal with the big issues and take firm decisions and avoid being a debating tank in which compromises are the order of the day.

The meeting format of this synod limited the number of full sessions (only on Fridays and Saturdays) and made good use of modern methods of communication. Deputies (mandated by the previous synod to fulfil a particular task) and synod committees (consisting of synod representatives) presented their reports. Synod members then received the



A meeting of the General Synod of the Reformed Churches (Liberated), gathered at Zuidhorn.

chance to ask questions of an informative kind only. Discussion was then closed. During the following week synod members could reflect on the matter via e-mail discussions. At the next full session a decision was taken. This approach has proven to be time-saving.

When the synod resumed after the summer recession, the chairman's position was empty. Rev. P. Groenenberg had become seriously ill during the summer recess. As a result Rev. E.A. de Boer (vice-chairman up till then) was chosen to be chairman of the Synod. Elder A.J. Kisjes was elected as vice-chairman. This has meant a novum for synods of the Reformed Churches: a moderamen with two ministers and two elders.

Continuity

The Reformed Churches have deputies for contact with the government. As a mark of courtesy to the House of Orange, these represent the churches at Royal weddings and funerals, also in church services which are then held. The synod also gave permission for them to represent the churches at meetings of a national character. On occasions, Dutch churches will address the civil government on certain matters. In the recent past, this has been done when gay-marriages were legalized and when new legislation was adopted with respect to euthanasia. Given the coalition government of socialists and liberalists (the so-called "purple cabinet") up to 2002, questions may well be asked about its effect. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that God's Word has not reached the ears of the Dutch government. On the proposal of deputies, the synod decided not yet to insert a definition of marriage into their church order in view of the legislation on gay-marriages (although the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* Churches did).

In 1999 the Synod of Leusden stated that Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism does not specifically state that the command to rest on the Sunday as a New Testament day of rest is a divine command but that it is a good ecclesiastical practice. Many members of the Reformed Churches felt this went too far: does it not give room for persons to work on Sundays also in non-essential occupations? It has been suggested that the Synod of Zuidhorn appoint a study-deputyship on this matter. As a reaction, the Synod unanimously expressed its appreciation off the riches of the Sunday. We may enjoy more than the early Christians did. The Synod specifically noted that this day of rest is the day after the Sabbath. This raises the question whether Sunday and Sabbath can be equated. If the Sunday is not divinely commanded, how do you celebrate it? Lord's Day 38 indicates that this is done by the worship services. The question also was raised whether christians may judge each other in this issue (cp. Col. 2:16). The Synod concluded that there has always been a measure of freedom in how the Sunday is celebrated. The problem with the present discussion is that it was raised as a result of a very specific situation. Because the questions are much broader, the Synod decided to appoint a study deputyship to look into the issue.

The Reformed Churches have had their own theological university in Kampen since 1854. Contacts with Apeldoorn,

where the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* Churches have their university, are intensifying. Kampen focuses on two goals. First of all, to supply the churches with able pastoral leaders. Secondly, to participate in, and contribute to, theological academia. Kampen faces one major concern, the number of students enrolling is dropping. Only six students enrolled in September 2002, two of which were women. As a result, the university is investing increasingly in Public Relations. The Synod had a few loose ends to tie up with respect to the Theological University. Stipulations set by the civil government in order to ensure recognition as a university also had to be taken into consideration. One of the questions was whether the university should not apply for government subsidies. Thus far the churches have never done so, as a matter of honour. This also shut the door for unwanted meddling by the government in church affairs, apart from which, it has not really been necessary since for the total annual budget of the university roughly 1.5 million euro is necessary and the Reformed Churches have some 125.000 members. If government requirements push costs up higher, this situation might change. The University in Apeldoorn of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* Churches has accepted a subsidy.

With respect to the question of subsidies, the governors were asked to study the matter and specify where such monies might be used. The next synod will decide on whether the churches will apply for subsidies or not.



The number of students attending the Theological University in Kampen is decreasing.



Foreign guests at the general Synod. From left to right: prof. dr. A. le Roux du Plooij (GKSA-South Africa) ; rev. R. Holst (EPCEW), England); rev. Won-Ho Jeon, PCK (Korea); br. H. Dekker (FRCA, Australia); rev. P. Nel (VGKSA - South Africa); rev. W.M. MacKay (FCS, Scotland); rev. D.K. Kithongo (AEPC Kenya); prof. W.D.J. McKay (RPCI Ireland); rev. C.L. VanderVelde (CanRC Canada); rev. F. Gomez (IRE Spain); dr. C.J. Smit (GKSA South Africa); br. Laertes Ballin (IRB Brasil); rev. J.J. Murray (FCS-cont. , Scotland); rev. Y.G. Dethan (GGRM Indonesia); rev. D.M. Kimanthi (AEPC Kenya); rev.J. Keddie (FCS-cont. Scotland); rev. J. Huijgen (Can RC Canada).

Photos: Tjerk S. de Vries

For the first time, the Synod established a special chair in Kampen, to be filled by the ADC (Archives and Documentation Centre). This chair will be responsible for doctoral studies into the history of the reformed churches during the 19th and 20th centuries. This year dr. George Harinck, director of the ADC, was appointed professor to this post.

In a fast changing world it is imperative that professionals stay up to date. The ministers of the Reformed Churches form no exception. The Theological University will pay particular attention to post-academic education and regulations have been adopted for the appointment of mentors for ministers with less than 3 years experience.

Relations with foreign churches

A continuing joy for the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands are the relations with reformed churches worldwide. Pentecost is the feast of the Spirit who brings the Gospel in all languages to all corners of the world. In the week prior to Pentecost the Synod was host to representatives of 15 churches from around the globe. It was very encouraging to see how enthusiastically and convincingly they all expressed their consent with the Reformed confessions by standing. During the two day sessions, greetings were exchanged and decisions were taken with respect to continuing or beginning sister church

relationships. Notably the close sisters in Australia and Canada, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Canadian Reformed Churches, were critical of a number of developments in the Dutch churches. One concern is about liturgy (especially the introduction of 'new' hymns) and observance of the day of rest. The synod expressed its gratitude for the fact that sister churches can encourage and assist each other and appreciated the prayers of churches abroad for wisdom in dealing with these matters.

A new sister church relationship was established with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, also with the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Church of East Africa, two groups of churches in Kenya, with the *Geraja Geraja Reformasi Indonesia-Musyafir* and the *Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil* (developed out of missionary work of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands and Canada).

A serious discussion developed regarding the relationship with the Reformed Church in South Africa ('Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika', GKSA). The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands already have a sister church in South Africa, the "Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika" (VGKSA, Free Reformed Churches in South Africa). These had expressed their concern about certain developments in the GKSA (scripture-critical tendencies, relations with other churches, the introduction of a new psalmbook and of a hymnbook). Deputies for relations with churches abroad had

proposed to enter into a sister church relation with the Reformed Church in South-Africa. During the synod, representatives from the VGKSA and GKSA presented their case. Deputies for relations with churches abroad maintained that the matter of scripture criticism was sufficiently dealt with in tripartite talks at Potchefstroom 2000. The Synod of Zuidhorn decided to postpone upgrading the relationship to that of full sister church relationship until the Synod in 2005. In the mean time, more clarity can be gained about the objections raised by the VGKSA, especially about relations with churches with which the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the VGKSA do not affiliate for fundamental reasons.

Worship

The Dutch language is a fast changing language. Nevertheless, the Reformed Churches still use a Bible translation dating from the 1950's. At this moment a new translation is being made under supervision of the Dutch Bible Society. The Reformed Churches participate in this project. Translations of various bible books are already published in two volumes *Werk in uitvoering* ('Work in progress'). The Deputies for Bible translation are concerned that most church members seem to be unaware of this upcoming new translation, which will probably be finished in 2004.

The question of worship and liturgy has kept the Reformed Churches busy for quite some years. This synod too, had to consider the way the Lord and Saviour of creation is worshipped. The (re)introduction of confession and absolution, new orders for worship, an increased number of hymns, and new liturgical forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper are some of the matters that have received attention. The question has arisen, however, whether the approach in dealing with these issues has been correct. Is not too much being regulated by the synod and imposed upon the churches? Experience has proved that some churches are quick to adapt to the changes, but other churches prefer to stick with the old and well trodden paths. The Synod took due note of these points and attempted to restrict itself to what of necessity should be regulated nationally. In essence the Synod decided to give the congregations more freedom than the churches presently feel they have. No church will be forced to implement new liturgical possibilities permitted by the synod (e.g. *ordinarium*).

The Synod outlined the following framework for liturgical practice:- obedience to Scripture;- a bond with the liturgy of heaven and earth (i.e. clear unity with the liturgy of the holy, catholic and apostolic church);- agreement with the confessions of the church, so that the liturgy bears out what the church teaches;- consideration of own culture, local situations etc. The question is what is up building for a local church. The Synod decided on the basis of a proposal from the Deputies for Worship, to make an order of worship available according to the *Ordinarium*, a liturgy dating back to the early church. In the Middle Ages this order became entangled with the Mass and for this reason the reformers chose for the very old order for homily services. But it should

be possible to eliminate the Mass elements from the *Ordinarium*, too. This order of worship will be developed by Deputies, together with a number of churches.

Since the 1970's the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands have a collection of 40 hymns besides the Genevan Psalter with its 150 Psalms. Since 1999 they have been working on the expansion of the hymn collection. In 1999 they made a start with 121 hymns selected from the *Liedboek voor de kerken* (1973, 'Songbook for the Churches'). All in all, 280 church members, a further 242 attestations of support and 58 church councils had written in on the issue with their concerns and objections or their approval. Some asked for up-to-date hymns (a number of *Liedboek* hymns are archaic). Some question the Scriptural character of various hymns. Some sought a limitation to the number of hymns that could be sung. Some wanted more co-operation with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* Churches on the matter. Some wanted to reject the criteria for hymns set by the General Synod of Leusden 1999 and return to those set by the General Synode of Kampen 1975. Some expressed their appreciation of the hymns that could be sung. Classification of the objections revealed basically 13 themes: 1. Some hymns teach unlimited atonement; 2. Some hymns make salvation a horizontal matter, a matter of human relations, an earthly concept; 3. We sing as if we re-experience history; 4. Some hymns show the influences of liberation theology; 5. Certain reformed doctrines (predestination, covenant) are barely mentioned; 6. The formulations in the hymns about the struggle of the believer is often weak; 7. The sharpness of God's commandments and the existence of sin is scarcely present; 8. Vicarious atonement receives insufficient attention; 9. Roman Catholic and Lutheran influences in hymns on the sacraments; 10. Certain names used for God are not biblical; 11. Some poetic images have no direct Biblical basis; 12. Rhymed versions of Scripture passages often skip over elements; 13. Some hymns portray mystical influences.

The Synod has taken all these objections into serious consideration. Many were found unwarranted. At one stage the allegation that Barthianism could be detected in the hymns led to the conclusion that Isaiah must have been a Barthian. The origin date of the hymn in question made Barthian influence impossible. As a result of the criticism four hymns have not been adopted in second reading: 113, 147, 264, and 301. Thus 117 *Liedboek* hymns are now accepted for the new hymnal. The Synod decided further that for the moment no hymns from the *Liedboek voor de kerken* would be added to the selection list. The Synod further had to make decisions on what to do with songs and hymns composed by Reformed Church members themselves, and from other commonly used songbooks such as the E&R songbooks ('Evangelisation & Recreation' is a Reformed Churches organisation for summer evangelisation) and the *Alles wordt nieuw* collection ('All things new', children's songs which go back a number of decades). Synod has adopted 90 such hymns in first reading. With respect to some, the matter of copyright has yet to be settled. Together with the 117 already adopted hymns the churches now have a royal



Brother J. Leenders of the RCNZ(New Zealand) addresses the synod.

number of hymns with which to praise God. During the discussion it became clear that the Synod considered the criteria adopted by the General Synode of Leusden 1999 to be in line with those of the General Synod of Kampen 1975. Moreover, the Reformed Churches want to discuss the issue of hymns with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* Churches.

Pastoral subjects

For the past ten years Rev. J. Boerma (now: Rotterdam-East) has ministered to the deaf and hard of hearing in the churches country-wide. Recently Rev. Tj. van Dijk (formerly: Middelstum) took over this charge. The ministry involves mainly preaching in special services and conducting catechism classes. This work is supported by four regional committees.

For several years now certain congregations of the Reformed Churches have been holding worship services adapted for the mentally handicapped. This usually means that some of the songs are taken from sources other than the church book and that the minister will preach in an evocative way, often with the help of visual materials. Sometimes this is one of the usual services where handicapped people from neighbouring churches and the people who accompany them, are invited as guests. Sometimes this is an extra service exclusively organised for the handicapped and their families and friends from the region. Deputies suggested that for the sake of a good integration it would be better if more attention be paid to the handicapped in all services of their own congregation. The Synod decided to mandate deputies to look specifically at the integration of handicapped members in the congregation.

The matter of sexual abuse in pastoral situations has caused a stir in Dutch church life in the past 10 years. The Synod now has decided to set up an agency which can mediate and assist in cases of sexual abuse in pastoral situations. This will be done in conjunction with two other reformed church federations, the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* and the *Nederlands Gereformeerde* Churches. A number of measures have been

adopted to ensure that cases of sexual abuse involving pastoral workers will be dealt with professionally and properly.

A study deputyship appointed by Synod Leusden 1999 submitted a substantial report on the matter of divorce and remarriage. This report can be summarised with the following four points: 1. The existence of divorce should humble us. It is a sign that we are not willing to follow the radical instruction of Jesus Christ. Self-denial is characteristic of Christ's Kingdom. 2. Prevention and counselling should receive maximal attention in every congregation. The obligations which marriage brings should receive much more attention. 3. Church councils are to decide for themselves how they should act in a situation of divorce. The two commonly adduced grounds for divorce - adultery and spiritual desertion - are not always tenable. In this the council should be guided by the spiritual maturity of those involved. Besides the current attention paid to discipline, more attention should be paid to Christian lifestyle in a marriage. 4. An advisory council for divorce counselling should be appointed for church councils.

The synod valued the report and, together with the deputies, recognised the need for the churches to humble themselves on this point. Also to renew dedication to the Lord because of the general lack of desire and ability for obedience to the ways of the Lord regarding divorce, remarriage, and thus the rededication to a lifestyle which is convincingly in line with the Kingdom of Christ.

Deputies were charged to look into the consideration of marriage, being alone, preparation for marriage, and questions regarding divorce in the light of the point and status of a church blessing. Deputies are to stimulate these considerations via a small, more readable, yet to be published brochure about the deputies report which includes the recommendations of the Synod.

Sometimes the relationship between a congregation and its minister sours to such an extent that further service of the minister in its midst is impossible. Over the past decade this has happened with increased frequency and it became clear



Rev. W. Huizinga addresses the Synod on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

that rules and regulations were needed for this situation. A new deputyship has been created to assist churches and ministers in this situation. This deputyship is in fact a merger of two already existing deputyships: that for release of ministers and that for tutoring and post-academic education for ministers.

