

REFORMED CONTINUA

Magazine of The Reformed Churches (restored) of The Netherlands

Proverbs 8:32

- Volume 3 - February 2010 -

From the editor

December, 2009

We thank the Lord for the strength and the possibilities that He has given us to once again send you another magazine... a third issue already.

There is a strong need abroad, for information about our churches and we hope that this magazine answers that need.

To start with, we are able to tell you, with joy, that this past November was the start of our third General Synod. This time held in Emmen. This Synod will, the Lord willing, last until approximately June, 2010.

In this magazine we have included several current articles.

Dr. P. van Gulp wrote an article entitled: A different gospel in Kampen.

Also included is the sequel article from Rev. de Marie, which has the title: The heritage of the great reformation: is everyone reformed?

Then there is the third article in the series: A response from the Canadian Churches.

Brother Griffioen wrote the article: Wonders in the church.

One of our churches also submitted a contribution. This time The Reformed Church at Bergentheim/Bruchterveld.

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Along with this issue we also include a digital link. In this way you are able to find all the local churches, their addresses and other information on the website of The Reformed Churches.

If you happen to be spending some time in The Netherlands, then you can read on the website the times of the church services that you may wish to attend.

In this issue you will also find an article about our student society Virtute Dei, the activities that the youth organize, as well as a 'Compendious Summary'.

Finding appropriate articles, writing articles as well

as translating and correcting the articles is always a most thankful task.

The lay-out of the magazine is now carried out by brother Bos. We expect that through the adjustments that he makes the MBs will decrease and as a result the magazine will have less volume.

We hope that this third issue will be well received, that this work may be a blessing for the churches all over the world and that it may be an instrument used for the gathering work of God's church.

To His name be all glory.

Joh. Houweling, Bleiswijk



Dutch tulips, painting by Elly Houweling

A different gospel in Kampen

In Search of a Dutch Gospel

Recently several concerned ministers of the Reformed Church liberated, raised objections against Dr. S. Paas becoming a lecturer at the Theological University of Kampen.

Their objections particularly concern his statements written in his dissertation, which they judged as scripture criticism. That dissertation dealt with an Old Testament topic, but in it, according to them, he associated himself with theories of other theologians who criticise the Holy Scripture.

The objections were rejected and the appointment was maintained, so that Dr. Paas by now has started his work. This implies the forming of all students for their future task.

In the last year of their study, they receive the one year missionary congregation study as part of their master study. According to his opinion Holland is a mission country and every congregation has to be a missionary congregation. This means that the preaching has to be adjusted to the modern society and the church members have to be instructed how to be missionary in their daily life.

For that purpose the church has to be made more accessible.

That especially has to be expressed in the preaching, but also in the organization of the church services. The church members will have to radically change their course and abandon the style of approach used up to now in their daily contact with non-believers.

Paas will imprint all this into the future ministers. What this will mean for the churches, he has described in his book with the sub-title: *In search of a Dutch gospel*.

In his book he pleads for a total change in the organization of the church, in the preaching, in the liturgy, but especially in the message for the world and also for the congregation.

In short: According to Paas, the gospel with which the congregation has to be addressed and that has to be carried out into the world has to be a Dutch gospel!

Culture

According to Paas the church has to join in with the environmental and mental world of the people outside the church. The culture of the world has totally changed, therefore it is not possible to use the same method as in the past.

To begin with, the church will have to change her own culture. We must not have the assumption anymore that we can reach the world with the

gospel with our old opinions and methods. If the church wants to be a real church for the world, she will have to change radically. After all, the church of the past centuries is characterized as doctrinal traditional, closed and uncompromising.

For these changes, according to him, reorganization and a restructuring of the total organization of the church is necessary.

The same counts for the mission and evangelization because, according to him, the present structure of the church is not focussed on it.

Solidarity

Where does, in his opinion, the gospel preaching have to be directed at, not only in the evangelization, (he calls it mission) but also in the church services?

To enter into the culture of the world, the church must seek and be self-sacrificing. For this thesis he refers to the word of the Lord Jesus Christ when He spoke to His disciples after His resurrection, namely that He sends them into the world, as the Father had sent Him. John 20:19-22.

That is then, according to Paas: to search and save that what was lost. In the first place it should mean, that they should, just like their Master, show solidarity with the sick, the poor and the oppressed. After all, He was sent for that purpose, so Paas claims without any Scriptural evidence.

Mission and Mission

The Scripture speaks very differently about the sending of the Son through the Father.

Soon after His birth, the Lord proclaimed through His prophet Simeon, the purpose for sending His Son, Luke 2:34 (R.S.V.): *"And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against.'"*

That means that He reveals the antithesis in the world.

Mind you: not calling the antithesis to life, but in making the existing antitheses visible. The thoughts of their hearts are made visible by Him. That is what He now does through His witnesses, which we are allowed to be.

Therefore we are being warned: Ephesians 5:11,12: *"Take no part in the unfruitful works of the darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things they do in secret."*

That exposure takes place to show someone his own sins.

He wrote through his apostle Peter, that this same Christ, who is the corner stone of the church, is also a *“stone that will make men stumble and a rock that will make them fall,”* 1 Peter 2:7.

That is why He pointed out to His disciples and with that to us also, that He came to throw fire on earth. And also: *“For judgment I came into the world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.”* John 9:39.

John 3: 19 *“And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”*

That is how the Lord Jesus Christ met the world.

John 7: 7 *“The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil.”*

He then told His disciples that that would be their future task in the world and for that reason they have to take into consideration that the world will hate them also.

That is the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That also is the mission of the disciples. The contents and the character of the gospel preaching in the modern world.

Of course we do not forget what Christ’s work is towards the resurrection: searching for that what was lost, saving those that were given from the Father and giving His life for His own. Thus He works towards two sides.

Revelation 22:11 *“Let the evil doer still be evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”*

Whoever then restricts the preaching of the gospel to solidarity with the sick, poor and the oppressed and who only brings one side of the gospel, is disobedient to the sending by Him, even as He was sent.

An Old-Fashioned Gospel

According to Paas it is time for the church to stop with her ‘self-glorifying and manipulating gospel’. He is, therefore, of the opinion that he has to warn the church members for a feeling of superiority. Pointing out the wickedness of the people is in fact no more than a theological construction, a sort of model of a gospel that hardly fits in with any feelings of the receiver. He calls this typically western intellect, but at the same time old-fashioned.

We must not then start with the question of guilt in our approach to our neighbour, but with the relational aspect.

With this Paas wants it so that it links up with the enormous crisis in relationships that take place in

our culture. There is a powerful need for reliable and permanent relationships, that do not misuse or manipulate you.

Dead in Sins

The view of Paas is in contradiction with what the Lord revealed to us in His Word.

He has shown us more than once through the letters of His apostle Paul, from what a person has to convert.

The preaching of the gospel shows them who they are:

Ephesians 2:12 *“Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”*

Ephesians 4:17 *“Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.”*

Ephesians 2:1-2 *“And you He made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of the world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.”*

Therefore the opinion of Paas has to be called a serious delusion.

The reformed confessions - the Catechism, the Belgic Confession and namely the canons of Dort are very clear on this.

In this last confession, the Canons of Dort, a whole chapter is written on this topic, with the title: The corruption of man and his conversion to God.

For the modern man it too counts what is written in article 1 of that same chapter: *“That man brought upon himself in his mind, blindness, horrible darkness, vanity and perverseness of judgment; malice, rebelliousness and stubbornness in his will and heart; and impurity in all his affection.”*

And in art. 3 we confess about the same people: *“they neither will nor can return to God, reform their depraved nature, or prepare themselves for its reformation, without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit.”*

In the rejection of errors, 4, of the Remonstrants we read: *“The unregenerate man is not really or totally dead in sins.”*

Thus the statement of Paas is remonstrance!

Changed

Paas resists the conviction that people in the first place have to see that they are sinful and have

to convert. He calls that a human doctrine which is disguised as Christianity and against which we cannot resist enough in the theology and the practice of evangelization.

The confession according to the Scripture, that man has always stayed the same, namely; inclined by nature to hate God and his neighbour, is condemned by him as a stereotype portrayal of man.

With regard to this fundamental attitude it is, according to him, stupid to think that man of the twenty-first century is the same as that of the first, twelfth or the seventeenth century.

Instead of this the preaching has to link up with today's needs, themes, questions and fears.

In short: only in this manner is it possible to reach the modern man with the gospel.

This opinion of Paas, according to the Scripture and confession, has to be resisted strongly. We have to realize that the Lord has shown us the way long before this modern time. He who knows the present and surveys the future, whose Word abides forever, has given a description of sinful man of all ages, so also of man in our modern time.

