

REFORMED CONTINUA

Magazine of The Reformed Churches (restored) of The Netherlands

Proverbs 8:32

- Volume 12 - May 2013 -

From the editor

May 2013

We are thankful to the Lord that we are able to present to you a new issue of Reformed Continua so shortly after the previous one. This is the 12th issue and is once again a special one.

The next regular Reformed Continua will, hopefully, be issued in September 2013.

Contents of this issue are:

- **Editorial: From Reformed to secularized churches? A book review of: 'De doorgaande revolutie; de ontwikkeling van de Gereformeerde Kerken in perspectief.'** (The on-going revolution; the development of the Reformed Churches in perspective) *)

*) G. Dekker, *De doorgaande revolutie; De ontwikkeling van de Gereformeerde Kerken in perspectief*, Ad Chartas-reeks nr. 23, De Vuurbaak, Barneveld, 2013 (144 pag.), €19,90

*) These articles (7) can also be found in *De Bazuin*, in the Dutch language.

This special magazine is completely devoted to the leading article.

In all this we may know and experience that it is the Lord Himself who preserves His church to the end. It is His merit that the Church still exists and that there are still many possibilities.

It is with thankfulness to the Lord, who gives these possibilities, that we can also mention that our candidate, br. C. Koster, has had a call to three congregations. We pray that the Lord will grant him wisdom in considering these calls.

We again hope and pray that this issue will be well-received.

May God grant that eyes be opened world-wide to the right view of the Church and that we may contribute to God's church-gathering work, to the honour of His Name.

Joh. Houweling, Bleiswijk

From Reformed to secularized churches? (1)

A book review of: *The ongoing revolution; the development of the Reformed Churches in perspective* *

by S. de Marie

We want to devote a number of articles to a broader discussion of the recently published book of G. Dekker, Emeritus Professor in sociology of religion at the Free University of Amsterdam. The book is based on his research into the development of the Liberated churches [Free Reformed Churches in the Netherlands – RCNlib] from 1970 to 2010. He compares these developments with the way the synodical churches (which merged into the PKN [Protestant Churches in the Netherlands] in 2004) developed in the earlier period from 1950 to 1990.

Synodical churches 1950-1990

This emeritus professor published a book in 1992 called *The Quiet Revolution* in which he traced developments in the (synodical) Reformed Churches from 1950 to 1990. In it he showed how over a period of forty years these churches increasingly conformed to the world. This process of secularization led to a decline in membership, a course that has continued much stronger after 1990. How did it happen? It occurred, says Prof Dekker, because of a desire in these churches to be open and to adapt to the world. This led them to alter their views of the Bible. They felt the need to adopt other views of the Bible in order to achieve that openness.

This had far-reaching consequences. It meant an official rejection of the decision of Synod Assen-1926 which had condemned a tampering of the authority of Scripture. Prof. Dekker, at that time himself member of these churches, suggests that for the synodicals the Bible became a human book. Furthermore, they abandoned the doctrine of the church, as shown by their desire to join the World Council of Churches.

Eventually this led them to undermine the Scriptural doctrines of reconciliation and of election. True, nobody formulated a new doctrine, but they tolerated alongside the 'official' Reformed Confessions views that were diametrically opposed to them. Although they subscribed to the confessions

on paper, in practice they relinquished them and thereby church discipline was no longer applied either.

By adopting heresy the synodical churches also developed a different view about God. They saw Him more as a God who joins in with the people giving plenty of room for human experience, than a God who governs and directs everything. A clear sense of sin disappeared and with it an antithetical Christian lifestyle in, for example, Sunday observance, married life, and leisure activities – although their synods did become increasingly involved in social issues (helping development, armament, apartheid).

Prof. Dekker's conclusion in 1992 was that by their openness towards society, the synodical churches had gradually but steadily engaged in a 'quiet revolution' of adapting to the world. This occurred at the expense of their orthodox doctrine of Scripture and resulted in a loss of their reformed identity.

1994

We hear from Prof. Dekker again in 1994, now as an invited speaker at a Kampen symposium, organized by various liberated-Reformed organizations and institutions, including the Theological University in Kampen. The symposium was dedicated to 'the reflection on various aspects of the Liberation and 50 years of liberated-Reformed church life'. The lecture of Prof Dekker, which is included in the book *1944 and after: Ten readings about fifty years Liberation* (edited by G. Harinck and M. te Velde, published by De Vuurbaak, 1994), had the loaded title: 'Are the churches on the slippery slope?' Note the date: only one year after the general synod Ommen 1993, ten years before our recent Liberation of 2003.