Deputies have looked into the problem of ministers who become dysfunctional in their congregation to such an extent that they have to be released from it. They suggested to the Synod that more systematic thought be given to the work which ministers are to conduct. On the proposal of deputies, the Synod decided to merge these deputies and the deputies for 'coaching and training of ministers' in one deputyship 'Service and Rights of Ministers'. This deputyship can advise a church in coaching its ministers, give advice concerning the rights of ministers, provide concrete assistance when there are tensions, provide concrete assistance in helping a minister gain a new position, etc. It can look at both the labour-conditions and church political aspects of the work of ministers. The Synod decided to install a national committee of appeal to come to an independent and professional resolution of conflicts between church councils and ministers.

For more than 25 years the GVI (Reformed Forming Institute) has existed, an independent institute which assists officers and church members in their labour in the churches especially by way of courses and conferences. The GVI serves a good purpose but financially things were not looking optimistic. Most of the regional synods of the Reformed Churches have requested Synod Zuidhorn to turn the GVI into a church deputyship. The Synod decided to re-form the GVI into a Support point for Congregational Development (*Steunpunt voor Gemeenteopbouw*). This new Support point will be smaller than the old GVI and will work in cooperation with the Diaconal Support point, the Reformed College in Zwolle and the Theological University in Kampen.

Contacts with churches in the Netherlands

There are a number of church federations in The Netherlands professing to be orthodox reformed. As a result, the

Reformed Churches also have deputies for 'Ecclesiastical Unity'. Contacts have been intensified with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* Churches. Concerns of scripture criticism in these churches proved unfounded, the publications in question have in part been withdrawn by their author. Various types of conferences will be organised to get the churches more acquainted with each other. Discussions with the *Nederlands Gereformeerde* Churches have also taken a more positive turn.

Up until recently, the Reformed Churches could not operate with the para-church 'Contact Orgaan voor de Gereformeerde Gezindte' (COGG; Contact Organ for the Reformed Persuasion) due to the presence of the 'synodical' Reformed Churches, (the churches from which the Reformed Churches separated in 1944). Now that this church no longer participates in the COGG, the Synod instructed deputies to begin talks with the COGG with a view to participation and, if possible, to join in for the present as observers.

In 1966 a number of ministers and others signed a 'public letter' (*open brief*) which, in many cases led to the expulsion of churches from the federation (these became the *Nederlands Gereformeerde* Churches) during the 1960's. Emeritus professor Dr. J. Douma had requested that the Synod confess guilt over the way in which the matter was dealt with. There were many other such requests. Most had not followed the correct path to the Synod's agenda but one had: the request from the regional synod of Holland-North 2002 to appoint deputies with the instruction to investigate 'how the decisions of the General Synod of Amersfoort West 1967 and Hooageveen 1969/70 can be reconsidered and what consequences this will have for other church decisions'. Most letters were declared inadmissible but in this way, the issue has now been properly tabled. One problem is that every region or even congregation has its own history of what happened in 1967, implying that a general confession of guilt might well not be the correct way forward. It was pointed out at the synod that we should be careful not to judge the issue with hindsight. With respect to the *Nederlandse Gereformeerde* Churches we should remember that we cannot repeat history and that both churches do not have to agree precisely on history. On its very last day, the Synod decided not to agree to the request from Particuliere Synode Holland North 2002. The Synod did express its willingness to inform the Contact Committee of the *Nederlands Gereformeerde* Churches of this decision via the board.

Evangelism and mission

The Reformed Churches have the opportunity to broadcast church services via the public radio or television. Deputies reported that many services have been broadcast also services from abroad. the remaining time is filled with documentaries (e.g. about the International Council of Reformed Churches). Quite a large number of people listen. Non-Christians especially watch the television services. Deputies were asked to follow the media developments. Some churches (Groningen, Hoogkerk en Haren) present weekly services via the internet.

The continuing efforts in evangelism had the attention of the Synod. Deputies for Assistance to the Evangelising Congregation ('Toerusting evangeliserende gemeente') reported that more energy and finances need to be employed to bring the gospel to the nations. In several churches there are extensive plans and opportunities for outreach but the finances to carry them out are missing. Deputies had asked for an increase in their budget of more than 100%, they were granted 50. Deputies were directed to sponsorship for further financial assistance. Deputies have been asked to develop a Vision Statement so that further monies will be more easily attracted.

In 1951 the Reformed Churches decided that mission should be organized at a local level. One church took responsibility for sending missionaries and was supported by the other churches of the parish or regional synod. Besides this, mission aid was reckoned not to be a church matter. It was organised by associations of church members. However, over the years this approach has fragmented mission work. A contrary movement started and thus in 1999 it was decided to combine the forces as much as possible. At the present synod it could be reported that the mergers had successfully taken place. The Synod decided that all aspects of work relating to mission, mission aid and theological training be co-ordinated by one deputyship. Independent organisations such as Distant Neighbours ('De Verre Naasten') have now become part of the deputyship Mission, Assistance and Training. These deputies serve particularly in coordinating demand from abroad and supply available in the Netherlands. Also the Institute for Reformed Theological Training has become part of their work. This Institute (IRTT) serves via courses in reformed theology to help young churches elsewhere build up a strong federation and be outreaching.

The spirit of Zuidhorn

Amongst the representatives at this synod, were just about as many diverse ideas as can be found within the churches. But the brothers were prepared to listen to the Word of God and to each other. This created trust and also confidence and appreciation of and for each other. The majority of decisions were taken with great unanimity. It is still worth taking the trouble to convince each other!

The Synod has called upon the churches to hold a period of 'confession of guilt, humility and covenant renewal as congregations of the Lord'. The background to this call is found in four points:

1. Marital difficulties and divorce;
2. The need to establish a centre for reporting cases of sexual abuse in pastoral relationships;
3. Conflicts between congregations and pastors;
4. The unsettlement which liturgical renewal evokes has sometimes damaged the respect and joy which ought to characterise the worship of the Lord.

Many good things were received from the grace of God. There was no proud, nor haughty eyes. The Synod of Zuidhorn has asked the churches which she sought to serve, to be still and quiet their souls with the Lord, like a weaned child with its mother (Psalm 131). May the Lord bless its decisions.

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With foreign guests united in song for the Lord in a meeting of the General Synod of the Reformed Churches.

Bridging the gap

Reformed Churches in 2002

Long ago, the Lord God gave His word. Nothing has been added since his last word, in the form of Jesus Christ (Hebs 1:1). Today He speaks to us too, but via the ancient words of Holy Scripture. We, in the Netherlands, live in a modern, western culture which calls itself post modern. The churches must ensure that the ancient words which they proclaim, reach the modern day listeners. Usually those words are surprisingly relevant, as though they were spoken only yesterday, but sometimes many words are necessary to show how God addresses our behaviour in the Bible. The discussions which took place in the Reformed churches in 2002 were about the way in which you bridge that gap as Christian in these times. They took place on the basis of a mutual recognition that the Bible is God's Word. Apart from that, the discussion also touched on the way we use the confessions as corporate reflection of the doctrine in the Scriptures. It was not the content which was the point of discussion but the question as to how the reformed doctrine reaches the people of today. Maybe it is a typical western society discussion. It is good for us to realise in the Netherlands that representatives from all over the world spoke with great enthusiasm about the reformed confession at the Synod in Zuidhorn. It remains, nevertheless, a discussion that is very important for us here.

Dialogue

As Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, we associate with those around us - the Christian Reformed Churches (CGK) and the Dutch Reformed Churches (NGK). Next to these

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there are many in the larger protestant churches whom also stand behind the reformed confessions. We are in discussion with the first group, and hope for discussion with the second named party. There are good contacts with the others which are not aimed at church unity. In this sort of discussion you take your own history and your own experience of the faith with you and you can expect fierce discussion. The CGK often have criticism of the preaching in Liberated churches. Judgement is not mentioned often enough, nor the way the Holy Spirit reaches the heart of man in his conversion. Now is not the time for a detailed reaction to this. Ultimately, here too, the real question is as to how you bridge the gap between God's Word and today's people. It is a spiritual question which does not affect the content of what is being confessed. One point of agreement with what we perceive to be the core of spiritual life, lies with complaints, heard everywhere, of languid ministry. Preaching with passion should be a remedy for this and, simultaneously, a remedy for the diagnosed timidity. Thanks to this difference in spirituality, dialogue runs smoother in some places than in others. Nevertheless, the mutual recognition of the CGK, continues and a little more hesitantly so, also with the NGK.



Hermeneutics

An extreme example of that timidity revealed itself when one of our ministers revealed his vulnerability for post modernism, in the *Nederlands Dagblad* under a pseudonym. By the way, we use that word more as a way of describing the way of thinking in our times than as a name for a philosophical movement. Reactions to his article, indicated that many share his questions. On the other hand, many others pointed to Christ, who can

...the churches grew less in 2002 than in the years before...

govern our life and thoughts. A preparedness to listen without prior judgement to His word can resolve this stalemate. This was the conclusion of a congress organised around this topic.

Much has been said about the way we listen in 2002. Students in Kampen are publishing a book called *Woord op Schrift*. They attempted to protect the reformed way of reading the Bible against fundamentals on the one hand and liberals on the other hand. By doing this they began a discussion which has yet to be concluded. Kampen's ethics teacher, Dr A.L. de Bruijne researched the importance of the metaphor in order to explain the Bible and especially in regard to ethics. A metaphor is a comparison, which, given the form, is not always recognisable as such. Can these be found in some historical passages of the Bible and can you work with these in ethics? For him this is absolutely not about removing the pressure of the Word, so that you can avoid its consequences. On the contrary, this is about letting the meaning of God's word shine in today's light. The word "hermeneutics" receives a wider meaning in this light - not simply the rules to explain the Bible correctly, but a process of good Biblical exegesis and the relevance for the situation today.

Church office

A discussion around church office emerged via another channel. The magazine *Dienst*, set up a competition to celebrate its 50 year existence. The editors sought the best article about a new vision of church office. No particular winner emerged. The tendency of writers was to state that the emphasis is no longer the elevated position of church office, but that these things have to be seen from a clear vision of the church, in which the function of the officers is especially to stimulate others to serve. Within the churches, church workers are becoming more common alongside church officers and pastoral care is a task for everybody. The GemeenteNproject which trains young people for an active roll in the church, is making its mark.

The role of minister was not yet crisis free in 2002. A number of ministers needed to take early retirement. Here there is a clear link with the line which we see running through the whole of church life. Discussions centre upon the relevance of the ministry : where do you stand in this day and age and does the Word of God still sound, unabridged and yet relevant? There is an answer to be found to the questions that this modern way of life raises, a way of life that makes listeners more critical and whereby the church officer who makes his office his profession, can expect to have to deliver quality. Otherwise he can expect to be dumped.

Confession

When such radical processes are taking place, it is unavoidable that the confessions also come under discussion. Not critically, as though somebody wants to mock them, there is genuine agreement with the confessed doctrine. The question is whether the way in which the doctrine is taught is suitable for our times. A discussion about God's providence

revealed that the question centres on how those old words can best be conveyed to believers today. A serious discussion and study into the question of whether or not a new confession is possible and necessary is underway, a discussion based on the conviction that the truth in the Bible, written down in the confession, still has so much to say to the people of today. This discussion is still in very early stages.

Concern

Not everyone within the Reformed Churches is happy with these developments, which also influenced the decisions of the Synod. For the first time the churches had to deal with organised protest, the epicentre of which was focused in the magazine *Reformanda*, not forgetting the activities committee which organises information evenings and publishes brochures locally. The question they raise is whether in the quest for a solution, we are not giving in to the spirit of the times and whether the authority of the scriptures is safe in this atmosphere. They prefer to hold on to the ways which were normal in the churches until recently. Discussions with them have yet to take place. Both sides complain how slowly things are going. This shows just how far apart the two poles are. It is not known how many church members are involved. The challenge for the churches is also to take these voices seriously, so that we can enter God's future together.

Statistics

The churches grew less in 2002 than in the years before. 468 members were added, so that we now have a membership of 126921. That growth took place is reason for gratitude. Other churches noted a serious drop in the numbers. There is much reason for concern on this point since no less than 1136 members left the church. The number of births is dropping. The fact that 402 people joined themselves to the church gives much reason for thankfulness.

Conclusion

As church you never stay in calm waters. Even in the New Testament it was made clear that a life of faith is a life of struggle. Just when you think there is peace and calm, struggle rears his head somewhere else. The church confessions were born out of struggle. If you look from this standpoint, it is not surprising that the year 2002 was characterised by intensive discussions on all sorts of topics. This is necessary to discover God's will for the times in which we live. But in this process it is a shame that what one sees as progress and refreshing, is regarded by the other as letting the world into the church. We hope most sincerely that the good fight of faith can be carried on, also within the churches, in a good spirit, in the spirit of thankfulness and awe about the fact of even being a Reformed Church in the 21st century, answerable to the Word of the Lord and the confession. This will ensure that the image of the church in these times will remain ultimately positive. It is Christ who maintains His church.



Call to reformation

A review

An air of concern has been prevalent over the last few months in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. back in February, calling for reformation. At the same time a brochure called *Let us repent - the Reformed Churches after "Zuidhorn"* appeared, a 90 page *call to reformation* in which the same issues were dealt with in a more detailed way. Behind the advertisement and the brochure are people who are involved with the *Reformanda* group, who publish a magazine of the same name, and the *National Workgroup for Information and Advice in Church Developments*. In this article our aim is to give you an impression of what has been happening via a few reactions which appeared in the Reformed press.

Now that the churches are soon to assess the decisions of the Synod of Zuidhorn (they are available on Internet and legally binding), it is time for church members holding the general office of believer to take responsibility, wrote the chairman of *Reformanda*, and to call our shepherds especially to the act of reformation.

"Signs of decay"

G.J. van Middelkoop, editor of the *Reformatie* indicated in his column Church Life (22nd February 2003), which signs of decay and denegration *Reformanda* sees according to the attached examples:

- the way Sundays are spent by an increasing number of church members: the second church service is being threatened and there is talk of more than only necessary work being done on Sundays;
- divorce cases are being dealt with according to own perception and church councils are allowing this to happen;
- people want more hymns and are prepared to accept the heresies which are packed into these;
- because of a desire for 'experience', there are uncontrolled developments in the liturgy;
- the central place of the ministry of the Word is going to make way for the contribution of the believers; the listener is more and more in the picture and the call to fight the good fight of faith is being heard less;
- the church boundaries are being watered down, which can be seen in all sorts of inter church co-operation and widening of the reformed organisations; increasing church unity with the Christian Reformed (Christelijke Gereformeerden) and (in spite of Scripture criticism and error) with the Dutch Reformed (Nederlands Gereformeerden) destroys the unity of true faith;
- room for Scripture criticism is being made; criticisms of the Scriptures are being propagated at the Theological University in Kampen with the approval of governors;
- there is disdain or denial of the work of the Lord in the

reformation of His churches; many are no longer willing to live on the basis of the remembrance of the great deeds of the LORD in the past.