We read about this in 2 Timothy 3. It shows us how man lives without God.

They are lovers of themselves - this is the spirit of humanism.

Proud and arrogant - that is: proud of themselves and their own achievements.

No honour for God or His law - that is: doing their own will and not accepting any authority above them.

Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Such is the secularized man.

That is how it started in paradise when man fell into sin. Even today it is still the Satan who leads into temptation, who caused the first man not to listen to the Lord, but let him to decide for himself what was good and bad.

That is how it started. That is still the same today. It is absolutely out of the question that it is an old fashioned concept.

Yes, we know the excuse: the former answers are not suitable in our modern time.

But the old and always new answer is that which Paul wrote to Timothy: stay with what you have been taught.

Is the modern man therefore, the same as those in ancient times? Yes and no.

Yes - as we have explained above.

No - In as far as "*the wickedness is multiplied, because man's love grows cold*". Matthew 24:12.

After all, sin brings forth sin. In this we see God's

hand, "*Who gives them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity*". Romans 1.

God sends "*upon them a strong delusion*", and they did not believe the truth in order to be saved. 2 Thessalonians 2:11.

Therefore, there is only one gospel: The call to repent to the living God in Jesus Christ.

The apostles continually emphasize the seriousness of the call to repent. After all, Christ is coming to judge!

The dead become alive

So Paas thinks that a different method is absolutely necessary in this modern time.

But in the first place it has to be about the contents of the message.

The congregation of now does not need a new method to testify in the modern world, but a message of repentance.

It is not a matter of communication, but believing the Scripture.

How can a man who lives unreconciled with God, who is an enemy of God, like the Lord has shown us, come back to life and return to God? How can a person who is dead in sin and crimes be brought to life? After all, "*the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritual discerned.*"

1 Corinthians 2:14.

Could the dead Lazarus (already 3 days) be made alive? Nevertheless, it did happen.

But that could only take place through Christ's powerful Word.

The dead do not hear anything anymore, but the Word of Christ called Lazarus back to life.

Do we still believe in the power of God's Word?

The call to be reconciled with Christ still has to be heard. And this can only be done through the preaching of the pure and undefiled Word of God.

The Preaching of Reconciliation

Christ Himself taught His disciples, and us also concerning the preaching to reconciliation. He spoke about it to His disciples after His resurrection.

Luke 24:44-48. He said to them. "*These are My words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.*"

Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third*

day rise from the dead, and that repentance to forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

This then means that it is written in the whole Scripture, also in the Old Testament, that the repentance to the forgiveness of sins has to be preached.

In the Acts of the apostles, we repeatedly find in short what the essence is of the gospel preaching of the apostles. That indeed was the call to repentance.

Already on the first day of Pentecost, Peter called to the multitude to repent. That is also the message to the gentiles. In Lystra the apostle cried out to the multitude who wanted to offer sacrifices to them, to stop these vain things and turn to the living God.

And when Paul took leave from the elders of the church of Ephesus he summed up his work as follows: *"How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."* Acts 20:20-21.

That was, after all, in accordance with his calling. In his defence before Agrippa he told him about his calling and what the Lord Jesus Christ had said to him: *"...to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."* Acts 26:18.

In his speech on the Areopagus he ends with the call to repent:

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a Man whom He has appointed, and of this He has given assurance to all men by raising Him from the dead." Acts 17:30-31.

To the Thessalonians: *"For they themselves report concerning us what a welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."* Thessalonians 1:9-10.

To the Corinthians: *"So we are ambassadors of Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."* 2 Corinthians 5:20.

Peter too, speaks of it when he addresses Cornelius,

his kinsmen and close friends: *"And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that He is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead."* Acts. 10:42.

This gospel of repentance to the forgiveness of sins is the God given gospel that must be preached. Only then, when the gospel is preached to all nations, will the Lord Jesus Christ return. - referring to Matthew 24:14.

Man is of himself a sinner, an enemy of God and thus lives in sin. Therefore we have the task to propagate God's word bright and clear. Uncomplicated, but not simplified.

Still the call has to heard: be reconciled with God. Lures should definitely not be used, such as the promising of real relations (Paas) or other aid for life. The LORD promises these.

But first of all there has to be a return to the living God.

Threshold

Lately we more often hear the call to make the church more accessible, to make it easier to draw people from outside the church.

The threshold of the church is the dividing line, the barrier between the church and the world. Lowering that threshold, breaking down that barrier, means that the church becomes friendlier for the outsider, directed more towards the consumer

But this always leads to the simplification of the matter concerned. Definitely no difficult words or church language!

Apparently this too is being heard in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Rev. Cl. Stam warned in an article in the Clarion against this development, which would affect the pure worship services.

His conclusion is, that in the worship services the whole congregation is addressed as being the body of Christ. The purpose of the worship services must always be and remain: the honouring of God's Name and the worshipping of Him who gathers, protects and preserves His people.

Conclusion

The appointment of Dr. S. Paas and the maintaining thereof, against the objections that were brought in, is decisive for the course of the Reformed Churches liberated in the future. With his view of being a missionary congregation, which he wants to bring into the Reformed Churches through his teaching to the future ministers, he puts dynamite under the foundation of the church.

This will, more than is the case now, deprive, not only in "Kampen", but also the churches of her scriptural character.

The modern developments proved to be unstoppable. And Paas will do his best in "Kampen" to change the churches. He does not only want to change the evangelization, but also the preaching of the gospel in the weekly church services.

In this manner the church has to become a missionary church.

That is now and in the future, the climate of the education in Kampen.

This then shall also become more and more the "culture" of the Reformed Church liberated.

Yet, in Kampen, they dare to maintain that with all the modernization, the church has remained fully Reformed.

As opposed to this gospel of Paas, this so called Dutch gospel, we want to listen to the only gospel that has been so clearly revealed in the whole Scripture by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Only through the preaching of that gospel can the church of our Lord Jesus Christ be preserved and built.

Only the preaching of that gospel can save the world and bring it back to the service of the LORD.

Dr. P. van Gorp



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The heritage of the great Reformation: is everyone reformed?

"That they all may be one"
- John 17:21a

Is everyone reformed?

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An appeal to all true believers

On October 31 it is reformation day. A day to look back at the great work of the Lord in the gathering of His people which He started in the 16th century by means of the reformation, and from there continuing His church gathering work. The reformed church that came out of this reformation was allowed by grace to be presented as church of Jesus Christ. Then comes the question: where do we find this church today? Where is that church that Christ liberated from the shackles of covenant desertion and has preserved ever since?

Recognizing the Reformed Church

To be able to answer this question - which is a question of life - you will have to know how you can recognize the Reformed Church as Church of Christ today. You will meet with various pretensions which denominations offer to justify their claims. Some of these are:

Is it a matter of "definition" what you call yourself as church-denomination? When you call yourself Reformed, as so many others, look at the common bond that keeps you together. This concept is followed by the E.O. (Evangelische Omroep) in the round of interviews Mr. A. Knevel held with the title "All Reformed". The line of thinking that the series followed was *"may the situation continue where so many church institutions are calling themselves reformed?"* Should they not all become one? That would form a strong witness in this world. This is how Rev. A de Snoo answered the question *"how can we give account to God for this situation?"* at an interview as chairman of the synod of the liberated reformed churches (GKV in the Netherlands).

Does the right to the name "reformed" have anything to do with origin or where you came from as a church institute? Is there a straight line from the great reformation in which legal documents prove you to be the church of the fathers and therefore can claim title to that name? This kind of thinking can be found in the Netherlands

Hervormde Kerk, (the state church - continued in the PKN) Some leaders solemnly declare that they have sworn faithfulness to that institute.

Or is the claim to be church of Christ more a matter of "experiencing" your faith with others? Then you have the idea of being Christ's church just because it is good to be together. Together to share in emotions and so called spiritual experiences, for example, because it gives the feeling of coming together in the name of Christ as pointed out in Mathew 18:20. So we find the chairman of the synod of the PKN (Protestant Church of the Netherlands), Dr. B. Plaisier, speaking to the Pentecostal movement, which has millions of members worldwide, on the occasion of its 100th anniversary; *"we are together all members of the body of Christ."*

Or, as we hear more often nowadays, do we have to come to that realization that the Church of Christ simply has no address anymore? We live in a time that you must have a concept of Church, or specifically of true Church, as being a utopia that has no real significance until the last day. Now believers are to be found everywhere, inside and outside of established church denominations. Together these true believers form the church because they all believe in Christ and so they are bound together. This occurs even though they do not even know each other at all and do not have any real communion. There is an invisible church of individuals that find their way to the multitude that no one can count. This is the direction for example of the slogan *"the E.O. is more than a radio and t.v. broadcasting system."*

Or do we have to state that in order to lawfully claim the name "reformed church" there has to be defined "criteria" by which the claim can be tested and whereby others can investigate this claim. Only this method is in accordance with Reformed scriptural principles. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession outlines the marks of the true church for this very purpose. Therefore the Three Forms of Unity or the reformed confessions could be presented as criteria for the concept of calling yourself "Reformed". The confessions themselves are not additional marks, for the Forms of Unity are only a basis because they are in accordance with Holy Scripture. Therefore their function is

understood as distinguishing the marks of the true church. In short *"it governs itself according to the pure word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only head"* (Article 29, Belgic Confession).