It is important to first pay a bit more attention to this lecture because Professor Dekker, as 'outsider', had already identified a number of issues within the RCNlib. He opened his speech with a reference to a 'historic decision', namely the decision by Synod

Ommen 1993 to give women members active voting rights – 15 years after Synod Groningen-Zuid 1978 had decided exactly the opposite.

We quote:

At that time the fear was expressed that such a decision would place the churches on a 'slippery slope'. That is understandable because in the same period other important decisions in the Liberated churches were being made which blurred the church boundaries: Nederlands Dagblad, a liberated-Reformed daily newspaper, now employed non-liberated-Reformed editors; Synod Ommen 1993 decided on less stringent standards in its contact with foreign churches; and membership of the Reformed Political Union (GPV) was no longer restricted to members of the Liberated-Reformed Churches. This was done at a meeting at which the leader of the GPV, Mr. Schutte, said: 'We must recognize that we too are exposed to the influence of secularism'.

Prof. Dekker responded:

*Hereby we touch on **the** problem facing the Free Reformed Churches in the current era.*

Warning

Prof. Dekker subsequently pointed out in his 1994 lecture that the RCNlib faced the great danger of adapting to the world just as the synodical churches had done. He noted deterioration in life and lifestyle in the RCNlib and saw the RCNlib increasingly adapting to the world, even though their doctrine was still orthodox.

As a result of his sociological approach, his assessment did fail to focus on the Scriptural antithesis. This antithesis requires that the cultural mandate be implemented in such a way that although we are *in* the world we show that we are not *of* the world, that in our lifestyle and behaviour the name of Christ is not denied but gloried, and that we live as a shining light. That's not something unique for the RCNlib but simply the Scriptural way of life that the Lord asks of His people and for which He prays (Matt. 5:13-16; Joh. 17:14-19; Jac. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:11-17; Rev. 3:4, 8).

The view of Prof. Dekker, being a sociologist of religion, was: you could tell a man by the company he keeps. He saw the failure to distance oneself from the world as risking world conformity. However, the fact that our faith needs to be applied also to our life in the world is not in itself risky but becomes

risky when we don't apply that (antithetical) faith. Despite Prof. Dekker's failure to see the antithesis clearly, he nevertheless sounded this serious warning:

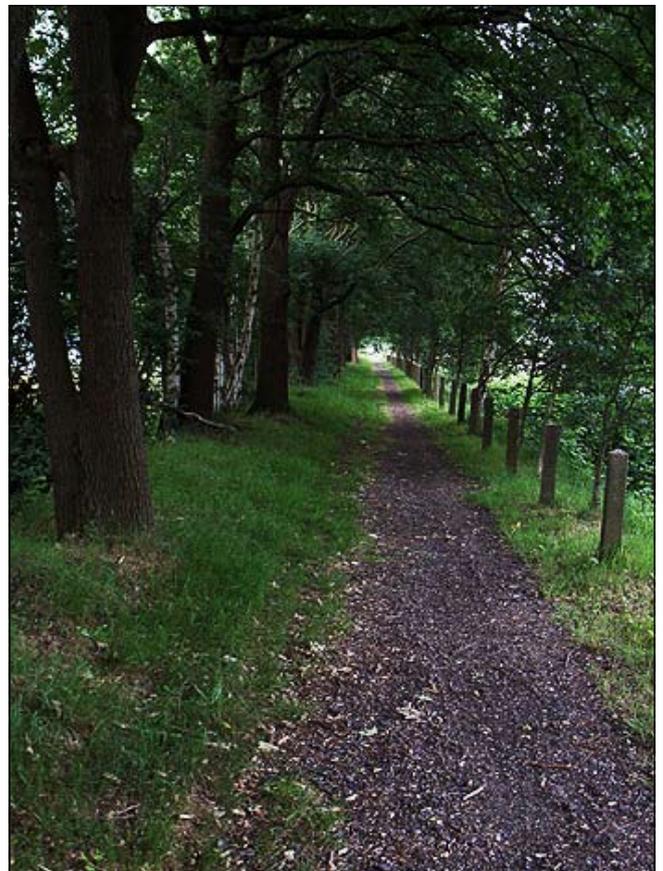
The liberated-reformed will in future give evidence of having undergone drastic changes. They will increasingly adjust to society around them, precisely because they want to involve their faith in all areas of life.

Therefore in the next decade they will go in the direction in which the synodical-reformed have gone and will increasingly look like the synodical reformed.

It was this statement that Prof Dekker sought to demonstrate in his latest book.

More about that in the next episode.