This need has been exacerbated by the decisions of the General Synod of Zuidhorn:

- As far as the fourth commandment is concerned, the synod decided that it is only an opinion that we need to rest on the Sunday. In this the Synod has legalized a new doctrine and allowed this into the churches while it conflicts with Scripture and Confession. That the Lord forbids (unnecessary) work on Sundays, may no longer be preached;
- Also as far as marriage is concerned, the synod has bowed to the practice, that is, approval and allowance of divorce;
- As far as church unity with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* and *Nederlands Gereformeerde Churches* is concerned, the synod opted to bow to the pressure which exists in the churches, despite the heresy in both of the other churches;
- The approval of the many new hymns from the *Liedboek* is acceptance of heresy packed into ambiguous texts.

"No longer a true church"

The brochure *Let us repent* gives the following final conclusion: "In fact the Reformed Churches have departed from the foundation of the apostles and the prophets: false doctrine is declared to be lawful, the sacraments are repeatedly profaned, discipline is insufficiently practised, a spirit of independentism is bringing disintegration into our church life, there is a strong spirit of backsliding on the whole area of church and faith. The churches display the characteristics of the false church more and more. It cannot go on like this! Ultimately, it may prove necessary to break the bonds with those who are not faithful to the truth. Ultimately, the command is valid: depart from the fellowship which has broken the covenant, because the LORD Himself is no longer in their midst. Reformation can no longer be postponed. Once again we must strongly and clearly prophecy with love and make a final appeal to turn away from the wrong spirit which has seeped through into our whole church and faith lives".

Continued radicalism

In his commentary, Van Middelkoop notes continuing radicalization:

"The great certainty with which the brothers speak is noticeable, as is the radical way which they establish issues. This radicalism was voiced at an annual meeting of *Reformanda* back in April 2000. The discussion held then, did

Nd 12-2-03

(Advertentie)

OPROEP TOT REFORMATIE

Ondergetekenden, leden van een Gereformeerde Kerk¹, richten zich langs deze weg tot alle medekerkleden met een dringende oproep tot reformatie door terugkeer naar de verbodige gehoorzaamheid aan Gods Woord en trouw aan de beloften van de kerk.

Wij komen met deze oproep, nu de Generale Synode van Zuidhorn gesloten is en haar besluiten rechtskracht hebben. Niet uit bezwaartocht of afzetten tegen de kerk, maar vanuit onze grote bezorgdheid en diep verdriet over het verval van Christus' kerk. De Gereformeerde Kerken zijn door de Here rijk gezegend en tot een zegen gesteld geweest. Als pijler en fundament van de Waarheid, werkten zij door Gods genade ook als een zuiderzout in de samenleving, als een krachtcentrale voor het leven in staat en maatschappij. Maar nu moeten we zien hoe deze kerken in verval zijn, ja zelfs aan deformatie en verbarsting onderhevig.

noodzaak tot reformatie: algemeen verval in de kerken

Dit verval is niet in alle plaatselijke gemeenten en in alle opzichten even duidelijk zichtbaar. Maar dat doet niets af van de verantwoordelijkheid die we naar elkaar toe hebben, in ware broederliefde! We roemen het volgende (zie de hieronder genoemde brochure voor nadere onderbouwing):

* In veel plaatselijke kerken wordt steeds openlijker toegestaan om ongehoorzaam te zijn aan de geboden van de Here. Dit is het gevolg van de secularisatie op allerlei gebied. Zo komt de praktijk van de zondagssluit door eigen invulling steeds minder onder het beslag van Gods vierde gebod om op de dag van de Here te rusten en zijn godedaden te gedenken. Hierdoor doen wij af van de dienst aan Hem en doen we Hem zelf lekt.

* De heiligheid van het huwelijk staat onder grote druk. Zorgwekkend is dat echtscheidingen steeds meer vóórkomen binnen de kerken, maar vooral ook dat verschillende kerkenraden over de zonde van een echtscheiding tegen Gods Woord ingaat, geen tucht meer oplegt. Dit geldt ook voor trouwen na een ongeoorloofde echtscheiding. Dit gebeurt tegen Christus' uitdrukkelijk gebod in.

* Ook het belijden omtrent de kerk overeenkomstig Schrift en belijdenis is aangetast door de secularisatie. Steeds meer zijn het de eigen geestelijke, religieuze behoeften en gevoelens die sturen, dan de roeping van de

Here Jezus Christus die zijn bruid, zijn kerk vergadert. Dit gebrek aan kerkbesef komt ook uit in de gezingschrijving, ja zelfs ontkenning van het werk van de Here in de reformatie van zijn kerken de eeuwen door, het laatste in de Vijfmaking, en de bewering van zijn kerken bij Schrift en belijdenis in de jaren zeventig.

* Het leven is aler: in de Vijfmaking bewerkte de Here de winst van de werkelijke belidenis van NGB art. 27-32 voor ons als kinderen van het verbond in het leven in deze tijd. Deze reformatie werkte dóór: het geloof dat de kerk de krachtcentrale is voor het hele leven, leidde tot het oprichten van gereformeerde organisaties op allerlei terrein. Met name kreeg in het ordeningsde band met de kerk weer gestalte, doordat door het brengen van grote offers op grote schaal gereformeerde scholen werden opgericht. Maar deze winst wordt steeds minder erkend en de 'doorgaande reformatie' wordt afgewezen. De oorzaak daarvan is dat het eenvoudige en schriftuurlijke belijden omtrent de kerk ingeruild wordt voor een schema van de oude dwalingen van de pluriformiteit van de kerk en de onzichtbare kerk. Dat is onder meer te zien in 'interkerkelijke' samenwerking op allerlei gebied en vervanging van de schriftuurlijke kerkgrenzen. Hierdoor kreeg de secularisatie ook steeds meer voet op het gereformeerde leven.

* De vele leden uit het Liedboek voor de Kerken zijn genastosd aanvaard. Dit gaat terug op de dwaling dat in de eredienst het persoonlijke denken en voelen van de gelovige, in plaats van Gods eer, centraal staan. Daarbij worden woorden met dubbele bodem, waarin dwaalweer is verpakt, geaccepteerd. Ook wordt in berijpingen van schriftgedeelten Gods Woord lektort gedaan, en antithese, verbodsleis, en verbodswaak weggesneden. Ook het gebruik van de Psalmen, als Liedboek van het verbond, komt er steeds meer door in de verdrinking.

* De liturgie ondergaat sterke veranderingen door de zucht naar eigen beleving van de creatieve mens. De ongebondenheid op dit gebied krijgt de vrije hand en neemt in verschillende plaatselijke gemeenten toe.

* Bij de prediking worden nieuwe wegen ingeslagen. Onder het motto 'de hoorder moet meer in beeld komen' dreigt de hoorder zelf steeds meer het centrum van de prediking te worden. Openlijk wordt de schriftuurlijke karakterisering van de prediking als bediening van de verzorging in twijfel getrokken.

* Zeer verontrustend is dat verspreide schriftuurlijke gedachten o.s. met betrekking tot de inspiratie en het gezag van de Schrift in de recente uitgave 'Woord op schrift' vanuit de kring van de Theologische Universiteit te Kampen, door deputaten-curatoren werden goedgekeurd. De betrokken

docent werd zelfs aangemoedigd in deze richting verder te gaan. De contacten met de Christelijke Gereformeerde kerken worden steeds nauwer, terwijl in deze kerken schriftuurlijke opvattingen in publicaties van voorgangers al meer dan 25 jaar ongehoord gelaten worden. Zo is de schriftuurboek, verouderd door de Gereformeerde Kerken afgewezen en bestreden (Generale Synode Assen-1928), de kerken binnen gedrongen. Dit verval binnen de kerken roept op zichzelf al om reformatie.

noodzaak tot reformatie: synodebesluiten

Naar de nood in de kerken is nog verergerd door de besluiten van de Generale Synode Zuidhorn-2002/03. Van deze vergadering mocht verwacht worden, dat zij reformerend zou opbeden. De Here vraagt immers van zijn Kerk dat zij dwalingen afwijst. In de eerste plaats uit eerbied voor Hem. Maar ook ter bescherming van zijn volk. In plaats daarvan heeft de synode zich bij de ontwikkelingen in de kerken aangesloten en deze zelfs voor een groot deel gegelimeerd.

Dat moge blijken uit de besluiten t.a.v. de zondagrust / het vierde gebod, kerkelijke eenheid met Christelijke Gereformeerde kerken, kerkelijke eenheid met Nederlandse Gereformeerde kerken, het zogenaamde gemeentelijk, verlagende woord in kerkdiensten van niet-gereformeerde kerken, ongecontroleerde viering van het Heilig Avondmaal in crisisgebieden, vragen van de vertaling Groot Nieuws 1996 in de eredienst, invoering van onschriftuurlijke gezangen, ontkrachting van de art. 55 en 57 K.O., het herzien huwelijksformulier, de nieuwe avondmaalformulieren, invoering van het ordinarium, het onkritisch aangaan van een zusterkerkfusatie met buitenlandse kerken (PCEA in Australië) en het rapport en de besluiten over echtscheiding. Hierbij kreeg de leugen een wettige plaats ten koste van de waarheid en werd eigenwilligheid in de dienst aan de Here toegestaan om aan de menselijke religieuze beleving tegevoel te komen.

conclusie

Door bovengenoemde ontwikkelingen en besluiten kan van de Gereformeerde Kerken niet meer gezagd worden, wat wij van de ware Kerk belijden: 'Kortom, dat men zich richt naar het zuivere Woord van God, alles wat daarmee in strijd is verworpt en Jezus Christus erkent als het enige Hoofd' (NGB, art. 29). Wij schrijven u dit alles met diep verdriet dat het zover gekomen is met de Kerk van de Here. Daarbij spijken we uit dat we delen in de schuld aan deze ontwikkelingen. We moeten onszelf beproeven of we wel op tijd hebben gewaarschuwd tegen de verwaarde ontwikkelingen of zelfs eraan hebben meegedaan.

oproep

Wij zijn daarmee tot de overtuiging gekomen

dat de Here van alle kerkleden vraagt om onze kerkenraden op te roepen om de onschriftuurlijke besluiten van de Generale Synode Zuidhorn te verwerpen en te komen tot een terugkeer naar de verbodige gehoorzaamheid aan Gods Woord op alle terreinen van leer en leven.

Wij vragen u daarom, als medelevenantwoordelijke broeders en zusters, deze zaken in uw gemeente en bij uw kerkenraad aan de orde te stellen. Uit liefde voor u, en tot bewijzen van Christus' Kerk bij Schrift en belijdenis. Maar vooral ook met het oog op het recht en de eer van de Koning van de Kerken, onze Here Christus.

Verder verzoeken wij u er bij uw kerkenraad op aan te dringen, ook de zusterkerken binnen de kerkgemeenschap op te roepen om tot dezelfde daad van reformatie en terugkeer te komen. Om vervolgens met die kerken, die daar positief op reageren, te overleggen op welke wijze deze reformatie van de kerken gestalte kan krijgen.

Wij bidden en mogen geloven dat de Here Jezus Christus als Hoofd van zijn Kerk, zelf zal zorgen voor de bewaaring van zijn Kerk. Maar Hij wil ons, gewone kerkleden, daarvoor wel gebruiken.

Het is onze vurige hoop en bede tot de Here, dat Hij u in het hart wil geven deze oproep op te volgen.

Met heilbode en broedergevoel,

Uw broeders en zusters in de Here,
 G. Aalvanger (Diederikwaart), H. Antrades (Leek), Mr. A.P. Bezemer (Zwijndrecht), C. Bezemer (Zwijndrecht), A. Boonker (Almar), H. Bos & H. Bos-Boonker (Venlo), T.L. Bouma (Almar), Mr. Marianne Ovenschot (Heil), W. Dijkens (Heemse), H. Gents & M. Gents-van Saks (Groningen), G. Goedshalk (Wierp), J. Groenewald (Zwijndrecht), L. Groenewald (Zwedenberg), H. de Groot (Wierp), Dr. P. van Guro (Saliken), W. Jansen & Hans van der Jagt (Zuidwold (Dr.) & de Hill), Drs. A.J. Koelkebeck (Den Haag), E. Kortebeek & N.E. Kortebeek-Verhulst (Wierp), H. Kneft (Wierp), H.C. de Mané & W.J. de Mané-Oom (Veendam), Dr. S. de Mané (Beikel en Rodenrig), D.H. van Noord & A.A. van Noord-Boekema (Eneide), P.E. Post & H.S. Post-Jonker (Veendam), H.C. Ravensbergen (Enzai), H.P. de Roos (Haren), M.F. Tolenaar-Kuiper (Bunschoten-Spakenburg), K.J. Trip (Zwolle), J.G. Veldhuis (Groningen), J.A. Veldman & K.A. Veldman-Troost (Veendam), W. Widdenaar (Ten Boer), M. Wolters (Groningen)

N.B. Voor verdere argumentatie wijzen we op de LNVKO-brochure nr. 3. Laten wij ons bekennen een groep tot reformatie, aan te vragen via LNVKO@aanvulling.nl of bij paningsen. LNVKO p/a Dokter van Dalen 42, 3851 JB Eneide (tel. 0341-550090) of als tekst te downloaden via www.aanvulling.nl of www.reformatie.nl; voorbeeldbrief naar de kerkenraad op te vragen bij: admn, Reformatie p/a Willem de Oedeving 12, 3301 KT Zwijndrecht of via jaagronewald@hetnet.nl

...a number of concerned brothers and sisters placed a large advertisement in the Nederlands Dagblad ...

not lead, alas, to a mutual attempt to see things within the right proportions, without covering anything up. This would have served the unity and peace of the churches, in obedience to God's Word, as far as the content is concerned and also as far as the bands with each other were concerned. Unfortunately, the magazine would not back down from its most dubious attitude where in them it categorises brothers and sisters, given to us in the church, as people who follow their own hearts, while others in a sort of Elijah position in a time where the foundations are being destroyed, can do very little. I have to say that the radicalization of the writers of the letters and the brochure carried on, and that because of it they came to a conclusion which caricatures our church life and judges developments and people in an unjustifiable way. On the basis of this point of view and judgement they

proceed to deeds which threaten to bring themselves and others on a road to disaster".