What is reformed?

Now a-days we often see that people easily let themselves be guided by what they see around them when they consider the question of the whereabouts of the true church of Christ. They will probably come to the conclusion that there are believers in all kinds of denominations that call themselves reformed. Also in some churches good sermons are still heard. The great danger there however, is that their subjective impression becomes the measuring stick as to whether they feel at home somewhere or not. That impression can depend on many things, the pleasant atmosphere, the number of members, the organ and the singing during the worship service or the tranquility or enthusiasm among the membership. Then they come under the considerations mentioned in 1 to 4 above. However the important question is not whether we feel at home but where does the Lord call us. Just for that reason the Lord uses His objective norm, the only lawful measuring stick of His word. That norm contains the marks on which you can recognize the Church of Christ (Article 29 B.C.) and consequently where the call of Christ commands you to join (Article 28 B.C.). A reformed church, if it wants to be called such, has to show as church that it is obedient to its Head. That it only wants to be guided by Him in the pure preaching of the word, the pure administration of the sacraments and also church discipline. A truly reformed church will in all things govern itself according to the pure word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it. This has to be evident by what it says and by what it does. Then it will become evident that the reformed confessions, which faithfully summarize the word of God, actually function. The forms do not act as ornaments or historical documents but have a living function that is both foundational and normative. It is also not Reformed for a local church to remain in a federation that has become unfaithful to the word of God because that local congregation is co-responsible for what happens in that federation (Article 31 C.O.). It is ultimately a federation where everyone shares the responsibility.

Multitude of Reformed Churches

But how do you look at the multiplicity of reformed

church denominations. You can not deny their existence. It is something you have to deal with, also as this is a part of the brokenness of this world.

In the course of time people have had various ideas about it. In the 20th century there was much ado about the opinions of Dr. Abraham Kuyper. Central in his thinking was the concept of pluralism, or the pluriformity of church institutions. The many different churches all showed some of the essence of the reality of the church as body of Christ, according to him. In this way, according to Kuyper, the idea that the truth of God is too rich for one church would be justified.

"The treasure of salvation in Christ would be too valuable on account of its' divine character to come to full expression in one human form" (A. Kuyper: Encyclopedie der heilige Godegeleerdheid, Deel II, 2e druk, p. 242). This appears as beautiful language but we do not find it in scripture. Another idea that is complementary to it is that of the invisible church of which Kuyper was also a fiery defender. We will also have to say that this is not scriptural.

Indeed there are invisible aspects to the church. We don't know who the hypocrites are, which are in the church but not of the church, and we don't know who the elect are who may inhabit the heavenly Jerusalem. Some of these may still momentarily reside outside of the church. We cannot oversee the church in its entirety. Nor can we know how the situation is in all the churches of the world, not in the past let alone in the future. But these are not the things that define how we should act, they belong to the hidden things of God. We have to direct our attention to what the Lord has revealed and what is our calling according to His will. Then we see concrete local churches, each with its own address, where the members come together. There Christ gathers His church. He calls us there in particular, we are not allowed to stay away from it.

The idea of the invisible church

With the invisible church, where the members are spread out over all kinds of denominations, you may regret that there is no unity. For others there is something attractive about it, as with Kuyper who saw beauty in the great variety in the churches. They all put a different emphasis

on the faith. With one there is a strong emphasis on one thing (for example enthusiasm, or strong social consciousness) and with another a strong development of something else (e.g. doctrine). It is no longer necessary to measure with a standard of measurement. There is talk of more or less pure churches, but there is no principle difference, only small graduations. Others are saddened by the separated existence and push for unity or assimilation. In both cases they say: *“accept one another and work together as much as possible.”*

These ways of thinking have grave consequences for the attitude of believers. It is a view that allows members to stay in a denomination that no longer proclaims the true word of God. Here the marks of the true church will be or are already lost, and who will be able to show that there is “still much good” here? People so easily forget the danger that in exactly such a church they or their children will lose the true faith. The ideas of pluriformity and invisible church will cause the true church to abandon the urgency of its task. Then it no longer understands its task of calling believers, also those in other denominations, to separate themselves from what is not a church or is no longer church. People no longer say “do as we do” but become relativistic, and let the true church gathering work of Christ through the service and labour of men come to failure. They end up without norms and call for the development of one large church, the way of the World Council of Churches.

Maintaining the unity of the Reformed Church

The scriptures teach something completely different, namely that the Lord gathers where His Word and Spirit have authority. To rule is to have authority, and that consequently means that the Lord wants concrete unity. This means in the first place that it is exactly the true local church that is bound to Christ (Revelations 1-3). In this way the scriptures teach us the need for a solid church federation, a concrete communion of saints. No federation where churches exist beside each other and loose from each other will remain as churches of the Lord. On the contrary the Old Testament shows us, at the political separation between the two tribes and the ten tribes, the God ordained unity of the church (1 Kings 18:31, 2 Chronicles 30:5). The New Testament teaches that the unity of true believers is a gift from the Lord and is a command for His disciples (Acts 4:32, Ephesians

4:4). Therefore also our Belgic Confession, which originates from the time of the Reformation, confesses the unity of the visible church. Calvin says of the true church that its unity must be maintained because she is the mother of all the saints (Institutes, Book 4, Chapter 1). He explains this for the real and visible church (Galatians 4:26). In Article 28 of the Belgic Confession the church and her members confess that it is the calling of all believers to join “this” assembly at each place where God has placed her. Therefore they have to separate themselves from those who do not belong to the church. The purpose of this mandate is the safe keeping of the unity in the local church and to serve the upbuilding of the brothers according to the gifts that God has given to all members of the same body.

Calvin’s Institutes IV, 1, paragraph 3, states *“It is as if it was said that the saints, gathered in communion with Christ, would by this definition divide among each other the good things God had bestowed upon them.”* It cannot be said more concretely, the unity that must exist between the local churches of the federation, and also in relationship with churches abroad depends on it.

The norms that are in place for the local church are mentioned in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. Here we confess that the church and its members believe they have to discern diligently and very carefully from the Word of God which church is the true church. What is meant here is that the Body of Christ and the communion of the true church must be distinguished from all sects that claim to be church. Sects or sectarians, are groups and denominations that are not bound to the true church but still claim to be church. The clear language of the Belgic Confession renounces any idea of pluriformity of the church or any idea of an invisible church being spread out over many denominations.

As theologian Prof. Dr. K. Schilder fought for the pure doctrine of the church all his life. The basis of his thinking was obedience to the Lord and to His Word. Concerning the call to join the true church he always pointed to the necessity of covenantal obedience (J.J.C. Dee: K. Schilder, oecumenicus, Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1995). He suggested that being unconcerned about remaining in a church federation that wandered away and remained away from the word of God was not good.

There is no covenant sealed with an institution but with Christ and God the Father. Unconditional faithfulness is required to the head of the Church, to follow Him and to preserve His pure Word. There is absolutely no requirement to be faithful to unfaithful church office bearers in an unfaithful church (Article 7, Belgic Confession).

Not leaving the Reformed Church

The unity that the Lord gives and asks from His church is a unity in truth. Also in this respect He requires covenantal obedience from believers. This covenantal obedience also means that you cannot leave the church where the truth of God's word is preached purely, where the sacraments are properly administered and where discipline is exercised (Article 28 Belgic Confession). Calvin had to make an important step of faith when he liberated himself from the Roman Catholic Church, a step of covenantal obedience. He defends this act extensively in his writings. Calvin also warns earnestly and extensively in his Institutes against seceding too easily from the church (Book 4, Chapter 1, paragraph 12-29). Particularly he attacks the Donatists and Anabaptists who make the holiness of the church a primary mark of the church. This means that if they think there are any sins or shortcomings in a church it would not be a true church anymore. Calvin shows that these people do not see that sinners, who only live by the forgiveness of sins in Christ's sacrifice, make up the church. In the church there are both grain and chaff, wheat and weeds, true believers and hypocrites (Matthew 3:12, 13:25). These things ultimately do not affect the lawfulness of the church if there is the true preaching, proper use of the sacraments and church discipline. They are a sign that we all live by grace also in the church that will never be perfect on this earth.