Obstruction of brotherly discussion

Rev. G. Treurniet (Heemse) reacted in the *Gereformeerd Kerkblad* (Reformed News) for mid and south Netherlands (8th March 2003). He noted a number of issues about which the writers of the brochure *Let us repent* may well have a point. But all these issues have been highlighted in the *Gereformeerd Kerkblad* more than once, and for this reason he thinks it is a shame to put them into a framework which makes discussions between brothers extremely difficult. This comes from all sorts of misunderstandings, communication breakdowns, and disobliging interpretations in this booklet. Rev. Treurniet lists them (incompletely):

- If a subject has been discussed at two general synods, no more revision is possible, unless new arguments can be brought in. This standpoint gives a rather heavy laden atmosphere to the booklet (and the whole plan): after “Zuidhorn” a number of decisions considered to be unbiblical by the brothers, become final. But is this the case? Art. 33 of the church order expresses this somewhat differently: matters once decided upon, must not be re-introduced *unless you are convinced that change is necessary*. With regard to issues of a lesser importance, this can mean that a synod is not prepared to revise a decision in the absence of new grounds. But alongside ‘new grounds’ there can be other reasons to reconsider an issue. Otherwise the women’s vote would never have been passed in 1993.
- If ‘Kampen’ considers the question, how the listener comes *into view* in ministry, that effortlessly turns into the *centrality* of the listener in the brochure. Is this honest?
- The brothers are right to warn against ‘covenant automatism’. But it is not right to read this into Hymn 335, stanza 5 from the *Liedboek voor de kerken*, which reads : “and nobody snatches it out of your hands”. Otherwise the Good Shepherd is guilty of covenant automatism, when He said: *no-one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand* (John 10:28).
- There is no evidence that there has ever been room in our churches for an opinion which deviates from the fourth commandment. But who is claiming room for such an opinion? The question is: is there any room for an opinion which deviates from a *certain explanation* of the fourth commandment? It is perhaps difficult to defend this on the grounds of synod decisions. But is there only room for a point of view when the synod has given room for this?
- Every offering, including the worship we offer in our songs, must be perfect. This looks like an important synod criterion: a good church song is at one with the Scriptures in content. Even so, in this connection, I have difficulty with the term “perfect”. This has to do with the sin offerings which were shadows of the Lord Jesus. As far as I am concerned, use it also when speaking of praise offerings but do not suggest that these can be perfect in this life. In this case we should then only be singing unrhymed Hebrew psalms.
- Under strict conditions, in situations of crisis and war, a Reformed army minister can offer Holy Communion to militaries who are not Reformed, but who are confessing Christians. *Let us repent* sees this as a step in the direction of an open Lord’s Table and calls this desecration of the sacrament. Is a measure of compassion for Christians who risk their lives for peace asking too much? And some valuation for the care which has been exercised in extreme situations to guard the holiness of the Lord’s Table?
- Last year, this church news reacted critically to what was said in a previous booklet about the new forms for celebration of Communion. In this booklet even the expression “spiritual banquet”, was attacked, which was taken directly out of our confession (*Belgic Confession*, art. 35). Completely ignoring this comment *Let us repent* suggests that these forms offend Christ’s honour.

“Hard accusations without evidence”

Rev. Treurniet continues: “I have even more difficulty with the following category of judgements - trends are assumed and accusations made without proof, which, because of their general nature, are difficult to contradict or pin down but which nevertheless leave a bit of a bad taste behind them (there’s no smoke without fire).

- Behind all the developments and decisions, which the writers oppose, is, according to them, one spirit of man centred thinking. You are either against all that they are against, or you have fallen prey to the “deformation”, A discussion of one subject becomes heavily laden: if you happen to think slightly different on any one of the points, then you must have been contaminated by post modernism.
- Vague quotes of a minister who once hid behind a pseudonym are repeatedly generalised. That the majority of ministers are glad to proclaim the gospel, and clearly show the church the way behind the Lord Jesus, seems to count for nothing. I see the suggestion which hides behind these dark generalities ungrateful and de-motivating.
- Strong judgements are given about ministry: “Often the minister expresses his own opinion. Time and again sermons are preached without Christ being mentioned. God’s wrath and covenant judgement are dropping out of sight. Sermons about sanctification are often misleading”. These are not incidents, no, this is the view that the booklet presents about the preaching. Is this allowed? If something goes wrong, say what it is! These global judgements are elusive, grievous and unspiritual.
- Something else: “in many congregations there is either none or hardly any talk of scriptural observance of discipline”. Evidence is unnecessary, it seems as though 5 members of 4 churches have the authority to make this judgement about 272 churches and church councils, because nobody knows who these “many” are.
- “Ministers also have increasing difficulty with the confession about Godly predestination (*Heid. Catechism*, Lord’s day 10)”. Evidence? None! Have I missed something or is this slander?
- Discussion about the book *Woord op schrift* has just begun. The *National Workgroup for Information and Advice in Church Developments* has made her judgement already: scripture criticism. Why do we not get together as adults, given to each other by God, and tackle these writers in a solid debate? If that does not work out, there is always the route map of the church order.
- What more can I say? That, according to the writers, objections to new hymns have been “openly ignored” by the synod? That the fourth and seventh commandment have been deactivated? That a six week ultimatum has been presented to the churches before the Acts of Zuidhorn have appeared in print?

Pray for the fruit of the Spirit

In the booklet, Rev. Treurniet misses what Paul in Galatians 5 calls the fruit of the Spirit. Surely people who long for reformation pray for this fruit?

- Love: bearing with one another, even if we do not agree about everything?
 - Joy: where is our amazement that we meet our Saviour in the church and receive His grace? Do we thank Him for both old and young who want to give their lives to Him?
 - Peace: do we set ultimatums before the leaders, given to us by Christ?
 - Long-suffering: are we patient with one another? Or are we afraid that we will only fall further away and expect nothing more from the Spirit?
 - Kindness: are we prepared to listen to the answer if our objection does not convince the Synod?
 - Faithfulness: if we have difficulty with a certain decision, do we say that the lie has taken the legal place of the truth, and that the churches no longer bend the knee before Christ?
 - Gentleness: do I decide God's time for recovery of the churches? Has His Word started in me? Has it only reached me?
 - Self-control: are we prepared to follow after Christ and carry our cross? And the cross of frailties in the church?
- He wonders how it has come "that we think so differently about the way to reformation".
- To start with, let's take a critical look at ourselves, also as churches. The approach and size of the hymn project has caused much resistance and mistrust. Not so much the synod, but the deputies have not always avoided the impression that all objections were taken that seriously. Partly because of this, a mood of pulling out all the necessary stops to fight the Liedboek-hymns was created. And once you have begun to exchange big words, it is hard to go back.
 - It now appears just how bad groups are for the church. *Reformanda* has not just dropped out of the sky, but it was not for nothing that many worried people did not join in. Purely the existence of such a group brings an us-versus-them atmosphere into being, which, eventually, if God does not spare us, becomes irrevocable, and I am looking at two sides (at least). The judgemental tone of some concerned makes a discussion almost impossible. It is also true that the *Reformanda*-label is enough reason not to take someone serious.
 - In contrast to the weakness and adventuring, which they have noted, some, amongst the concerned party, have fallen into reaction mode, which is fired more by fear and tendencies to cling on, than by trust and Christian liberty.
 - Such an atmosphere fosters segregation and plotting. In that atmosphere you are likely to interpret flagging as a result of decisions of the synod and to consider refuting an argument as ignoring it. Then your openness toward each other disappears and simply the idea that you could view things another way, becomes a threat.
 - If we do not let ourselves be corrected by one another, our weak points will dominate. By some of us those are the attraction of legalism and anabaptist rigorism. Then the church has to be purified within six weeks otherwise it is no true church. In this there is also an element of worldliness, albeit unintended: I cannot live with it if it

works out differently than I think it has to work out. Then I drop out and call it reformation, forgetting the deformation that is in my own heart.

Rev. Treurniet ends like this: "Let us repent. Indeed. Of wrong decisions? We have to consider this seriously (when the Acts of Zuidhorn are published). In any case, of an activity which pretends to call the churches back to God's Word, but which in fact places them in *our* dilemmas, with *our* gun on the table, and blocks the (so necessary) true discussion. No matter what you think about preaching, hymns or Sunday rest, brothers, *it cannot be dealt with in this way*. The church is not ours, it is Christ's".

Radicalism and extremism

Another reaction was from Prof. B. Kamphuis who reacted negatively to the *Call to Reformation* and was then called to account by Rev. P. van Gulp in the following edition of *Reformanda* (12th March 2003). Prof. Kamphuis writes in the *De Reformatie*, that he has the impression that he is compared to someone who knew how it ought to be, but who did not act according to that, a doubter who hinders the reformation of the church.

He continues: "Historical parallels always fall short, but I do know something else which has often frustrated reformation of the church - radicalism and extremism. Luther had to face spiritualists, Zwingli fanatical anabaptists. In the time of the "Remonstrant troubles" the Reformed of the Dutch Republic had to face extreme supralapsarians who, with their rigid statements provided 'shameless sophists' with good opportunities to scoff at the doctrine of the Reformed churches (see the *Conclusion of The Canons of Dort*).

The position of radicalism is, in fact, a luxurious one. The radical does not have to worry about being careful or subtle. He does not have to be ready to enter discussions. That he views matters correctly is untouchable. He is the one who thinks and acts consistently and the others are the doubters. Patience he calls lack of courage, understanding for someone else's motives he reckons lack of conviction. Radicalism is no stranger to the history of the Reformed Churches (Liberated). Schilder had to warn against Zealot like behaviour in the early fifties of the 20th century. The sixties were familiar with premature separations during the discussions which preceded 1967. In the seventies the magazine *Woord en wetenschap* called for being consistent and the eighties saw the "Hoorn"-issue arise. In the nineties, *Reformanda* was radicalizing and now we have the *Call to reformation*.

This radical undercurrent has, in my view, done much damage to our churches. Of course they were right on many issues, I would be the last one to deny it. But that is typical of radicalism: they live for being right. But their wrong is greater. They push to unacceptable consequences. They disturb the peace to which Christ has called us. They ensure a caricature of the churches in the outside world. Many in our churches share certain worries which were expressed in the *Call to Reformation*. I hope they do not let themselves be tempted into the radicalism which is manifested in this appeal. They must not let themselves be

persuaded that they are doubters than. Your awareness of the church speaks louder if you back away from an unnecessary split. May God be merciful to our churches.” Thus prof. B. Kamphuis, rector of the Theological University in Kampen.

Call for brotherly discussions in the congregations

Various readers responded to the articles Van Middelkoop wrote in *De Reformatie* of February and March 2003. They were not in agreement with the call to reformation but recognised many of the concerns it raised.

In his response (12th April 2003), Van Middelkoop maintained his forceful rejection: according to him, the move to reformation is based on “personal experience and subjective convictions which do not justify such drastic steps. It is irresponsible to operate in the church in this way. We must say this clearly to each other, also if we can to a greater or lesser extent share the problems pointed out by the initiators of this call”. This requires us to take a step away from this call.” But, according to Van Middelkoop’s conviction, that cannot be the last word:

“We should discuss with each other how we can be reformed churches today. How we, in complete obedience to God and with an acceptance of *all* who have been given to us as brothers and sisters, should *together* search for the Lord’s plan in all things that we come across. The threat of drifting away and apart from each other is real. That is not God’s intention; He sees us as one body and does not want disintegration but increasing integration. To be precise: growth towards maturity with a unity of faith and increasing knowledge of Christ (Eph. 4).

This is a unity which includes the diversity. Diversity was given with the differences which God put into His creation and also with the individual gifts that everyone has been given through faith. This unity is rooted in our complete submission to what God in the Bible says and asks. I assume that we all want to submit to the Bible and that we naturally can address each other on these points. (...)

One reader suggested that we should organise a congress so that we could progress together. That is certainly a possibility in order to come to a deep discussion of certain concrete questions and from there to serve the churches with the results. But in the short term, it seems to me better to discuss with each other as a congregation about our own situation, and to address the questions that live locally. We need to consider how we, in a deep unity with Christ and with each other, are able to form a strong church in this weak time. We have to realise that it is an honour to be part of Christ’s body on earth, as the last synod said, and that is why we are not allowed to have discord and helplessness dictate the atmosphere. In such a church our dedication to our joint Lord motivates us to get to work to recover damaged relationships. A church like that seeks her strength in a pure and unabridged preaching of God’s word and accepts what that Word says with gladness. We together, minister, church council, and membership have to see to it that all things take place in peace and order. The ministers lead their flock in the right way, maintaining Christian peace. The congregations are built up in every way. In this church we all in Christian responsibility, occupy ourselves with the business of growing to the maturity of Christ.”

My body, forever

"I absolutely believe there will be something after death. I just cannot believe that death is the end. Death will not be the finish of me. I'll still be there. Somehow life will go on. What will happen to me I do not know, but that life continues is a certainty." You hear people talk like this today, also people who have absolutely nothing to do with Christianity. They see 'near-death experiences' as a confirmation that death is not the end. Belief in re-incarnation is on the up again; again, because there is nothing new here. Through the ages people have stated that life goes on after death. The Athenians who spoke with Paul were also firmly convinced of this... until he started to talk about the resurrection of the body...! Then Paul was seen as a madman. That our spirit lives on after death, is a fairly common belief in all kinds of religions. But resurrection of the body...!?

Incredible

Resurrection of the body, resurrection of the flesh. Countless arguments could be brought forward which oppose this. The biologist will tell you that our body falls apart and dissolves into molecules and atoms, some of which might even turn up again in someone else's body. What remained of the dead of 100, 1000, 5000 years ago? And what of those people who have been dug up because of shortage of space? And what about all the organ transplants, the people who have drowned at sea, those torn apart by animals? And what about all those cremations? What has remained of a concentration camp, or after a nuclear disaster, in which people were so completely destroyed that nothing remained except the outline of their shadow? Can such a shadow be raised from the dead? Even if it were possible, would it be worth raising up such a mortal shell!?

Valuable

Glorify God in your body (1Corinthians 6:20)! That must have come as a shock to those who attached little value to the body, to the extent that the Corinthian Christians had no problems with sexual immorality. That only concerned the flesh, anyway, and it was the spirit, the inner man, that mattered. This idea was commonly accepted in those days. The body was seen as an earthly packaging for the spirit. A necessary evil, which you discard sooner or later. Death was even considered a way out! Paul argues fiercely against this. The body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body. In no way is it inferior! The Father, the Creator, values the human body so highly that He goes to the trouble of awakening it from the dead. The Son values the human body so highly that he bought it and paid the price for it. The Holy Spirit values the human body so much that He wants to live in it as in a temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). Not for nothing did God's Son become a man of flesh and blood. And He returned to heaven *in His body*.



About the author:

Since 1997, Rev. Egbert Brink (1961) has been a minister of the Reformed Church (liberated) in Waddinxveen. Prior to that, from 1990 he served the church in Nijmegen. He studied at the Theological University in Kampen and at the Faculté de Théologie Libre in Aix en Provence (France). He was visiting lecturer at the Faculté de Théologie Evangélique in Bangui. He has written *Alles in Christus* (1997, about Watchman Nee), *Lied van verlangen* (2000, meditations about the future), and *Het Woord Vooraf* (2000, a topical doctrinal book intended for catechism students and for members). He regularly writes in the weekly paper *De Reformatie* in which he addresses age old faith issues under the heading *believing again* (*Opnieuw geloven*).

I am my body

The misconception that the spirit is higher than the flesh has reared its head throughout history. Your soul as your inner being is alleged to be of more value than your body as your external being. But your soul, that is you yourself, your complete self. Our self, however, is right throughout our whole body. If this were not so we would not feel offended so



Inscriptions on gravestones often testify to a belief in the resurrection of the body.



Why should I still visit a graveyard?

quickly. The Biblical expression “my soul longs” means nothing more than “I long”. “Bless the LORD, o my soul; and all that is within me” (Psalm 103:1). Your soul is you yourself. The separation of body and soul is in contrast with your day to day experience. You cannot imagine yourself away from your body. That which is done to your body, touches you personally. What happens to my body, happens to me! Man is personalised flesh. I do not *have* a body, I *am* my body!

Humiliating

Man is like a thinking reed. He knows much, he can do much, but ultimately he is as weak as a reed. Take the sicknesses which afflict man, terminal illnesses that slowly destroy a body. Humiliating for the human body! Nothing is more humiliating than sin. Sin turns the body into a derelict building (KRAAKPAND), so that it is not used in the way it was intended. It is destroyed by sexual abuse; alcohol abuse tears it down; gluttony can kill it; nicotine invades it; an excessive workload can exhaust it. Sin shows itself in various forms of addictions, which leave their trail of destruction. Sin has a most degrading effect upon a person's body. The external ravage is evident: it looks decrepit, worn out. But the body's internal organs (heart, liver, e.g.) suffer no less. “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Death does certainly not belong, is an unwelcome imposter. Death is outright humiliating and disfiguring.

Mortal remains?

What actually remains of a person? A clear distinction is often made between the ‘person’ who dies and his ‘mortal remains’ that are placed in the grave. “The mortal remains have been laid to rest in...” What a horrible expression! I will never get used to it, nor do I want to, because it is profoundly unspiritual to speak in this way. Of course you

can say that it is just a manner of speaking, but it comes from a heathen way of thinking, which can grab hold of us before we know it.

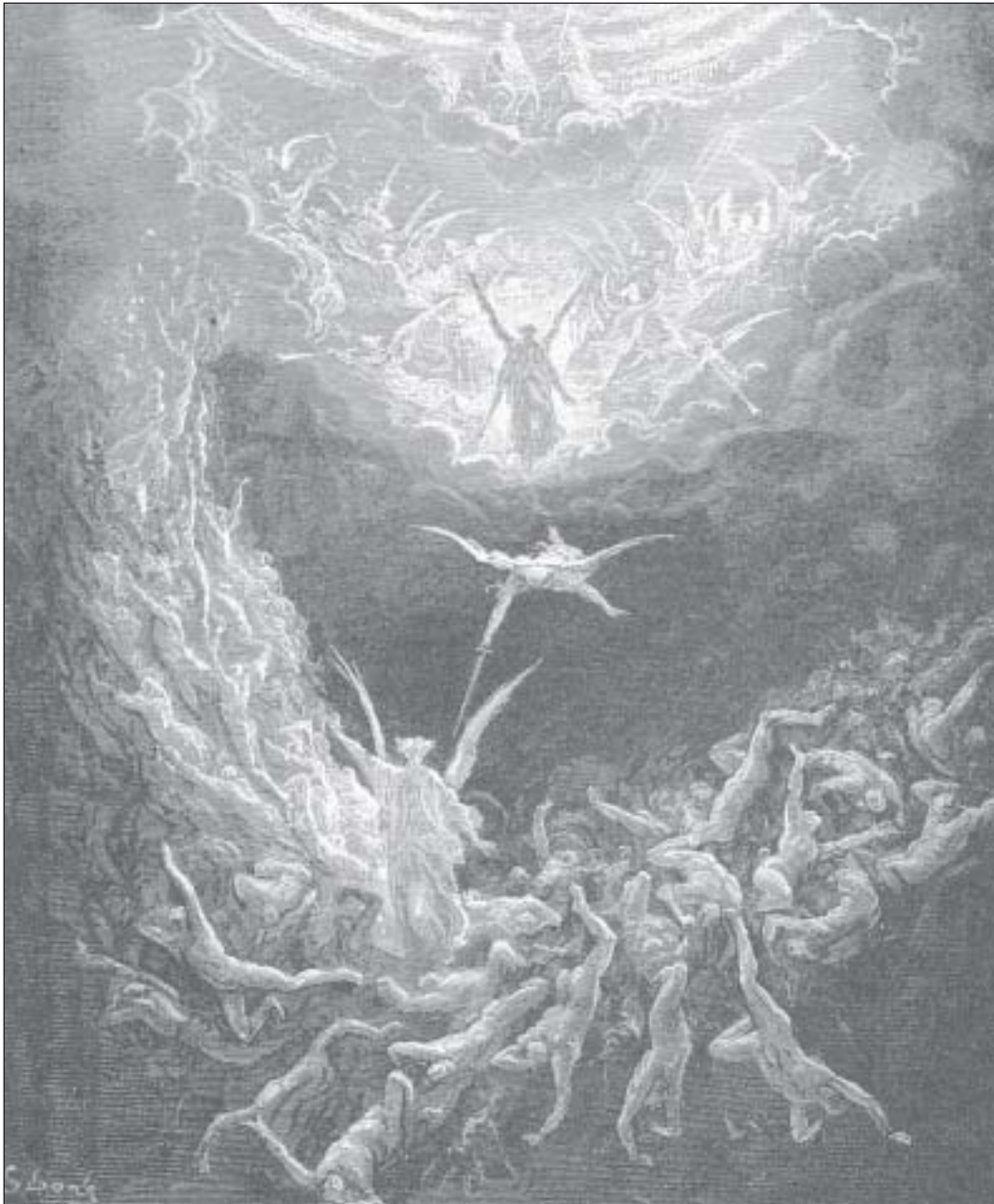
The Bible speaks differently about this. Jacob says “...there I buried Leah” (Genesis 49:31). There is never any reference to *remains* or a *shell*. Nor does the apostle John say: “there they laid the body of Jesus”, but “there they laid *Jesus*” (John 19:42). At the burial of His own Son, God says: there they laid Jesus. He cannot neglect those eyes, that mouth, and those hands. When we love someone, we love him as we have known him: with that face, with that bearing. How can we then, at his burial, suddenly banish his body out of our thoughts? A body that we have embraced can never become mortal remains, no matter how painful we experience that that body is no longer our loved one. And yet, a child that we have carried under our heart, remains our child until the moment of burial, yes, even while it is in the grave. What is laid to rest in the grave are not just the mortal remains of someone who was and is no more. For those who know Christ, that body has a future. It has absolutely not been declared a total loss. It is intended to be conformed to Christ's glorious body (Philippians 3:21). And despite the deep humiliation of its decomposition - what degradation! - it does not lose its identity. And Christ does not lose sight of it. Also my body has been dearly bought and paid for by Him.

Sowing

All this is also expressed in that beautiful imagery of sowing. We are ‘foolish’ enough to believe that a cemetery is like a field. Our grave is a ploughed *furrow* in the churchyard. “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24). This is not limited to the imagery used to describe ‘the dying of the old man’. Burial is sowing and not surrendering to destruction! It is no disaster that the seed decomposes. The grain *must* be completely broken down if an ear of corn is ever to grow out of it. A farmer sowing his seed does not even want to see the grain back in its old form.. Even though burial is sowing, it does not make it less painful. It is sowing in transiency, it is and remains sowing in dishonour. A funeral is never glorious and beautiful, but tarnishing for man. Only, the body is not relegated to oblivion, and burial is not destruction... for those who believe in Christ.

The cemetery

“What reason would I still have to visit the cemetery?” I would ask it differently: why would we avoid that place? “Yes, but he or she is not there anymore, anyway. Don't we believe that he or she is already in heaven?” I do not want to detract from that, but he or she is here as well! Here lie more than earthly remains. We cannot comprehend how someone can be both here and in heaven, but the one is no less true than the other. This is beyond reason, not unreasonable. That we believe in a temporary stay in heaven, may not detract from the concrete language of the Bible. It speaks about all who are in the graves and who will hear Christ's voice from



The Last Judgement
Graving by Gustave Doré

there. As faithfully etched on William of Orange's tombstone e.g.: "*Resurrectionem expectat*" ("waiting here for the resurrection").

Soul without a body?

If soul and body form such a close unity, can you still say: my soul will be immediately taken up to Christ after this life (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 22)? Some have clung so tightly to this unity that they could no longer endorse this. They assume that the dead sink into a bottomless anaesthetic, not to be woken till the Last Day. Immediately, Bible texts come to mind: Paul who longs to be with Christ (Philippians 1:23); Jesus telling the murderer on the cross: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Jesus

tells the Sadducees: "For He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Luke 20:38)!

No power of death or grave can ever separate me from Jesus. Moreover, the Lord Jesus Himself said clearly that God is able to do what we cannot do: separate the soul and the body. "Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body" (Matthew 10:28). Jesus definitely differentiates between body and soul. God is able to separate them when we die, in order to reunite them later. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul also talks about it in this manner. By dying, we lose the roof over our heads as it were, we lose our earthly tent and receive another temporary shelter in heaven. But do we not then arrive at a division between body and soul again? No, it remains one human nature, but God spreads that one nature over two main sections of His creation: my body on earth, my soul in heaven. Unimaginable, but true.

The soul remains itself

But what is that soul then?

A vague shadow? Surely, you can't possibly imagine yourself without a body! Do I become a gossamer spirit, floating through the air like an angel? Don't I stop being a human being in heaven? Who dares to make a sensible comment about this...? We do not know what souls look like, but the Bible speaks about them as though they have some kind of form. Your soul is you! Souls are recognisable: Abraham keeps his familiar name, Lazarus is carried by him (Luke 16:22). Moses and Elijah can make themselves visible and deliberate together (Luke 9:30). Souls, like people, are active despite having no body. But it appears that you do not have to have a body in order to be active. That also counts for the angels. When you read the biblical facts, it appears that souls without bodies rest from life's battles, from the pain and suffering, and especially from sin. They can listen, they can hear what is said. Nor are they silent shadows, but they cry out passionately, or sing enthusiastically, accompanied by music. They work, by serving in the new functions they have

been given. They rejoice, because every task gives satisfaction. That is entering into the joy of the Lord. They really live with Christ Who is at the centre of attention, and every soul consciously experiences this. In childlike faith, without curiosity, I heard the father of a dead boy pray: "If it is possible, pass on my love."

Complete awareness

Your existence in heaven is different, therefore, from how it was before. The form of existence is changed. You live on outside your body. But that does not make it an empty life, and certainly not an unconscious one! Dying as a Christian is not dropping into an endless anaesthetic, it is a conscious 'being' with Christ. A soul does not fall asleep after death but remains wide awake. You do not sink into a grey, forgotten area. You are completely aware of what is happening. For God's children, the glory does not begin on the Last Day, but as soon as their eyes shut for good on *earth*.

Temporary accommodation

We are not yet in heaven. Believers who find themselves in heaven after their death, have yet to reach the highest glory. You are still in an in-between phase. Although you can be genuinely happy, your joy is still incomplete. The fight against sin is certainly over, no temptations can enter heaven, your conscience is at peace, but there is more to come. You, too, are still incomplete. In heaven you receive a temporary resting place. We have not been created for heaven, but for the earth, and therefore we must learn to look beyond heaven to the day in which God reunites our soul and body! As human beings we are incomplete in heaven, because God's work has yet to be finished. But it does not stay that way. God's work will one day be completed. Heaven, too, still experiences the phases of history, although time will fly in that glorious place. But Christ is still busy preparing a place, history has not yet come to completion. And the souls of those under the altar are also aware of this (Revelation 6:9-11)! Christ is busy with preparatory work in heaven in order to complete the construction of the new earth and the new man. We may look forward to that new creation with deep longing: first here, from earth, then from heaven, looking forward to the day when the last trumpet will sound, when all the graves will be opened...for the last roll-call.

Feeling of belonging

Why does God not just start afresh? Why does He not let the old pass away? Why does He bother to look for what has been lost? Because it concerns His own creation. God is a complete Redeemer who is faithful to his own creation. He redeems completely, from top to toe. He even wants to redeem my flesh, to ensure that I will eternally have a feeling of physical well-being.

God's Spirit gives growth to what has been sown. In whatever way my body will be changed - and that will be quite a lot! -, it remains my body, just as a stalk of rye grows from a seed, and a new ear of wheat grows from a grain. God has given every living being its own nature, its own qualities, its own character. Both body and soul keep their own

identity, and are meant for each other, in order to be reunited with each other again.

Everyone keeps his own identity. God will never view His people as mere numbers or mass-produced articles. As correctly confessed on the gravestones of *unknown* British soldiers: "*Known unto God*". The most characteristic, the most typical, the most intimate qualities of an identity is preserved. With everything that is *me*, as I am here on earth, but redeemed from all the rottenness that was in it! Everyone will keep his own identity. Being glorified does not mean everyone will all be the same! The body will be glorified: made suitable for life on the new earth. Everything will benefit the whole new mankind, designed and pieced together as one glorious whole, for the greater glory of God, to reveal his manifold wisdom.

Complete renewal

Belief in the resurrection of the body, however, does not mean that life in the hereafter will be a kind of extension of what we have now. Our body will undergo such a thorough change that we cannot imagine it. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul uses four contrasts to illustrate the differences:

- *Sown in corruption, raised in incorruption.* No longer subject to decay but indestructable, unbreakable, unreachable for sin, sickness or old age.
- *Sown in dishonour, raised in glory.* It is unthinkable that you could ever again live apart from God. You will shine as a star from now on. You will carry the image of a heavenly being.
- *Sown in weakness, raised in power.* A strong body, not one that fails, not weary, eyes that keep seeing clearly, ears that never lose their function, knees that never grow weak, glowing with health, bubbling with energy.
- *Sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body.* Governed by the Spirit of God, fixed on the Father and the Son, heartily ready to glorify God. An unimaginably beautiful body.

We have to detach ourselves from mainly 'fleshy' images: flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. On the one hand: the whole man, including his earthly body, will be saved. But on the other hand: take note that the new body will totally be ruled by the Spirit. Belief in the resurrection of the body does not mean that life here and now extends into the life hereafter. It will be a profound change that completely exceeds our imagination. Food digestion will be out of the question (1 Corinthians 6:13), the stomach will not have to break down food anymore. No longer shall there be married life as we know it (Mark 12:25). Not that people will become angels or sexless beings. That would be difficult to imagine coming from God's hand. Being male or female is part of your identity. But the focus on a man or woman will be surpassed by a complete concentration upon God, an attention which will not exclude our fellowman, because God will be all in all.

If our body now already is a work of art from the Creator, how much more beautiful it will be when it is recreated in the likeness of Christ. I believe in the resurrection of the body, with gladness and eager longing.

*Who would listen to what a slave-girl has to say to her mistress in the kitchen?
God willing, those words will reach the king's palace.
God made Naaman believe: the man who was not even looking for Him. 2 Kings 5.*

by Rev. Joop Schreuder

Relevance of 'Calvinism' for church growth and expansion in the modern world



Do the reformed doctrines present a solid foundation for church growth in the XXI century?

Definition

By Calvinism, I do not mean the personal opinions of Calvin, however much he was able to contribute to the understanding of the gospel, I mean the reformed conviction, as it resulted from the re-discovery of the gospel in the time of the Reformation, and particularly that, which has been recorded in the Canons of Dort.

By church growth, I mean growth because outsiders come to faith, are converted, and join the congregation.

I will deal with the question of what the reformed doctrines mean in connection with church growth in the 21st century under three headings.

(1) Typifying our times

Modernism to post-modernism

In our times, we are dealing with a development from modernism to post-modernism. The modernist believed in progression, and in an objective and general truth. From science in particular, much was expected. For the church, this often meant dealing with an arrogant rejection of the faith in God as Creator, appealing to so-called scientifically established facts and statements. In conversations, the invitation of the gospel was often parried with: "Prove to me that God exists!"