When people leave the church of Christ because of ecclesiastical disunity due to assumed injury of one's own rights, it shows that there is an improper understanding of the church gathering work of Christ and the mercy of God. Thus they lose the right to call themselves Reformed.

Remaining Reformed

Being reformed is nothing other than that people bind themselves in covenantal obedience to the pure word of God and following Christ as the only Lord of the church in unity of the truth. It follows then that we flee to the Lord with all our sins and

encourage others also to go to the Lord, Who is always inclined to forgive.

Let all those who want to remain reformed show that covenantal obedience that the Head of the church requires in His church gathering work by joining or remaining in the true church. Then we join in building up the house of God which is the habitation of the Holy Spirit. This building is built on the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets, of which Christ is the cornerstone. Then everyone can use the gifts given by the Lord in such a way that the church, as holy temple, is gathered together and grows in Christ her Head to the honour of God the Father (Ephesians 2:20-22, 4:15,16).

*From De Bazuin, Volume 2, Number 38
by Rev. S. de Marie*



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Youth activities

The organizing of "Good Start" and Skating

Firstly I would like to introduce myself to you. My name is Ciska Admiraal, I am 19 years of age and am a member of The Reformed Church at Hasselt, The Netherlands. I was asked to write something about the organizing of a day of skating and of the "Good Start". Let me begin with the latter. You will most probably think: "Good Start"? What's that? At the beginning of each year we organize a new year's reception. Here we can wish each other a happy new year. But that is not the main objective. The main objective is to begin the new year together with God. Through Christ we are bound together in the communion of saints. Surely nothing goes above beginning the new year together in that unity? In that way you have a GOOD start of the new year. There we immediately see the name: "Good Start".

A lot has to be organized before a "Good Start" can take place. Over the past four years I have been in the organizing team and I enjoy doing it. After the summer holidays we, as organizers, get together to discuss all that has to be done. We allocate the tasks and set a date. This is mostly on the first Saturday in January. After the date is set we hire a location, and also make a list of possible brothers from the congregations who we think are suitable as speaker. One is chosen and he is then approached by one of us to ask if he is willing to be the speaker, and if he himself will decide on a topic or leave it to the organizers. When this is done we send a notice to all the local church bulletins announcing the date and the location of the "good start" and with a request for all those interested to respond by putting down their names for participation. We then compile a shopping list and order the meal. When all this is done we wait for responses.

About two months before the "Good Start" is to take place we meet again to calculate the costs, for there is a charge to cover costs. Once again we send a reminder to all local church bulletins and also the church magazine 'De Bazuin' for youth to put down their names for joining in. This time we also mention the speaker, the topic and the costs.

If we ourselves have to think of questions and points for discussion, this is the time we do it. We also re-check the planning for the day so

that everyone knows what he or she has to do.

Then the day arrives. The organizers are present early to get everything ready. Seating, cake, coffee and tea. We also divide everyone into groups of about 8 people.

From 1 pm the youth starts to arrive and they are welcomed with coffee or tea with cake.

At 1.30 pm the day is officially opened with Scripture reading, singing and prayer, then a word of welcome. The speaker is then given the opportunity to present his paper. After he has finished, we split up into groups and discuss the propositions and questions. This takes about 20 minutes. After a 10 minute break we continue the discussion, this time a plenary session of about 30 to 45 minutes. The discussion is closed with singing and prayer, at the same time asking for a blessing for the meal that is to follow. The meal lasts up to 1½ hours. The speaker is thanked for his contribution and this is followed by Scripture reading and prayer, giving thanks for the day and for the meal. From here on each is free to go. Mostly everyone leaves by about 9 pm.

Now something about organizing a day of skating. This does not involve that much work. Usually a day is organized during the Christmas holidays. We decide upon a day and then we look for a venue where we can have a meal together after the skating. When this is found reservations are made. A notice is sent to all bulletins and the church magazine inviting the youth to join in. Again we wait for response. Everyone is to bring his or her own lunch. The organizers supply drinks and a snack.

On the actual day we meet in the hall of the skating rink. Entrance fees are paid via the organizers. As soon as the rink is open for the public the skating fun can start. At about midday we have lunch and then it's back to the skating. Between 4 and 4.30 pm the skating rink closes and so it is time to leave. We all meet outside and find a spot in the available cars ready to head for the place for our meal. The meal which is opened and closed with prayer is enjoyed by all and around 6 pm everyone is ready to go home.

I hope I was able to give you an impression of the things we organize and what has to be done for this.

Ciska Admiraal, Hasselt

Introducing you to ...

the congregation of De Gereformeerde Kerk of Bergentheim/Bruchterveld and environs

We are a congregation of about 160 members. This includes 55 baptised members. The youth is thankfully well represented. Over the years many infants have been born. Even now there are four sisters happily expecting a baby. In all this we see the blessing of the Lord. The newly-born account for the growth of the congregation, from outside there is no growth.

Bergentheim/Bruchterveld lies in the north-eastern part of the province of Overijssel. There are still many churches in this area, but the flourishing of many of these churches is diminishing. For the rest the area has mainly a rural population.

We are known as the congregation of Bergentheim/Bruchterveld because initially most members came from that area. A while later we could welcome many members from Hardenberg.

The Sunday worship services are now held in a church building in the small village of Lutten, which is about 8 kilometers from Hardenberg, hence we all travel to church by car. The church building that we rent from another church denomination has several meeting rooms. Catechism classes for two youth groups are held here every week. Besides that, there is also a small group who attend confession catechism classes. Then there are also various associations: two youth clubs for the 16-year olds and older, three women's and two men's associations. We also have a mixed association attended by brothers and sisters who live in the vicinity of the city of Hoogeveen.

Each year the activities committee organizes a number of social events for our congregation, such as a day where sporting activities play a major role for socializing. Also an afternoon is organized for the senior members and a special activities afternoon for the younger youth.

However, in all this, Gods Word has the central place; each Sunday but also at congregational meetings held several times a year.

We do not have a minister of our own, but when we celebrate Holy Supper or baptism is to be administered, Rev. S. de Marie leads the worship services. In this also we see the blessing of the Lord. In spite of the small bond of churches, we are allowed to and we must quietly help build the church of Christ, in expectation of that great day, when the Head of the Church will come to gather his people, his Church, to serve God in complete perfection.



A.Hutten, preses

Wonders in the Church

Some congregations in our bond of churches are very small, so small that members at times have grave doubts about it; can this be kept up? When there are also people leaving or withdrawing themselves, we are inclined to lose courage.

But, for that matter, does the Reformed Church “old style” still have a future? The gathering twice on Sundays, and listening to long sermons, may need to be regarded as out of date.

Is an Evangelical Congregation, with excitement, and beaming persons, not more fitting in the 21st century? There the attractive Christianity is practiced to within the gatherings.

Many questions concerning the Church and the preaching, that must already have been seen by the reformed Rev. J.C. Sikkel, caused him to write his book in three parts with the title “Troost Mijn Volk” (Comfort My People) in the years around 1900.

Questions about the Church, they seem modern, but they prove to be very old.

Zion restored in glory

The book “Troost Mijn Volk” follows the prophecies of Isaiah as from chapter 40. In this and in the following chapters the people in exile are spoken to encouragingly. Those, that are far away from Jerusalem, let them not be in despair.

We will follow this encouragement from Isaiah 49: 17 to 26. (RSV)

17. Your builders outstrip your destroyers, and those who laid you waste go forth from you.

18. Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather, they come to you.

As I live, says the Lord, you shall put them all on as an ornament, you shall bind them on as a bride does.

The comfort for those in exile, points towards the restoration of Jerusalem, of Zion, of the Church. Jerusalem, left behind as a “Mother deprived of her children”, shall again welcome her sons. Those led away from her, shall again make haste towards her, whilst the enemy goes forth from her. It will be a joyous time, when Jerusalem will again be inhabited and may proudly show off her overcrowded city.

This is glorious for those in exile, for they and their

offspring form the “children that make haste” (KJV) toward her.

This is comfort for Zion, comfort for the Church of all times.

Does our Congregation give a deprived impression? The Lord does not forget His people, and at His time He will provide a joyful turn.

19. “Surely your waste and your desolate places, and your devastated land - surely now you will be too narrow for your inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children born in the time of your bereavement

will yet say in your ears:

‘The place is not too narrow for me; make room for me to dwell in’.

Then you will say in your heart:

‘who has borne me these?’