Post-modernism saw a change in this. The haughty belief in the certainty that science offered, against the appeal to God's revelation, seemed to become a lot less certain.

It became meaningless to speak of an objective truth and this affected hermeneutics as well. The strict distinction between subject and object, which is typical of the modern way of thinking, can no longer be maintained. The impression that a text makes on someone can differ from one day to the next: the text will have a different meaning for everyone. Some hermeneutic scholars took this even further, up to the denial of the objective truth. What is true for you, does not necessarily have to be true for me; there is no general truth, there are, at best, (individual) truths.

Experience

We encounter this pluralistic, relativistic culture in attempts to spread the gospel in this day and age. We meet people

About the author:

Joop Schreuder was born in Lisbon (Portugal), 5th March 1951. After a classical grammar school education, he studied at Kampen Theological University (1969-1976) He was sent out as missionary to Curacao in the Dutch Antilles, by the church in Rijnsburg. Thereafter, he was minister in the church in Zwijndrecht (1990-2000) and to the present in Spakenburg North. He was a BBK deputy, working in section 5 (Spanish and Portugese speaking countries) from 1993-2002.

who are often no longer interested in what is true. What appeals to people is not what is presented as truth, but what experiences your faith brings. People tell us that we must not believe that everyone should adopt our conviction. Others should be allowed to stick to whatever they get their support from, irrespective of whether or not that conviction is true; whether or not it corresponds to an objective reality. Religion is relegated to one's private life. The man to whom we bring the gospel in the 21st century, is usually very sympathetic towards religion, much more so than a few decades ago. Religion is 'alright', but only as long as it is presented as a personal conviction and experience.

New Testament situation re-emerges

D.A. Carson rightly comments, that the New Testament can be more directly applied to us than 50 years ago. From the beginning, the young church of the New Testament had to deal with a pluralism of religions and cultures. The absolute and exclusive claims of the apostolic epistles appeal to us especially. While others recognize many "lords" and a wide variety of hopes, Christians recognize one faith, one baptism, one hope, one Lord, one God. And Paul is prepared to pronounce his solemn "anathema" on those who preach some other gospel. For the authors of the New Testament, there is no difference between the pluralism and the idolatry of those times. Therefore, we have to deal carefully with the greater prominence that our contemporaries give to faith. By faith, they actually mean religiosity.

Pluralism

If we look around us, it is not difficult to notice certain effects of pluralism.

Think of the pleas for dialogue with other religions, and the assertion that salvation is also possible in other religions,

apart from Christ; giving up believing in the Lord Jesus as the only way and the only truth and the only mediator; the reluctance to use church discipline; undermining the seriousness of the biblical message concerning the last judgment, by introducing a doctrine of a possible conversion after death; also by doubting or even denying an eternal judgment.

God's view

God's revelation of Himself is the total opposite of this way of thinking.

The creation of man in God's image sets man apart from the rest of creation. God gave us the capacity to know Him intimately. The fact that we are created, also holds us responsible. Not to acknowledge that we are dependant on God, is already anarchy in itself. Sin meant our total decay. Modern man recognizes the evil in the world, but does not see it in relationship to God and therefore he does not acknowledge guilt towards Him who made us. He does not know God as the personal, transcendent and sovereign Lord.

We do not do our neighbours any favour by adjusting the teachings of the Scriptures to the way of thinking in our times. The reformed confession can help us to continue the preaching of the Truth of God.

(2) Ideas on Church Growth

When we look around us in Europe, we see the devastating effects of secularisation.

Let us just in all honesty admit, that the spreading of the gospel through mission and evangelisation is an enormous task for the church (Math.28). But to bring that into practice is hard and often disappointing for us.

Techniques

If we look at how other Christians spread the gospel, we see that, in many cases, man is put in a central position. In evangelistic television-services, it is often the person who preaches the gospel who has to make the show appealing by his appearance, his personality and his eloquence.

In mass-meetings you can see what the use of organisational skills - by telling a story about a conversion, a testimony. Much is done to create a pleasant atmosphere, and to be appealing so that people feel happy and are being entertained.

Sometimes, the tension which is created in meetings, has to lead to deep emotion when people present, decide to give their lives to Jesus.

In Pentecostal churches, a lot of attention is given to the suffering of man, with the promise that Jesus came, not only to free us from sin, but also from disease and other evil. That evil comes from the devil, and from God there is only goodness, so you can claim health and prosperity from Him. Those with a lot of faith, have a lot of success.

There is also a renewed interest in signs and miracles. Attempts are made at reaching the non-believing neighbour especially by way of emotions and the experience of miracles.

The Church Growth theology, also concentrates on man. The

doctrine of God's double predestination is dismissed and in its place one states that God loves all people on earth the same. God wants to save all people. Although, in the Church Growth movement one also recognizes that God does make a certain selection. He does this on the basis of the 'responsiveness' of man. He has a preference for 'winnable people'. The biblical doctrine of election has been altered to the conviction that God concentrates on the 'responsive elements of society'. It is our duty to find the 'winnable people' and tell them of the gospel. Especially in that category we should present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Then, people will come to belief in God.

There are many other ideas on church growth in our time. Think of people like Bill Hybels (Willow Creek). There are all kinds of concepts for building the congregation and making it grow (often putting into practise the correct notion that spreading the gospel is a task of the church community as a whole, and that it is necessary therefore, to mobilize the whole church for evangelistic purposes).

My reservation to the above mentioned approaches, has to do with the fact that it is exactly from those quarters that the reformed doctrine is often principally dismissed, because it is said to be infertile to evangelisation.

(3) What does the reformed doctrine stand for in this context?

When we think about our task to spread the gospel, we should start with God. It is about Him, from whom, through whom and to whom are all things (Rom. 11: 36).

All preaching of the gospel has its starting point in Him, who decided to save sinners through His Son. God the Father made that decision to save. The Son gave himself to make it possible. The Holy Spirit ensures that people are actually saved, by means of hearing the gospel, through faith and conversion. Everything finds its origin in God's eternal decision (the pactum salutis), is made possible by God and leads towards the goal that He set.

The preaching of the gospel does not start with us. It is God who sent his Son out of love. And it is the Son who continues the mission by giving orders to his apostles. They are sent out to the nations, to preach the gospel, to make them his disciples, to baptize and to learn to keep everything that the Lord of the church commanded. Christ makes this possible by pouring out his Holy Spirit in the church. The work of the apostles, therefore, continues through the church. Not only through the ministers, but by mobilizing all believers. The Spirit of Pentecost makes a prophet out of every believer, in order to confess the name of Jesus in the world.

This preaching does not have an uncertain ending.

God predestined who would be brought to faith with power, through the gospel.

Paul writes to the Ephesians that God chose us in Christ before the world was created, to be holy and blameless in his sight. He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, *according to the purpose of his will.*

When He sent his Son into the world, with the task to lay

down his life, and take it up again, this was not just to generally give the possibility of salvation. Christ came to lay down his life, not generally for those who would voluntarily choose Him, but for His sheep: for those whom the Father decided to give to Him.

Only this doctrine of God's sovereign election gives us the courage we need. Without this blessed assurance we would give up!

When we explain the importance of the work of the Lord Jesus, and invite non-believers to put their trust in Him, it is like telling someone who died to get up.

Act of God

That is what God tells us we are: dead in our transgressions and sins (Eph. 2: 1-3). An unspiritual person will not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. (1 Cor. 2: 14). The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so (Rom. 8:7).

How can the dead listen to the gospel? And how can God's enemies start to love Him? This can only happen when God Himself allows the gospel to come into someone's heart with such a power, that it opens the heart and he is truly resurrected from the grave.

Actually, every Christian should admit this as soon as he starts to pray. When he gives thanks for his own salvation and prays for the conversion of those who do not believe yet, he recognizes that faith is something to be *granted* by God. He recognizes the truth in Ephesians 2:8,9: 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.'

And He does not give this gift to everyone

He gives it to those He chose, in His sovereign pleasure. In accordance with the plan, that He already made before the creation of the world. 'He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.' (Eph. 1: 4).

We cannot understand Him in this (Isaiah 55:8), nor call Him to account (Rom. 9: 20). We can only worship Him for the miracle that He was willing to choose us, while He did not find any reason for this within us. This gives us reason enough to be eternally thankful. And He told us, that the

ones He chose, the church that He will bring to glory, form a great multitude, which cannot be counted, from every nation and race and tongue.

Courage

This gives us the courage to spread the gospel anyway. And not to shy away from something that seems impossible. When we tell the Truth, He can give our words so much power through his Holy Spirit, that the wall of resistance against Him will crumble. He opens the closed and softens the hard heart. He makes the will, which was dead, alive, which was bad, good. He does this through his Spirit (Canons of Dort iii/iv, 11). And for this He makes use of the gospel, which he commanded us to preach everywhere. He gives us his Holy Spirit. And He commands us to bring forth fruit in the power of the Spirit; also in the loyal preaching of the gospel. In the seeking of that which is lost, filled with love. And in the hard work to the honour of our king. For: "in a multitude of people is the glory of a king" (Prov. 16:28).

Let the promise of the gospel be heard universally and without discrimination to all people, telling them, that whoever believes in Christ who was crucified, will not die, but have eternal life. This gospel should be preached with the command to repent and believe (Canons of Dort ii, 5). Christ himself is in the centre, calling: "Come to Me".

The apostle says boldly, the elect obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Christ's sheep will hear his voice, and if any will startle away, let them go

In most cases where we preach to those who are not yet familiar with Christ, we would probably not start with election. If we use the image of a house where people will find salvation, then its foundation is God's decision to elect and its door is Christ. We will first show people the door and invite them to go in through it. We will not ask them to think by themselves whether or not they belong to the elect, but we will tell them to put their trust in the Lord Jesus. In Him they will then find the assurance of their election. (Compare R.B. Kuiper, p. 44).

This gospel provides courage to work at spreading the gospel in the 21st century: God is faithful, his plans do not fail.

Is the disputed confessional movement “Kein anderes Evangelium” (No Other Gospel), still necessary?

Interview with Rev. Hansfrieder Hellenschmidt, Idea nr. 70/2002, 19th June

Is there a change going on for the better in many areas of the state church? Almost all church leaders are talking about the need to evangelise and also about re-establishing the priorities for the work of the church again. This is a turnabout compared to the situation in the mid sixties, when, in the spirit of the times of student rebellions in West Germany, the churches were becoming increasingly critical of society, and turned away from the then still ruling conservative theology.

Many evangelical churches were formed as a reaction to this. The largest and most active of these was the confessional movement - “Kein anderes Evangelium” which went public in 1966 with a large group of followers (24,000) in Dortmund. Their leaders, Rev Rudolf Baumer, the Erlanger Professor of theology, Walter Kunne and Rev Paul Deitenbeck, were men of the confessing church in the third Reich (under Nazi rule). The confessional movement initiated the “congregation days under the Word”, set up places of study in many university cities and published an Information letter every two months of which there are 27,000 copies. In the mean time, a number of confessional congregations have disappeared. An interview with the Chairman of the confessional movement, Rev. Hansfrieder Hellenschmidt (Filderstad, Stuttgart) follows. Helmut Matthies interviewing:

Idea: is the dramatic sounding cry :No other gospel, still necessary today?

Hellenschmidt: What has been improved? Is it not so, that much has worsened? In that time, nobody would have dreamt of blessing homosexual relationships, which now have to become normal in the churches. Nor would it have been possible then to consider sharing religious services with Moslems. Even the refusal to allow women into church office was generally speaking still maintained, and was openly opposed by the chairman of the board of the EKD, the Bavarian Bishop Hermann Dietzfelbinger in 1973. Nowadays, theology students find themselves in trouble if they question this. There are no longer any state churches where someone can become a minister if he opposes women in office. Nor is there any improvement in the position of the church in relation to the Bible. The historical-critical theology, including scepticism and unbelief, is still very present alongside an ecumenical spirit in all the churches. Where is the improvement in the Bible orientated theology, in fact?

Idea: Has the whole campaign been pointless?

Hellenschmidt: It is not the consequences but the fruits which are decisive. For us, this is not about keeping the church going, but her renewal through the gospel. But what those fruits are will only be revealed in eternity. The Scriptures and confessions are central in our work. We are not preaching anything unusual.

No radicalism

Idea: Your opponents on the other hand, even within evangelical groups, say that the movement has become more radical in recent years.

Hellenschmidt: We have not shifted from the positions we laid in the foundation. The accusation that we have become more radical is unfounded and offensive. No group can prevent that certain people within it, make radical statements. But to criticise, therefore, the whole community of becoming radical is ungrounded. Our critics have never been able to prove that their criticism is true. We really could not go along on the road which ends with “group dynamic piety”.

Both are necessary: doctrine and evangelisation

Idea: Are the others still in the wrong then?

Hellenschmidt: Certainly not. Since the beginning, there have been two different directions within the confessional movement. The one group emphasises the need for scriptural teaching and the other emphasises evangelism. The second group has taken a step back and in part, left the confessional movement. Both directions need each other. Doctrine without evangelism becomes orthodoxy and evangelism without doctrine is likely to become superficial or one sided.

Idea: But whole national departments have stepped out of the movement?

Hellenschmidt: The confessional movement has a whole history of ups and downs behind it. Whole national departments never got off the ground or stopped. One has split away. They disliked the fact that we were critical of Willow Creek and of the new evangelical methods used by Pro Christ, and also of the evangelical spiritual care, because of its psychotherapeutic orientation.

Pro Christ and Ecumenicalism

Idea: Why do you oppose a movement like Pro Christ which is controversial amongst church leaders and evangelicals?

Hellenschmidt: the majority of confessional movement members take an active part in Pro Christ. They are not principally against evangelisation. We are critical though, of

the unclear relationship between Pro Christ and the Roman Catholic Church.

Idea: and why is this a problem?

Hellenschmidt: We are not principally against the co-operation between evangelicals and Catholics in some areas. Evangelisation is about winning souls for Christ. After that, the question arises as to which church the converts will belong. Can we, given the current doctrine of the Catholic Church, send them there? And if we do not do that, would the Catholic parish which had worked together with Pro Christ feel offended and discriminated against?

Who is the church today?

Idea: Is the Catholic church not a Christian church?

Hellenschmidt: We do not want to oppose her principal right to be a Christian church, but we must establish that she has separated herself even further from Biblical teaching on many points since Luther's time. In those days, she did not claim the infallibility of the pope, the ascension and perfection of Mary etc. As long as ecumenicalism is only imaginable under the headship of the pope and with certain actual catholic dogmas which are contrary to the reformation, we cannot agree to it.

Where the Cardinal is right

Idea: In the mean time, the Catholics claim that their church is more Biblical than the evangelical church if we talk about ethical questions, such as belief in the virgin birth of Christ. They accuse the Protestants of rewriting the Bible in a feminist friendly language, and making compromises in the texts surrounding Holy Communion. For evidence of this look at the last Church Day. Cardinal Ratzinger even declared that if people look at the Elbische Church that they cannot see a real church. Are people being honest if they then say - evangelicals are true to the Bible, and Catholicism is the same as, or full of heresy?