I was bereaved and barren,

exiled and put away,

but who has brought up these?’

Behold I was left alone;

Whence then have these come’.

Zion deprived of children, marvels at the goodness of the Lord.

The city will again be overcrowded. From where will they come?

The exiles, still far from Jerusalem, must have rejoiced at the hearing of this news of the future. Are they not the ones who shall return to Mother?

We also are joyful when we read of the care of the Lord. He shall not forget His people, for He cares for the well-being of His people. Would there be anything too marvelous for the Lord? Would also the smallest congregation not be able to become overfull, so that the place is too small?

22. Thus says the Lord God:

“Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples;

and they shall bring their sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried

on their shoulders.

23. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers.

With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you and lick

the dust of your feet.

*Then you will know that I am the Lord;
those who wait for me shall not be put to shame”.*

How unimaginable for the people in the distant Babylon. What a wonderful future. Highly placed persons will give Zion honour, unthinkable wonders!

The Church itself rejoices with those in exile, because he who expects the Lord shall not be ashamed.

*24. Can the prey be taken from the mighty,
or the captives of a tyrant be rescued?*

25. Surely, thus says the Lord:

*“Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken,
and the prey of the tyrant be rescued,
for I will contend with those*

who contend with you,

and I will save your children.

26. I will make your oppressors

eat their own flesh,

and they shall be drunk with their own blood,

as with wine.

Then all flesh shall know that I am the Lord

your Saviour,

and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob”.

The close captivity says nothing for the children of Zion, for the Lord Himself will see to it, that the captives are set at liberty by a King Kores.

Oppressing tyrants will go down in mutual battle. Zion will be restored in its original glory. Likewise, the Church of the new Covenant may also count on His true promises, for the sake of the Name of the Lord.

Gods Church Comforted

We have followed the Bible passage, and will now, with Rev. Sikkel in the background, see what the Lord has to say to us.

We begin by asking ourselves, whether, in Isaiah 49, the Lord addresses and comforts separate individuals, the odd believers here and there.

Would these words of God be meant for the odd person in difficulty, maybe stuck in business, or worrying about one or other problem?

Is it he or she that is addressed, who is to sit for a difficult exam, or who is unemployed and cannot find work, or maybe has an unstable health?

Or would such a Word of Scripture be especially meant for a devout brother or sister, who wishes to be strengthened spiritually?

In general we may know, that support may be derived from every word of the Scripture, in whichever situation we may be.

The businessman, the student or whoever, all bible readers wherever they may be, know themselves strengthened by the Lord, when they meditate on a part of the Scripture.

Yet, saying this, the question remains: how is the read section thought-over, and what does one do with it. Is the read part only applied to one's own situation, concentrated on prosperity in business, improvement of own health, and successful work applications?

If that is so, Gods Word is wronged, and the comforting words, meant for Gods people, are merely used for one's own success and own limited purpose.

No, the Word of the Scripture, in first instance, wants to encourage and comfort the Congregation, the Church of the Lord.

The Church will be restored by the Lord, and brought to prosperity. That was promised to the exiles, and that is what also counts for the Zion of today.

When the businessman, the student and whoever, makes an appeal on Gods promises from the Scripture, then each person must visualize himself in the middle of the congregation.

From that place and situation, as member of Gods People he will call unto the Lord and pray for help and deliverance.

By that Word of God the Church is addressed and comforted, the promises are wholly valid for Gods faithful Church, of which the individual may know himself a member.

This membership is decisive for listening and praying.

As long as everything goes well in the congregation, as long as the church council may be prosperous, as long as the brothers and sisters, young and old, may be safe, safe from apostasy and temptation, then, - if need be, my business may become bankrupt, I may fail my exams and someone else may receive the nice job. As long as the church may thrive, then I shall, in my psychological distress, or in my serious illness, ask for support and help from the Lord, in order that I do not impede the well-being of the congregation, but through my willing suffering shall support the building up of the faith of the brotherhood.

Save Gods Word

So we see that the Lord firstly speaks to the Church, and there-in and there-after to me personally. Now we want to consider that we must use the Word with great care.

It is easy to take a verse from the Bible and use it to our benefit. A verse for this and a verse for that. But, can we do that?

Can we cut the text off at its root? Can we select words spoken to certain persons, in certain circumstances, at certain moments, and loosely take it out of its context and give it a meaning of its own?

Therefore the following quotation: (translated)

"We have cut-off wildflowers left over, hay that no longer knows of a field, that knows no sky, no sun and no wind anymore; - such people have an intense small Bible left over, or rather, no Bible, but some cut-off texts;" (295)

Cut-off wildflowers, removed from their own environment, loose texts must do the work. By using these same 'flowers' over and over again, one has a Gospel left over that fits on a matchbox. It seems possible, but what is left over is no longer Gods Word. Using the Bible in this manner, appears innocent and we think that the Evangelical congregations are faithful to the Bible, but what one is doing is damaging the Word, it is demolition of the rich Gospel.

Even if one believes the Bible from cover to cover, one is no longer faithful to the Bible.

The wonder

Our life is dependant, not only on sufficient bread, but namely of the speaking of God.

In Deuteronomy 8:3 we read:

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. (RSV)

Everything that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord, the Word of God, is life.

How sad it would be if we, in a self-willed manner, would hinder and make impossible the speaking of the God. That is what we do in one way, we

cut the wildflowers, pick texts, and in the other way dedicate these products for our own private prosperity. It is a common approach, but the "speaking of God" is abolished.

The wonder of Gods speaking only finds its full glorious way there where Gods Congregation is gathered, and where the full Word is preached.

Rev. Sikkel says of this:

"This is the only pure principle of Scripture explanation, the only pure principle for the preaching of the Word. In the Temple, in Gods Church, the separate living out of the full Word that comes to the Covenant people of the Lord, the Congregation of God, must receive light, comfort and guidance." (296, translated)

Our separate, individual life, each of us personally, receives the Full Gospel in the middle of the Congregation.

Then Gods speaking finds a free way through, and the congregation revives. Christ is preached in all his glory, and richness, and we receive light, comfort and guidance.

Mother of children

We have to be in the Church, under the administering of the full Word. If we hold on to that firmly, then we may regard the words of Isaiah 49 as spoken to us.

"And hear then the Scripture; read your Bible; let yourself be addressed with Zion; ask for administration of Gods Word to his Church.

Then a page like this one from Isaiah, will become valuable to you. How rich the promises are for Zion! As long as Zion wants be Zion, wants to fight Zions battle, wants to suffer Zions pains. As long as she asks for the Word of God for Zion". (297)

Yes, as long as the Church wants to be Church, will fight and wrestle for the truth of Gods Word. Through Gods grace we fought the battle around the Liberation of 2003. How good the Lord was to show us that way en let us go that way.

And suffer grief? That we still do. Where the congregation is small and where the churches are disdained. But with our pains, we are the most privileged of the people, for in the oppressed church the Word opens most richly. And the Church may rejoice and know, that the rich promises of

Isaiah 49, through Gods grace, may be valid for today. The Mother deprived of her children, shall still be richly blessed by the Lord. As long as the Church wants to be Church:

"Then the Word opens, then the promise opens; then the Holy Spirit comforts; then the Lord lifts up His people. In the Mother, her children shall rise. And therein they are her honour, her ornament, which she binds onto herself as a bride does". (297)

Does the Reformed Church "old style" still have

a future? That is no longer a question; it is the richest Congregation that exists.

Are the so-called evangelicals on the right path? No, they have to do without the lovely disclosure of the Word, and live with a gospel full of misunderstanding.

Let us be careful about the Church, like we also must be careful about the Word.

In the Church, that is where we must be, for it is there that Christ is preached most abundantly.

*From De Bazuin, Volume 3, Number 3
by H. Griffioen*



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The Liberation; 'a compendious summary'

Much has been written about the Liberation of 2003/ 04. Since the first issue of Reformed Continua we, however, received several requests for an article which would give a concise overview of the issues and events 'causing' and preceding this Liberation. We hope this article complies with these requests.

A national meeting

The Liberation became a fact at a public national meeting held in Zwolle on Saturday the 20th of September, 2003. At this meeting, among other things, the 'Act of Liberation' was read. This 'Act' worded the 'necessity' as to why the people had to Liberate themselves from sinful Synod decisions and consistories that ratified those. It was, unlike some people understand it to be, not so that people at this meeting could 'jot down' their name on a piece of paper thus Liberating themselves 'there and then'. As the Church of Christ is no 'national institute' the people could not Liberate themselves from the errs of a bond of churches. Their grave concerns had to be addressed locally at the highest assembly that Christ Himself put in place to guard His flock: the local church council. Ultimately the question would have to be: what would they do with regard to these Synod-decisions?! The national meeting was 'only' a starting signal to activate the people that wanted to remain faithful. At this meeting they sought to hear the voice of the great Shepherd as they felt 'scattered on the hillside'. Yet, at this meeting they were directed homewards. As it was there where they had a task to perform. A difficult task: to petition their church council to return to or remain obedient to the Word of God. Consequently they were asked not to ratify the Synod decisions that conflicted with that Word.