Hellenschmidt: I have to agree with the Cardinal there and not only if we look at the church in North Elbe. If I see how even in Wurttemberg, Christ's words of institution can be changed, this is scandalous. I have even come across a minister who started the celebration of communion with these words : "when the Lord Jesus lay on the Table in the night with his friends...". It is especially here that we emphasise that "no other gospel" may be taught. The Reformation lay the greatest emphasis on only where the gospel was declared faithfully according to the Scriptures and where the sacraments were given according to the scriptures. Where this does not happen, there is no church. The recognition of this is not a watering down of the confessional movement but a consequence of what the Reformers said.

Why do you oppose women in office?

Idea: 25% of ministers in the state church are now women. Why does the Confessional Movement still refuse women in office?

Hellenschmidt: We are glad of the women, who, as deacons, perform female functions and care of the sick. But we cannot

take our place in a church in which the Bible is seen only as a guideline, and which ignores the clear Biblical statements against women in offices responsible for teaching and proclaiming doctrine. The argument - these statements have no place in our times, could also be used by homosexuals to say that the verses which forbid homosexual practices are also no longer valid today.

Idea: but even in many evangelical churches, women in office are accepted. Many free churches also accept women ministers.

Hellenschmidt: But that does not alter the question of whether or not this is what the Bible states. I find it quite amazing that many who call themselves faithful to the Bible, are unusually silent in the question of women in office, or have completely changed standpoint. We cannot ignore the fact that Paul declares that it is about "a word from the Lord" that a woman may not teach in the church. If we want to be apostolic churches, then the apostle's word has to be heeded.

No place in the church?

Idea: But can you then still maintain your position in the state church? The EKD said in 1992: he who opposes women in office, departs from the fundament of the valid doctrine of the evangelical church. Should not all ministers of the confessional movement then leave the EKD?

Hellenschmidt: Since when in the evangelical church, have we had a binding doctrine such as in the Catholic Church? We have the Holy Scriptures and the confessions. This alone is our standard in accordance with the fundament of all state churches. As far as that is concerned, this is a presumption from the EKD to suddenly produce another piece of doctrine over and above this.

Ten free Confessional Churches

Idea: Some members of the 70 strong leadership of the confessional movement have drawn their own conclusions and set up their own free churches. In the mean time there are approximately 7 "confessing churches". Is this a trend in the movement?

Hellenschmidt: It is an initiative taken by a number of brothers who could not accept everything which has been made possible in the church today. It certainly has not happened because of any charge from the confessional movement. The confessional movement still sees its task within the state church.

Idea: And what about the ministers who oppose women in office? Do they simply have to accept that they can no longer be tolerated?

Hellenschmidt: If all ministers in the EKD who are against women in office on Biblical grounds would openly stand up for their opinion, the church leaders and synods would have to reconsider their decision. It is not right that in the question of women in office, a decision has been taken which goes against the Bible, despite much opposition. Ministers who could not accept this decision because they are bound to God's Word in their churches, have been threatened and obstructed in their functions. The church leaders should be reminded that the conscience has to be respected, and that

the otherwise expected protection for minorities ought to be practiced here. Should it be allowed that a minister, for whom God's word is holy, be removed from office or refused office, so long other elements of the confessions of faith are maintained and held up before the church? Here too, the church should be asked if she is prepared to accept the situation as it is.

Establishing a free church.

Idea: Taking into account all these difficulties and the fundamental criticism of the state church, people then have to ask themselves if it would not be better to set up an own church...?

Hellenschmidt: The splits which divide almost every free church, show that this is not a real alternative. Further, the history of the free churches shows that, frequently, after a few decades, she adopts all the wrong developments within the

state church, be it the historical/critical method or women in office. The solution is thus, not in the creation of new churches but that people within their own churches exclusively and undisputedly focus upon the Bible simultaneously confessing Jesus Christ in a worthy way and live in accordance with that confession.

Idea: Our thanks for this interview.

In turn, we too are grateful for this interview and for its correct reproduction.

Taken from Informations letter Aug. 2002, nr 213

The questions have been answered by Rev Hansfrieder Hellenschmidt, chairman of the Confessional Movement: "Keen anderes Evangelium". (No other gospel).

Seven Years, D.V.

The United Reformed Churches thus far

It will soon be seven years since the first steps were taken to organize a federation of churches now known as the United Reformed Churches in North America. It seems appropriate, then, to reflect on the way by which Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of the Church has led these congregations. But recounting the many blessings experienced also requires a humble confession of the sins which still stain our lives every day. Only this way will a reflection on the past stir us to rededicate ourselves to serve the Savior-King with ever-greater devotion.

The background and occasion for the decision to organize another federation of Reformed churches on the North American continent can be rehearsed in a few sentences. Such as rehearsal is not only appropriate for those who lived through the years before 1995 but is especially necessary for the children, young people, and a growing number who have come from other denominations with a strong desire to unite with a faithful church which without compromise seeks to proclaim and live by the sovereign grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Undergoing changes

By the late 1980s and early 1990s a growing number of Christian Reformed people - either with or without pastoral or consistorial leadership - broke ties with that denomination. This occurred after much soul-searching and prayer. For at least three decades the CRC had been undergoing changes that led to an "identity crisis," which was carefully and competently documented by Dr. Cornel Venema in the August 12, 2002 issue of *Christian Renewal*.

Before 1940 the Christian Reformed Church, under its leadership, was staunchly Reformed, as so many of its



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synodical decisions at the time demonstrate. But shortly after World War 2 strange winds began to blow within those broader assemblies. And by the 1960s and early 1970s two divergent groups could clearly be discerned - the one agitating for change, and the other seeking to maintain the confessional basis upon which those churches had been founded. Although the focus turned to the issue of women in ecclesiastical office - one synod modifying what the earlier synod had decided - the fundamental issue, often pointed out in many well-written articles - lay far deeper. It was the issue of the clarity, trustworthiness and absolute authority of all that the Bible clearly teaches, also on the creation of the universe and of man. Only when the repeated protests and appeals for two decades met with no favorable responses did congregations and many members leave the CRC.

Out of that unhappy situation the organization of the Alliance of Reformed Churches arose, prompted by the invitation of the Lynwood, Illinois consistory. Within a few years, after much discussion and preparation, a large number of those churches decided to organize as the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Psalter Hymnal

Already as a "preparatory" meeting several far-reaching decisions were taken. First, of course, on the official basis of the federating churches - an unswerving commitment to



Holy Scripture as the absolute authority for doctrine and life, and subservient to it the Three Forms of Unity. Also tentative approval of a Church Order, with recommendation of the use of the "Psalter Hymnal" (1957 edition) and the use of its liturgical formularies. "Charter membership" for churches and ministers was also left open until the first official synod, scheduled for the following summer. These uniting churches were also arranged in three "classes" or regional assemblies to meet either two or three times annually. With this, let us engage in a "statistical review," gleaned from the annual Yearbooks, the first one published in early 1998. Although these say little about the spiritual life and ecclesiastical faithfulness, they do remind us of the growth, both in number and membership of these congregations, including a few not yet fully organized.

1996 - 36 churches, 8,696 members
 1998 - 68 churches, 14,973 members
 1999 - 70 churches, 16,118 members
 2000 - 73 churches, 17,416 members
 2001 - 77 churches, 17,968 members
 2002 - 81 churches, 18,542 members

Presently they are served by 832 elders and deacons and 115 ordained ministers. Of those ministers 74 are pastors in congregations, eight or nine are engaged in outreach both at home and abroad, another four as professors of theology, three "on leave," and 26 listed as "retired" but who often help out when requested.

In Canada there are 31 URC congregations with 6,489 members; in the United States there are 50 congregations with 12,053 members. Twenty-seven did keep their church properties in agreement with the 1970 synodical decision of the CRC.

Some congregations have experienced amazing growth, even doubling their membership within four or five years. Two record a severe loss of members. Six small congregations, the latest Athens, Ontario, have disbanded. During this period five ministers of the Word have died. Meanwhile, at least six ordained pastors left for other fields of labor, two quite recently to serve the Reformed Churches in New Zealand.

From the statistics other encouraging factors can easily be gleaned, although some consistories fail to report as fully as requested. Internal growth can be somewhat measured by number of baptisms. Each year these are almost twice the number of live births reported for either Canada and the United States, while the number of recorded deaths in the URC is always somewhat lower than the national averages. Also the number received into membership each year far exceeds that of those who have transferred. A much smaller number are listed as "resignations" every year. To me it is not clear whether these people break off connection with any church or have simply left for another denomination. But a steady expansion to new areas continues. Recently in the Belgrade, Montana area a group of Reformed believers has organized a URC congregation. Also, serious efforts are being made to establish a congregation in Bellingham, Washington,



in Muskegon, Michigan, in Listowel, Ontario, and possibly in other communities.

Especially in the beginning, it was often said that the URC would become no more than an "asylum" for discontented old folk who resisted all change and longed to return to what the CRC was 50 or 75 years ago. But decisions taken at its preparatory assembly and confirmed by its first official synod clearly demonstrate that the URC is aiming to be a confessionally faithful Reformed federation striving earnestly to reform itself according to God's Word by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let anyone who still thinks the average URC consists largely of old people should attend one or two services. By far most of those present are young couples and families with three, six and even more children and young people who fill the pews twice every Lord's Day.

Until now - and hopefully this will continue for decades - the URC has resisted any attempt to place under denominational committees and boards any work which a local consistory and congregation can carry out, by Christ's commission and the Spirit's guidance. With many other ministers and members I, too, have witnessed the slow but continual drift in the CRC toward a hierarchical control by boards and their "experts." Often this has throttled far more than many are aware the zeal and strength of local congregations and the exercise of the office of believers. Also in this respect the URCs, together with many ordained ministers and members without any CRC connections, is seeking to develop a Reformed character unique in these times when all the mainline denominations are losing active members by the tens of thousands every year. Not a word or phrase of the above, however, is intended to "grieve" any faithful consistories and members of the CRC who are still striving to maintain that denomination's historic positions. For that this writer, now almost 87 years old, owes under God's providence far too much for the instruction and spiritual care which he has received.

In the above we have only mentioned what is observable and has been reported. Far more significant, indeed, would be careful and prayerful reflection, in so far as possible, on both its "strengths" and "weaknesses." These we may reflect on in a following issue of this magazine. But for every faithful member of the URCs the time is here not only to reflect on the way in which the sovereign Lord has also been leading these churches, but especially to rededicate ourselves to His service in gratitude for all the blessings received.

The dwarf and the giant

Two church federations in Brazil and the missionary work undertaken by churches in Drenthe

About 40 years ago, the Churches in Drenthe sought a missionary area. Because of the growth of the reformed colony in Monte Alegre, they chose Brazil, an immeasurably great land in Latin America. Centuries before it used to be a Portuguese colony and therefore a missionary target for the Roman Catholic Church. Brazil was one of the greatest and most Roman Catholic lands in the world. In all parts of the country, to literally all the uttermost extremes, the RC influence is noticeable, even though under the influence of the negro slaves imported from Africa, a weird and wonderful syncretism has come into existence - a mixed bag of Roman Catholic saints have blended themselves with the rituals of the African religions.

Emigrant Lutherans settled in the south and since the end of the nineteenth century, North American Presbyterians churches have been set up. Also from the beginning of the twentieth century, all sorts of charismatic and Pentecostal churches have gained ground. It is a land of great challenge!

History

The church in South Assen started to support missionaries some 35 years ago on behalf of the churches of PS Drenthe and two parishes of Groningen, that is since 1964 until 2001. The first missionary was sent out at the end of 1969. The



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original intention was to start work amongst students in the cosmopolitan city, Curitiba. Yet here there were not enough starting points to proclaim the gospel. The area of interest was therefore changed to the poorer districts in casu Colombo, an outlying area of Curitiba. Slowly a group of people began to take form here, but this was far from stable. This state of affairs stayed more or less the same for years. The growth finally began to take place when Brazilian evangelists were appointed to work alongside the missionaries.

In the year 2000 an important milestone was reached in the history of missionary work in Brazil. In that year, the church in Colombo, a district of Curitiba, became independent and was instituted. Church offices were also established and Rev Beto was ordained as the first minister.



A church service in Campo Alto (Colombo, Brazil).



The celebration of the Lord's Supper in the church at Curitiba.

The practical consequences of this for the church in South Assen was that there was no longer a need for it to keep supporting a missionary. Here ended a 35 year history. Since this time, the Missionary Deputies for Drenthe have been responsible for missionary work.

The dwarf

The institution of a church in Colombo has certainly had consequences for the nature of missionary work: the support of the church in Colombo has been given another character. The support given by the Netherlands at this moment takes the form of a church worker who will help establish the young church on her road to independence. As far as finances are concerned, the young church in Colombo has received financial support since March 2000 intended for the furthering of church life and the costs of the ministers training.

Federation of Reformed Churches in Brazil

In the same period that Assen began its work in Curitiba, a missionary work began in North East Brazil, initiated by the Canadian Reformed Churches.

For approximately twenty years work was being done in Sao Jose de Caroa Grande and Maragogi which later resulted in the starting of a church in Recife and Maceio. The work spread out more swiftly than in the south, resulting sooner in other independent churches. Good contacts were maintained between them. In July 2000 the initiation meeting of the Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil (IRB) was set up. Brazil itself uses the word church federation to describe the relations between the churches. The IRB includes the churches which have come into existence due to the missionary work of the Canadian Reformed Churches in North-east Brazil, the church in Unai and the church in Columbo. The Canadian and Dutch Churches have agreed and already supported the further development of the federation. The intention of all parties is that any necessary help is first sought within the

federation, IRB. If there is insufficient help available then the federation will call for help from the(now) Canadian and Dutch sister churches.

The giant

History

The church in South Assen, had already, on its own initiative on the basis of missionary strategies, decided to get better acquainted with the large Presbyterian Church in Brazil, a church with more than 500,000 members. This church came into existence in the nineteenth century thanks to missionary work of the North American Presbyterian churches. Missionaries had reported on the work of this church from the start of their activities in Curitiba. In the nineties, visitations were made to the leaders of this

church by Assen and Assen had to conclude that a church of our Lord Jezus Christ had existed in Brazil, long before the Netherlands began its missionary work there. On Assen's advice the GS of Ommen decided to pursue further contacts with the IPB to see whether or not church relations were possible.

In 1994, the leaders of the Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil (IPB) were invited to visit Assen. BBK deputies were invited



Evangelist Saulo goes into the district to preach the gospel.

as well. During this visit, the leaders of the IPB issued an invitation to the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated) to visit the meeting of the Acting Committee of the Supremo Concilio taking place in March 1994. The report of this visit which was presented to the General Synod in Berkel, 1996, was positive. A decision was taken to get to know each other better. This too was positive. During the second official visit in 1997, a decision was made for collaboration in missionary work (Accord for Missionary Co-operation), on the initiative of the IPB. The GS of Leusden approved of this in 1999.

One important detail is this: the IPB and GKV have come to know each other as churches which, in their own lands, desire to live according to the will of God. Both churches recognise that they have a primary responsibility in the land where God has placed them.