The preceding years

This does not mean that the 'call to reform' was first heard of in the year 2003. A long, tiresome and often difficult road led to this 'final call'. Many years had gone by in which many faithful church members voiced their concerns. They warned others for the decay that took place within the churches. These concerns and 'warnings' can be found in many articles in back volumes of different Reformed Church magazines such as 'Reformanda', early volumes of 'Nader Bekeken' and newspapers. Yet, of more importance are the many 'objections' and 'appeals' that were officially tabled at the different assemblies via the 'ecclesiastical route'. These are of greater significance as they elicit

an official response (or a 'non-response'). Sadly this response determined, 'brought to light' and officially established their erring ways, straying from the sound Reformed doctrine. Thus many people 'trod' the ecclesiastical pathway to express their concerns. They did so for a variety of reasons. Some came to address matters as a result of an unscriptural 'sermon' they heard locally; for others the reason to appeal lies in the unscriptural decisions from a major assembly they read in the Acts.

Many people thus faced a tedious and difficult road. A road which, humanly speaking, was not to be desired. The reason people went down this road anyway lies in their reformed conviction and their love for the Word of God. Expressing this love in this way was not always appreciated. Yet, we are convinced that this was the right and only way. It was 'the way' we agreed upon in the Church Order. With regard to this point it must be said that not everyone that 'liberated' also followed this 'ecclesiastical way' individually. This could not be expected of everyone, as not everyone has received the same talents. Neither was it necessary as the decisions ultimately were published in 'Acts' or minutes for everyone to read. There were also people that started but were not able to complete the ecclesiastical route all the way to the end. They had to 'pull out' as 'matters' caused too much tension for them. All this work was done in weakness and tainted by sins. There were also individuals that went 'down this road' for the wrong reasons, or went about it in a wrong way. Despite all these things those that went down this way in faith took a stand when they could no longer be silent bystanders when assemblies transgressed the boundaries of God's Word.

Not endlessly

One (thankfully) can and may not endlessly continue to appeal and request for revision. At some point the 'end' of the ecclesiastical 'road' will be reached. In 2003 or 2004 this end was reached for most people as in certain major matters the possibility to ask for revision was no longer available. There are, however, people that understood (and still believe) the contrary. They believe that one can (almost) endlessly continue to propose matters. For them this will only be ended when they are forbidden to express themselves or when they are 'throw out' of the church. We, however, do not believe that this is in accordance with the Church Order. In article 33 we find that only new matters may be 'tabled' to be

dealt with. To this there is one exception: Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds. This is in line with article 31 which, among other things, states that one has 'the right to appeal ... [when] it is proven to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order'. This can only be done in the ecclesiastical way stipulated by article 30.

From this it becomes clear that 'proposing' or 're-addressing' the same matter cannot be an endless recurring activity. With some irony professor K. Schilder once called these people 'Revisionists' (i.e. people that continue to ask sequential synods to revise decisions made by prior synods).

The Liberation of 2003 came about as a result of the decisions made by the Synod of Zuidhorn 2002/03. Yet, to this we must immediately add: that decisions from preceding Synods lie at the bottom of these decisions and have since been 'challenged'. These were the Synods of: Ommen 1993, Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996 and Leusden 1999. There the delegates also decided (or refrained from doing so) on matters (yet to be mentioned) that led up to the necessity of the Liberation. For those issues the Synod of Zuidhorn was the final 'station' in the ecclesiastical way to annul these unscriptural decisions. In Zuidhorn they reinforced most of these decisions, or altered some minor details to pacify and blind some people. From these decisions it became indisputably clear that the churches gathered at this Synod no longer 'govern itself according to the Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head'.

Deterioration

Does this mean that in any matter which reached the end of the ecclesiastical way a 'Liberation' should follow? No, not necessarily. When the matter involved was a one single (minor) issue then (depending on the gravity of the matter) it may well be possible to leave such a matter alone or to exercise patience. A determining factor is whether people or assemblies have an open ear for arguments based on Scripture, as well as a willingness to discuss those matters openly and honestly. This was, however, not the case in Zuidhorn. The matters and corresponding decisions were no separate or single issues: they stem from a long process of deterioration.

This deterioration was the weakening of 'church life'. It can be compared with a 'leak' in a water pipe. It starts with a few drips from a tiny puncture. This gradually wears out and grows larger until

finally the water pours out freely. Thus the decay in the churches started off small, yet over the years it spread to all areas of (church-) life. Different elements played an important, yet destructive role. There was the element that many people 'gave in' to the 'spirit of the time'. It was the spirit of 'Post Modernism'. This 'spirit' loathes the concept of 'truth' or the idea that there is only 'one Truth', especially when this 'truth' is the Word of God. Next there was the element of the secularization which had a large influence within the churches: world conformity. This could play such a large role as people rebelliously let go of the antithesis the Lord ordained. Another factor is the large group of people within the churches that pursued a wrong kind of 'ecumenism' (unity at the expense of the Truth). Besides these points there were many other factors, one we will yet mention: the increasing trend of individualization. This also influenced the developments within the churches.

In which way did this deterioration become visible within the churches and individual members? These elements had their effect on the 'everyday' life of individuals. This became evident in a 'sloppy lifestyle' and world conformity. Once this became more common, or accepted, the urge to adjust 'the rules for life' arose. This became clear, for instance, in the way these Synods weakened the 'standard' for living. They found the 'yoke' too heavy to bear, especially where it came to the fourth and seventh commandment. In this day and age the Reformed view in these areas was not popular. This went accompanied with a distorted view of Scripture with regard to what it has to say for everyday life; i.e. what it says about the role of husband and wife in marriage. Another example: Letting go of the confessions when it comes to the doctrine concerning the 'Church' (for the sake of unity). Further allowances were made for 'Scriptural criticism' within the Theological college at Kampen. On top of this the sermons in general became increasingly shallow and superficial. A shift could be observed in the preaching from covenantal to exemplaristic. Where at first the Lord was at the center of focus of the preaching this more and more shifted to the 'listener'. Following from this is the proliferation of changes to the liturgy as well as the 'innovations' that were introduced in the worship services. Things were all geared towards the 'religious needs' and 'creativity' of people. These 'things' could only take place while the 'third mark' of the church was being neglected. Exercising church discipline was refrained from at a

large scale. You see: the flock was being scattered on the hillside!

Did anyone speak up against this'?

Over the years many articles were written addressing these developments, warning people against them. These were published in Reformed church magazines and newspapers, and also addressed to ecclesiastical assemblies. In general these articles, objections and warnings were not taken seriously and often ignored or even laughed at. In this way it was possible for the churches to grow further and further away from the Word of God and the Reformed confessions.

In a public appeal to all church members ('Call to Reformation' February 2003) the people and church councils were once again urged to give heed: to repent and return from this deformation. Return was still possible: locally as well as within the bond of churches. This 'call' was also a reaction to the decisions that were being made at the Synod of Zuidhorn. Even though this Synod received a large amount of objections, appeals and requests for revision they discarded all this (in most matters). They declared almost all these requests to be inadmissible or 'wiped them off the table' with a standard formula. Unbelievable!

What was 'at stake'?

In order to be able to see the severity of the matters we must look at some a little closer even though in the scope of this article not everything can be covered. For more in depth material we refer you to the first letter that our deputies sent to all the deputies of churches abroad (which should be published in the Acts somewhere).

With regard to the fourth commandment the 'alarm' had to be raised when at Zuidhorn they once more discarded evidence from Scripture brought forward by the appellants. They wrote against the false doctrine that created room for people to believe and proclaim that there is no God-given command to rest on the Day or the Lord (the Sunday). They made things worse when they decided, 'against' those that believe that the rest ought to be observed on the Sunday on the basis of the fourth commandment, that one may no longer bind each other on this matter. This decision is contrary to what Scripture says: Matth. 5:17,18; Mark 2:27; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Hebr. 4:8,9v; Rev. 1:10; Gen. 2:2,3; Ex. 16:22-30; Ex. 20:11; Ex. 3-1:14,15; Neh. 13:17; Is. 58:13,14; Jer. 17:21-27; Ez. 20:18-26; the Confession: the Heidelberg Catechism Lords Day: 33, 34, 38; as well as contrary to the Synod of Dordt

1618-1619 (see Post Acts 164st session). By these un-Scriptural decisions the Reformed preaching was 'curbed', church discipline (which commences in the preaching) administered to people that sinned against the fourth commandment was consequently curtailed.