Two federations

Since 2000 the GKV maintains relationships with two church federations in Brazil. The question has been asked, if this is right - two church federations in one land? The question, of course, is easier to ask than to answer. In this we also have to remember that Brazil is larger than Europe. We would make it very difficult for our Brazilian brothers if we were to say there must only be one. From the beginning of the project, the missionaries and the members of the church to-be in Curitiba, knew that the IPB existed. IPB evangelists were even used by them.

When the missionary church reached the point of considering the federation question, they did discuss possible association. First and foremost because of the good contacts which had already been built up and because for some very practical reasons, they had sought support from each other. But there were also other considerations, especially because of the great diversity found within the IPB.

The IPB is a church with Presbyterian confessions of faith. The church government did want to strengthen the Calvinistic line but locally there were sometimes enormous pockets within the IPB which were under the influence of charismatic or Pentecostal movements. A few of the young IRB churches, especially in the north east, had had less positive experiences with these movements with the consequences that the IRB wanted to remain independent,



Meeting of the representatives from Brazil, the Netherlands and Canada to discuss the work in Brazil, a so called C3 discussion.

while maintaining contacts with the IPB. The IPB currently has a large missionary project in the south of Brazil (Rio Grande do Sul) for which there is much interest amongst the church leaders in Curitiba. Consistent with the Agreement for Missionary Co-operation, the Missionary Support in Drenthe has put forward a large sum for this work. In this way, there is regular contact between the IPB and the Mission Deputies in Drenthe.

The BBK deputies are currently busy preparing a three party consultation with the IPB and IRB.

Developing relationships

Under such circumstances, it is pretty much a matter of course that the IRB considers the question "In what way do we refer to the IPB?" Opinions about the IRB still vary. A report about the IPB, was brought to the attention of the IRB synod in September 2002. The conclusion of the report was fairly negative, the 'influence of the north' still being clearly evident. When the report was discussed, most of the members of the synod were not in agreement with its conclusions. The synod instructed the committee for maintaining relations to seek contact with the IPB in order to hold discussions together. This decision does not mean that the IRB has no questions about certain issues within the IPB. For this reason the IRB, during those discussions, happily concludes the following : that the IPB holds to Calvinistic confessions of faith, and publicly confesses the reformed faith, has publicly chosen against heresy and has decided to break relations with the PCUSA. The objections of the IRB will be discussed further and more information will be asked about issues which are not clear. The IRB will inform the IPB of her desire to exercise church fellowship with all who confess the reformed faith and all who practise that. A great reformed attempt on the part of the dwarf, to form a reformed witness together with the giant, in a land which is especially religious on the outside.



Rob van den Berg with his wife. Rob was sent out as church worker by the churches in Drenthe, the Netherlands and by De Verre Naasten.

Worship: Evangelical or Reformed?

One of the challenges of being Reformed in America is to figure out the relationship between what is evangelical and what is Reformed. Protestantism in America is dominated by the main-line Protestants, the evangelicals, and the charismatics. After these dominant groups, other major players would include the confessional Lutherans. But where do the Reformed fit in, particularly in relation to the evangelicals, with whom historically we have been most closely linked?

Some observers argue that the confessional Reformed are a sub-group in the broader evangelical movement. Certainly over the centuries in America, the Reformed have often allied themselves with the evangelicals, have shared much in common with the evangelicals, and have often tried to refrain from criticizing the evangelical movement. But are we Reformed really evangelical?

One area in which the differences between evangelical and Reformed can be examined is the matter of worship. At first glance, we may see more similarities than differences. The orders of worship in Reformed and evangelical churches can be almost identical. Certainly, both kinds of churches sing songs, read Scripture, pray, preach, and administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. But do these similarities reflect only formal agreement, or do they represent a common understanding of the meaning and function of these liturgical acts in worship?

If we look closely, I believe that we will see the substantive differences between evangelicals and Reformed on worship. That difference is clear on two central issues: first, the understanding of the presence of God in the service; and second, the understanding of the ministerial office in worship.

The Presence of God in Worship

The presence of God in worship may seem a strange issue to raise. Do we not both believe that God is present with his people in worship? Indeed we do! But *how* is God present, and *how* is he active in our worship?

It seems to me that for evangelicalism, God is present in worship, basically to listen. He is not far away; rather, he is intimately and lovingly present to observe and hear the worship of his people. He listens to their praise and their prayers. He sees their obedient observance of the sacraments. He hears their testimonies and sharing. He attends to the teaching of his Word, listening to be sure that the teaching is faithful and accurate.

The effect of this sense of evangelical worship is that the stress is on the *horizontal* dimension of worship. The sense of warm, personal fellowship, and participation among believers at worship is crucial. Anything that increases a sense of involvement, especially on the level of

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emotions, is likely to be approved. The service must be inspiring and reviving, and then God will observe and be pleased.

The Reformed faith has a fundamentally different understanding of the presence of God. God is indeed present to hear. He listens to the praise and prayers of his people. But he is also present to speak. God is not only present as an observer; he is an active participant. He speaks in the Word and in the sacraments. As Reformed Christians, we do not believe that he speaks directly and immediately to us in the church. God uses means to speak. But he speaks truly and really to us through the means that he has appointed for his church. In the ministry of the Word—as it is properly preached and ministered in salutation and benediction—it is truly God who speaks. As the Second Helvetic Confession rightly says, “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.”

God is also actively present and speaking in the sacraments, according to the Reformed understanding. The sacraments are much more about him than about us. He speaks through them the reality of the presence of Jesus to bless his people as he confirms his gospel truth and promises through them.

The effect of **this** understanding of Reformed worship is that the stress is on the *vertical* dimension of worship. The horizontal dimension is not absent, but the focus is not on warm feelings and sharing. Rather, it is on the community as a unit meeting their God. Our primary fellowship with one another is in the unified activities of speaking to God in song and prayer and of listening together as God speaks to us. The vertical orientation of our worship service insures that God is the focus of our worship. The first importance of any act of worship is not its value for the inspiration of the people, but its faithfulness to God's revelation of his will for worship. We must meet with God only in ways that please him. The awe and joy that is ours in coming into the presence of the living God to hear him speak is what shapes and energizes our worship service.

The Ministerial Office in Worship

The difference between the Reformed faith and evangelicalism on the presence of God in worship is closely tied to their differences on the ministerial office in worship. For evangelicalism, the ministers seem to be seen as talented

and educated members of the congregation, called by God to leadership in planning and teaching. The ministers use their talents to facilitate the worship of the congregation and instruct the people. The ministers are not seen as speaking distinctively for God or having a special authority from God. Rather, their authority resides only in the reliability of their teaching, which would be true for any member of the congregation.

The effect of this evangelical view of office is to create a very democratic character to worship, in which the participation of many members of the congregation in leading the service is a good thing. The more who can share, the better. The many gifts that God has given to members of the congregation should be used for mutual edification. Again, the *horizontal* dimension of worship has prevailed.

The Reformed view of ministerial office is quite different. The minister is called by God through the congregation to lead worship by the authority of his office. He is examined and set apart to represent the congregation before God and to represent God before the congregation. In the great dialogue of worship, he speaks the Word of God to the people and he speaks the words of the people to God, except in those instances when the congregation as a whole raises its voice in unison to God. We who are Reformed do not embrace this arrangement because we are anti-democratic or because we believe that the minister is the only gifted member of the congregation. We follow this pattern because we believe that it is biblical and the divinely appointed pattern of worship.

The effect of this view of office is to reinforce the sense of *meeting with God* in a reverent and official way. It also insures that those who lead public worship have been called and authorized for that work by God. The Reformed are rightly suspicious of untrained and unauthorized members of the congregation giving longer or shorter messages to the congregation. In worship we gather to hear God, not the opinions of members. The *vertical* dimension of worship remains central.

Conclusion

The contrast that I have drawn between evangelical and Reformed worship no doubt ought to be nuanced in many ways. I have certainly tried to make my points by painting with a very broad brush. Yet the basic analysis, I believe, is correct.

One great difficulty that we Reformed folk have in thinking about worship is that our worship in many places has unwittingly been accommodated to evangelical ways. If we are to appreciate our Reformed heritage in worship and, equally importantly, if we are to communicate its importance, character, and power to others, we must understand the distinctive character of our worship.

Our purpose in making this contrast so pointed is not to demean evangelicals. They are indeed our brethren and our friends. But we do have real differences with them. If Reformed worship is not to become as extinct as the dinosaurs, we as Reformed people must come to a clear understanding of it and an eager commitment to it. In order

to do that, we must see not just formal similarities, but more importantly the profound theological differences that distinguish evangelical worship from Reformed worship.

Our Worship as God's Work

Dr. Thomas Manton (1620-1677) tells us that when those who worship the holy God become through that worship holy themselves, they show forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9). God works grace and holiness in us, and then we declare him to be a holy God (*Manton's Works*, I, 84).

It is the Holy Spirit who purifies our worship by his continual work of sanctification. When we worship, having our minds enlightened by the Spirit, our lives cleansed by the Spirit, our wills moved by the Spirit, and our hearts warmed by the Spirit, then *our worship is transformed from being a mere human work into being a divine work*.

But if worship is a divine work, it is God's saving work among us. *It is God's work of building up the church*. Thus, the Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us that Word, prayer, and sacraments are *means of grace*—"the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption" (Q. 88). From the very beginning, Reformed theologians have been fond of speaking of worship as being *edifying*. Martin Bucer in particular liked to use this word to describe Christian worship. He had in mind that passage where the apostle Paul tells us that everything in the service of worship should edify the church (1 Cor. 14:1-6); that is, it should teach or build up the church. Worship which puts first the praise of God's glory, worship which is according to God's Word, worship which serves God and God alone, does in fact edify the church. *It edifies the church because it is the work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ*.

When, in the worship of the church, the Word is truly preached and the sacraments rightly administered, then God calls, teaches, and leads his people into a new way of life. It is in coming together for worship that we become the church (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:17-22). It is here that we are united together into one body by God's Spirit, that we are made participants in the coming kingdom. It is in worship that we hear the good news of our salvation, that we are saved from our sins and transformed into the image of Christ. Worship is the workshop where we are transformed into his image.

When we are thus transformed into his image, we reflect his glory. It is then, through the ministry of praise and prayer, the ministry of Word and sacrament, that we are transformed to offer that spiritual worship which the apostle Paul tells us is acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1-2). It is this which is meant when it is said that *worship is the work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ to the glory of the Father*.

-Hughes Oliphant Old
New Horizons, April 20

In Memoriam:

Rev. U. Nggandi Rawambaku (1943-2003) and Rev. Melkianus Bole Radjah S.Th. (1948-2003)

On January 30th 2003 Rev. U. Nggandi Rawambaku died in the Waingapu Hospital aged nearly sixty. Rev. M.B. Radjah died on February 6th 2003. He had been temporarily released from hospital in order to attend the funeral of his colleague Rev. Rawambaku. During this release, his condition worsened and he died on the way to hospital.

The passing away of these two ministers heralds the end of a whole generation. Rev Nggandi Rawambaku died of Parkinson's disease after a prolonged illness. He left a wife and seven children behind, the youngest of whom is 16 years old. Rev Bole Radjah suffered for years from diabetes. He is mourned by his wife and three daughters, the youngest of whom is 12 years old. Who were these two men? And which churches did they serve? Both were born of Christian parents in East Sumba. They were second and third generation Christians.

Rev. M.B.Radjah

Melkianus Bole Radjah was born a Sabunese, and into a family that had lived long at Sumba. Bole was educated at the school for Christian teachers in Waingapu and became a guru or teacher. Around this time two delegates from the Netherlands also visited Sumba after their trip to Irian Jaya. It was 1973. The Synod in the Netherlands wanted some clarity regarding the two groups of churches in Sumba, with whom the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated) maintained contact. These visitors, Rev. O.J.Douma and Rev.M.K.Drost, visited Rev Kondamara in Katoraku. In the sixties Rev. C.van Kalkerren had worked in that village, teaching those studying to be evangelists. After his repatriation, he continued to guide this work in Sumba from a distance. The lessons were then given by Rev L. Kondamara and the teacher/evangelist brother Tai Rawambaku from the neighbouring Lai Handangu. During the 1973 visitation, the course came under discussion and the men from Sumba requested that a number of their young men be allowed to go to the Netherlands for theological training. Bole Radjah was one of these.

From 1975-1979 he and a colleague studied at the Albertus Zijlstra reformed pedagogical academy in Groningen. Special emphasis was laid upon Dutch language, didactics and Reformed Education. Rev C.van Kalkerren provided extra lessons in many other subjects. When they returned in 1979, it was with a whole library of books and since they could now speak Dutch they could carry on their work in Sumba breathing new life into the evangelist course. This was restarted in 1979 in Katoraku, later Wai Marangu. M.B.Radjah taught there from 1979-2001. He was a stable factor in the course for many years.

From 1985 he became minister in Melolo alongside his teaching function. It is true that this church gave him much room to carry on his teaching function but even so, he did manage to do much in the church as well.

In 1995 he obtained a degree in theology at the High school in Surabaya. He made many visits for the churches. In 1983 he visited the churches in Irian Jaya, various schools in Java, Seoul in 1998 for the ICRC and also Australia for a language course and theological orientation course. He was chairman of the GGRI in 2001, and for many years he functioned as secretary for the BBK deputies.

Rev. U. Ngg. Rawambaku

Umbi Nggandi Rawambaku was one of the youngest children of Umbu Tay Rawambaku's of Lai Handangu.

His father was converted and thus Umbu Nggandi grew up in a Christian family. When all the other children had drifted away, Umbu Nggandi stayed behind to care for his parents land and cattle. He continued his father's open and critical attitude towards non-Christians. The family is of noble blood and has much influence on the island. He preached as evangelist in the church of Lai Handangu since 1977. He became a minister in 1987 and retired in 1998 for health reasons. Although he never dared to go far from home because of his poor health, he had much influence because of his sharp intelligence and natural wisdom. Because of his background, many listened to him. Many turned to him with family difficulties. Within the church he was often involved in administrative functions. He was treasurer for all the committees supported by the DVN : hospital, school and development projects in Yakerrsum. He was trusted by both Dutch and Indonesians.

In 1981 he started as a pupil of the training school despite being far older and wiser than other students. Simply by following the course, he managed to give the school a good boost.

At that point he already had a large family, and in later years the care required for studying children was by no means small.

The ministers in these circles have long received financial support from the Netherlands. Retired ministers also receive support since they cannot be supported by their own churches.

During his sickness, we have visited him a number of times. We have often departed in the awareness that it may have been for the last time. He made it clear during these visits just how much he suffered because of difficulties in the church.

We pray for both families and for the brethren in Sumba.

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**Colour brings out in full relief
– by means of slanting beams –
the map of all the world.
Increasingly far-reaching is the Light!
Over the quarters It will claim
an ever larger territory;
each corner of the earth
must yield to it ultimately.**

**The hands of the clock in God's hand
mark the Light's feats of conquest on earth
until in the fulness of time
every one of the four winds of heaven
shall be filled with the glory of the Lamb.**

Lux Mundi: Light shining upon this world.

*This cover was made according to the design
of J.P. Gootjes from Zwolle.*