Another major point was the fact that Scripture criticism was being accepted by way of Synod decisions with regard to the continual progress in ecclesiastical unity with the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk (transl.: Christian Reformed Church) as well as the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk (transl.: Dutch Reformed church). It has been clearly demonstrated that in these churches there is room for Scripture Criticism (1 Peter. 1:20,21; 1 John. 4:1; 2 John:10; art. 7 Belgic Confession), whilst decisions made by previous synods (i.e. Synod of Arnhem 1981) were also ignored.

The decisions with regard to the 'interdenominational Hymnal' (Liedboek voor de kerken) were endorsed. Many of the Hymns selected for use in the churches were proven to be against Scripture by numerous people, yet they were released for use within the churches. In this way many false doctrines openly or open to a double meaning thus entered the churches and at the same time misleading its members. Many of these Hymns contain false doctrine with regards to one or more of the following errors: the doctrine of common grace, horizontalism, unscriptural magical re-living of occurrences in the history of salvation, liberation theology, and omission/ confusion/ minimizing of (1) election / covenant / living out of the covenant promises, (2) the good fight of faith, (3) sin / covenant- unfaithfulness / antithesis, and (4) atonement through satisfaction.

The consequence of allowing this large amount of Hymns for use is the fact that it divided the congregational song of praise into those that whole heartedly sing along and those that do not want to 'defile their lips'. Besides this, the implementation of these Hymns proved another objection people had: the implementation of this vast amount of Hymns will go at the expense of singing the Psalms.

These matters could not again be proposed in accordance to art. 33 of the Church Order. All Scriptural grounds had already been brought forward to at least two consecutive synods (not to mention the church councils, classes, regional synods etc. that also dealt with these issues). If people are not willing to listen to arguments from Scripture all

else fails. Even so, there have been some ministers and church councils that have since tried to appeal. They found new grounds to 'tackle' minor aspects or sub-aspects of the main decisions. These efforts were of no avail- the main decisions were never annulled. In this the Lord was not honored by an uncompromising obedience to the rightful claim He laid down in His Word for all of us to serve Him the way that He wants.

The list goes on

Besides these major irreversible decisions there is a whole list of other matters that also indicate the departing from the Reformed ways. Also these issues have been addressed ecclesiastically. We will name some:

- *The raising of hands in blessing by an ordinary church-member while leading a worship service;*
- *Delegating / allowing delegates to represent the churches in 'worship services' of other denominations;*
- *Allowing (and conducting) the participation in unfenced Lords Supper table in crisis areas, at which anyone that calls himself to be a Christian can participate;*
- *Releasing the NBV, the 'Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling' (New Bible Translation 2004) for use in the worship services;*
- *Unnerving the articles 65 and 67 of the Church Order;*
- *Weakening the 'form for the solemnization of marriage' in a new version;*
- *Idem for a new version of the form for the celebration of the Lords Supper;*
- *Introducing the 'ordinarium' into the worship services (an early Christian Order of Worship - still found in the RC and Anglican traditions - in which the preaching of the Word becomes subordinate to the Lord's Supper);*
- *Entering into a sister church relationship with the PCEA (whilst the existing sister churches in Australia (FRCA) have good reasons not to recognize the PCEA as 'true and faithful' churches);*
- *The deputies report and the decisions with regards to the issue of marriage and divorce (see also the article by H. Griffioen in this issue of Reformed Continua);*
- *Accepting / allowing for the 'Scripture Criticism' that is contained in a method for Evangelization that synod released for use within the churches.*

Because of all these issues and developments it could no longer be maintained that the Gereformeerde Kerk vrijgemaakt (Reformed Churches liberated) 'governs itself according to the Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head' (art. 29 Belgic Confession). By means of the 'Call to Reformation' with the accompanying brochure 'Let us Repent', church people and local consistories were petitioned not to ratify the above mentioned decisions. Thus they were urged to reject these wrong decisions and to give Reformed guidance. This 'call' however was turned down 'en masse' by (almost) all local church councils. The aforementioned synod decisions were ratified in (almost) all congregations. Thus these local church councils endorsed the unscriptural content. This was the cause for the Liberation.

A Miracle!

In Liberating, people called their local brothers and sisters to free themselves from unscriptural decisions. They did so according to article 31 of the Church Order. To Liberate from church councils that refrain from giving Reformed guidance and the equivocal way in which they ratified Synods decisions. This call, in obedience to Christ, not only led to separation. It also led the faithful believers to seek unity with all those that whole heartedly want to live according to the Word of God. This is a miracle in itself! Seeking unity with all those that want to live by His Word, in an age where this Truth is being questioned and diminished. From all this we learn that it is the Lord Who gathers, defends and preserves a church unto life eternal. He does so like the Good Shepherd.

We can only write these things hoping that more people will come to understand and see where the Lord gathers His people around His Word in The Netherlands today. His sheep recognize and hear His voice. That should suffice. Yet, of more benefit is the fact that He says: 'I know My sheep'.

*Watch o'er Thy Church, O Lord in Mercy;
save it from evil, guard it still.
Perfect it in Thy love, unite it,
Cleaned and conformed unto Thy will.
As grain, once scattered on the hillside,
Was in the broken bread made one,
So from all lands Thy Church be gathered
Into Thy kingdom by Thy Son.*

*Joh.W. van der Jagt,
Dedemsvaart*

Student society: Virtute Dei

As students of The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (restored), we have formed a student society. This society officially came into being on the 29th of June, 2007. Prior to this, students were already meeting to discuss a variety of topics in the light of God's Word. That came about as follows:

Most of the students at that time were members of the Reformed Churches (liberated). These churches were in a steady process of straying away from the true Word of God. This resulted in a call to reformation, with the purpose of returning to the pure preaching of God's Word. Unfortunately, the Reformed Churches (liberated) did not respond to this call and it became necessary to liberate. This (in short) led to The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (restored).

The students who were already having meetings at that stage, had already liberated themselves or were in the process of doing so. These students wanted to discuss topics more deeply with each other, as brothers and sisters and in this way form a reformed opinion. They realized that, in these troublesome times that students face, it is important to be able to support each other.

Other existing student societies within the Reformed Churches (liberated) were often not an option. Mostly because of the moral decline that had taken place within their circles, or, sometimes, because of the closed (religious) character of the society. Because of the church liberation there were many matters that became difficult to discuss and that also resulted in awkward social contacts with students of the Reformed Churches (liberated). One of the most important reasons was, that we could not truly discuss important matters of faith with each other on the same basis.

The first time that we as students came together was on November 11, 2005. This was of course the early beginnings of setting up our student society. We had to find out from each other what the wishes, the aim, the target group, the frequency and the topics for discussion would be of our society. As students, we felt that there was definitely a need to support each other, to share issues we were faced with concerning our faith, our studies and student life. For this reason the students continued to get together, initially at the homes of the students and later at a fixed location in Utrecht. Already at the second meeting a draft was made



Participants of the camp held at the farmyard campsite "Lorijan" in Bakkeveen (Friesland) that was organized by Virtute Dei in October 2009.

up as to concerning what the target group would be. This target group was especially the students of The Reformed Churches (restored) attending colleges and universities. But of course exceptions could be made. For instance, those who had just completed their studies could continue to attend the meetings.

Before every meeting we have a meal together. At each meeting, plans for the following meeting are made. As time went on it became evident that it would be more efficient and more consistent for the meetings to have statutes and to choose a board. The board could then deal with the organizational matters and this would not have to be done during the actual meetings. Three volunteers got together to draw up a draft statute, so that the members could vote on it. On the 29th June 2007 AD the student society was officially formed by the acceptance of the statutes and the election of a board.

Since then there have been a variety of meetings. The frequency of the meetings increased to once every three weeks. The society was also given a name: Virtute Dei, which means: through God's strength. This name is at the same time a confession of it's members, namely, that we live by the strength of God. We have discussed many topics such as, the relationship between faith and science, the limitations of science, science and the Bible, fundamentalism, education and faith, choice of career/profession, the task of the government, faith and experiences, empirical

findings, psychology, views on Scripture, the wrath of God, evangelical ideas and other topics. We also regularly discuss parts of church history.

Virtute Dei issues an annual magazine for its members. Once a year it also organizes a social weekend where a lot of emphasis is on the social contacts, but it is also combined with Bible study. Last year and this year we invited a guest speaker to give a speech on a certain topic. Last year we had a speech about empirical findings and this year about stewardship. Of course there is also the "birthday" of our society on the 29th of June when we have a celebration.

In this way we, as students, try to be constructive

and we try and help each other with our studies and student life. In this way we may put into practice the aim of our student society as worded in the statutes: the society has the aim to help her members to give an interpretation to their student life in a way that is favorable to God, by seeking our knowledge in the Bible and by studying all kinds of relevant topics.

We certainly see all this as a privilege that the Lord gives to us and we pray that with His blessing we may continue in this manner in the time to come.

*On behalf of the board,
Corneel Koster*



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A response from the Canadian Churches (CANRC) (3)

The Reformed Churches (restored)

The Canadian deputies received the mandate to clarify the legitimacy of the liberation of 2003 and to follow further developments since then.

In 2005 there has been contact with The Netherlands and Australia. All published documents dealing with the liberation are in possession of the Canadian deputies.

The brochure from The Reformed Churches (restored = RCR), (Do not take words away from the book of the prophecy) which was a response to the brochure from the Reformed Churches Liberated (RCL) (Not beyond what is written) unfortunately arrived too late in order to be able to be added to their report.

In a supplementary report they only made brief mention of this brochure - namely one and a half pages.

However, after reading this brochure, the final conclusion of the submitted report remained unaltered.

The conclusion of the deputies is that there is a group of church members, namely those who affiliate themselves with the magazine Reformanda, that warn against specific trends and synodical decisions in the RCL. In 2003 they sent a letter to the RCL with 2 attachments (A call to reformation and Let us repent) as a result of their immense dissatisfaction with the decisions made by Synod Zuidhorn. The RCL were called upon to repent and the churches were given 6 weeks to respond. The response of the RCL did not meet their expectations and this led to the signing of the Deed of liberation and restoration. And so the schism of 2003 was a fact.

Deputies make clear that not all the concerned brothers and sisters in the RCL made this same step. Many ministers thought that this call to reformation was much to premature.

They said that all official measures for submitting objections had not yet been exhausted. Furthermore, they said, that the situation in the RCL was not so dramatic that such extreme steps had to be taken. At the same time, the deputies directed the attention to a group of ministers who had set up an internet site called Gereformeerd blijven.nl (Remaining reformed). The purpose was to inform the RCL community concerning the threats to reformed life.

Although these ministers were not supporting the

method and the timing of the act of reformation they remained open to the option of following at a later point of time.

This of course would depend on further developments in the churches and at the synods.

The deputies from the RCR sent a letter to the Canadian deputies with the request to continue the sister church relationship with them. This would result in ending the sister church relationship with the RCL. The deputies strongly advised against this request to continue the sister church relationship with the RCR.

The question arose as to what the Scriptural grounds were to discourage a sister church relationship with the RCR, after they had read all the brochures and all the synodical decisions from Synod Mariënberg. An answer to that question has not been given.

Even after referring to a sentence in article 28 of the Belgic Confession, they also do not give an answer to the RCR as to the meaning of article 28.

The answer of the RCR clearly points out where we must look for the visible church.

We are called to separate from those who do not belong to the church. The church here being the church which is visibly recognizable as the church that submits to Scripture, the confessions and the Church Order.

When referring to the marks of the true church, the RCL has disqualified itself as a true church.

Deputies from the RCR do not attend Synod Smithers 2007

The deputies of the RCR had not received an invitation to visit the Synod at Smithers. We were, nevertheless, thinking of sending two representatives to Synod Smithers. Several individual brothers in Canada even supported this possibility. We, however decided not to attend the Synod uninvited. This would only confirm the wrong impression that they hold about us, as stated in the report of the Canadian deputies; namely that the RCR is a group of church members affiliated with the magazine Reformanda who are very dissatisfied with the decisions of Leusden and Zuidhorn. (They are nothing more than a group of persistent complainers.) Furthermore the Canadian deputies and the Synod already had in their possession all the information needed in order to reach their judgement. At the last meeting of our deputies, we

brought this issue in prayer before the throne of God.

In 2006 the deputies from the RCR had received an invitation from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) to visit the synod in West Kelmscott. Australia had not yet made a judgement concerning the legitimacy of the liberation of 2003.

As long as that was not possible, the Australian churches would keep contact with the RCL as well as with the RCR. Yet, there is one difference, namely; that the RCR is a church with which contact at this moment is still possible and the RCL is seen as a sister church.

Right from the start the Canadian delegates had brought forward a different opinion. They recognized the RCL as a sister church but not the RCR. And with that perspective they started an investigation concerning the legitimacy of the liberation of 2003 and the situation within the RCL.

We notice here a recurrence of the situation in 1944. Then too, the Reformed Churches Synodical were recognized as sister churches by others but not the RCL.

The same occurred several years ago concerning the Free Church of Scotland (FCS). A schism occurred in that church. The Canadian churches continue their sister church relations only with the FCS. In the meantime they continued their investigation of the situation.

Lincoln Church raised objections to the fact that in this way preference was given to the FCS above the Free Church of Scotland continuing (FCSc), while the investigation was not yet completed (art. 34 of the Acts of Synod Neerlandia 2001).

The Church of Lincoln wished to see the roads remaining open to both churches.

Deputies believed that in such a sorrowful situation there was no reason to end the sister church relationship with the FCS while at the same time remaining open and honest with those that had liberated themselves.

They first desired further clarity on the whole situation. As long as there was no clarity as to what the circumstances were that led to the liberation of the FCSc, then it would not be proper to continue equal status of sister church relations with both. (id art 34 Acts Synod Neerlandia 2001).

The Synod of Chatham 2004 advised the deputies not to continue to have contact with the FCSc but to continue the sister church relationship with the FCS (art 43 Acts Synod Chatham, 2004)

Synod Chatham however, decided to continue a sister church relationship with the FCS and at the sametime maintain contact with the FCSc.

It is due to these considerations that the Canadian deputies did not send an invitation to the deputies of the RCR.

According to them it would not be proper to have a sister church relationship with both churches (RCL and RCR) while the investigation was still ongoing and there already was a sister church relationship with the RCL.

We agree with the Church of Lincoln that in this way the one church is favoured above the other. And actually a choice has already been made.

The synodical decisions of Synod Smithers

RCL

Synod Smithers (2007) accepted the advice of the Canadian deputies.

The concerns about the many number of hymns, the fourth commandment and the marriage form were removed. However, concerns remained about the renewed approach towards divorce and remarriage. They also expressed appreciation for the manner in which RCL encouraged the RCR, by means of an appeal, to reunite.

There is also no proof that the RCL is following an unscriptural course. And furthermore, the church order is still in place within the RCL.

The sister church relationship will be continued.

Even though the synod had decided to continue sister church relationships, many letters from several churches clearly stated that a number of issues still give cause for concern.

RCR

All the information provided about the necessity to liberate due to the many unscriptural decisions of the RCL and their tolerating scripture criticism, was not able to convince the Canadian churches that we had to liberate ourselves.

The events of 2003 were considered an act of disruption and schism.

Our request for a sister church relationship was rejected.

They called upon the RCR to make an end of this unlawful schism and to reunite with the RCL.

According to them the liberation of 2003 was unscriptural and not in accordance with article 28 of the Belgic Confession. The Canadian churches will make an honest effort to reunite the RCR and the RCL.

Is the judgement of the Canadian Churches convincing?

Did they examine the scriptural grounds that were presented by the RCR deputies in their brochure 'Do not take words away from this book of prophecy' and the Acts of Synod Mariënberg?

Synod Smithers acknowledges that the report from the Canadian deputies does not give details as to their conclusion concerning the RCR. Even though, in the past years, the Canadian Churches have paid attention to the issues that the RCR presented in their brochure and in their synodical decisions.

They were aware of the criticism, investigated them and still come to the conclusion that the RCL remains faithful to Scripture and the confessions. All the documents from the RCR did not lead them to another conclusion. They even go so far as to state that there is a danger that the RCR 'did not test the decisions made by the RCL synods with enough care.'

It is regretful that in most of the Canadian reports and synodical decisions the scriptures, confessions and the church order are not clearly referred to.

We have experienced with the RCL that the interpretation of Bible texts can vary and that is why it is not sufficient to only refer to Bible texts. Reference to the antithesis is also lacking in the Canadian reports. Such statements are loud and clear because they seek the Lord.

We know that there are many brothers and sisters in Canada who have difficulty in accepting the verdict of their synod. Let us remember these brothers and sisters in our prayers and ask the LORD to give them wisdom and strength in this difficult situation. Let us also plead to the LORD for deliverance and that also in Canada they may receive insight into what is really happening in the RCL.

P. Drijfhout

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