* G. Dekker, *The ongoing revolution; Development of the Reformed Churches in Perspective*, Ad Chartas series No. 23, De Vuurbaak, Barneveld, 2013 (144 p.), € 19.90



From Reformed to secularized churches? (2)

We continue the discussion of Prof. Dr. G. Dekker's booklet about the developments in the RCNlib. In the first issue we saw what the presentation of the question was in the described study. This went back to the expectations, that the RCNlib would show the same development as the synodical-Reformed churches had done in the period of 1950-1990, expectations that were already voiced by him in 1994. He now wanted to prove this assumption using information from the church yearbooks and other literature about the RCNlib over the period of 1970-2010. It was striking that in 1994 this professor had already pointed out this new openness as a characteristic feature for significant changes in these churches.

On-going reformation

Dekker then describes the basic thesis of his study: The RCNlib in the 1970's. These years were characterized by stabilization after the departure of those who now form the Netherlands Reformed Churches. There was talk of a close unity and a large degree of uniformity on the concept on the church and the so called 'on-going reformation' in those years.

That concept on the church meant that they recognized the true church in the RCNlib, but not in other churches, such as the synodical churches from which they had had to separate. Associated with that was the view they had about in which manner that concept on the church would also have its effect on the co-operation with others in school, daily paper, politics and society.

This view was that of the 'on-going reformation'.

Dekker describes that idea, already existing since the Liberation of 1944, 'that the reformation of the church had to bear fruit within family life, school affairs and in the broad field of politics and socio-economic issues'.

Dekker considers the concept on the church and the associated on-going reformation as a form of 'radicalization' of the Liberation (p. 23). The Liberation of 1944 was namely the cause for an ethical conflict with the synodicals. How can you work together on the Scriptural foundation if you are not *one*, if you have been suspended and thrown out by the synodicals?

However, we would not call this 'radicalization' but simply faithfulness to Scripture and the Confession of the Church, in doctrine and life. It is nothing

more than a consequent attitude to the Lord who calls His children to His Church (the true Church) and away from the false church and the many 'sects', who misuse the name of church (Art. 28,29 Belgic Confession). For you are not only Church on Sunday, but also during the week. At societies etc. with the foundation of Scripture and Confession, nothing must be dismissed from that foundation with regard to the doctrine of the church, the doctrine of the covenant, or of any other part of the doctrine. 'On-going Reformation' is therefore return to, and obedience to God's Word, also in connection with (reflection on) life in the general society (see e.g. what Art. 29 Belgic Confession says about the marks of those who belong to the church). A consequent attitude in the areas of doctrine and life of the church and its members. This on-going reformation, Dekker ascertained, immediately led to a sort of isolation, with regard to the synodicals. The churches had their own newspaper (Gereformeerd Gezinsblad), their own schools, their own political (GPV) and social (GMV) associations and in other fields (GSEV, GOV). Not everyone wanted to conform to this. Immediately after the Liberation, the so-called Bos-movement came up, which led to a return to the synodical churches of 10 ministers and approx. 2500 church members (p. 23). Also after that there was a growing group who had a different, a broader church concept and did not want the isolation that comes along with the on-going reformation. That led to the resignation of the so-called 'buitenverbanders' (the later Netherlands Reformed Church), at the end of the 1960's.

Despite the pain of this schism, it brought more unity within the RCNlib than before and a quiet time of up-building and prosperity started.

The on-going reformation was now generally accepted, even though there had to be a constant urging so that everyone continued to understand their task (p. 24, 48).

A change in attitude towards other churches

In chapter 4 Dekker describes the position of the RCNlib in relation to other churches and the society. His attention is mainly focused on the changes that took place after the quiet period of the 1970's and early 1980's, and he also looks for parallels with the synodical churches.

Dekker considers openness towards society and

church as the origin and the core from which most other changes have emerged.

It is possible that his sociological background naturally brings him to this, yet we are of the opinion that Dekker accurately determines the real origin of the revolution that is occurring within the RCNlib. It is no effort whatsoever for him to demonstrate those developments, occurring since the mid 1980's, towards more openness and more room in practically every area of the church, church life and the affiliated reformed organizations.

Using many quotes, Dekker shows that these developments were accompanied with a change in a fundamental conviction concerning the true Church and its task and involvement in the world.

Ecumenism

With respect to the synodical churches, no contact with them seemed possible after the Liberation because of the unresolved question of the truth regarding 1944. Later, in 1971, the RCNlib also concluded that doctrinal freedom existed in these churches because of the actual lack of doctrinal discipline. In 1989, they even had to note that the synodical churches had, in the meantime, lost the reformed character (p.42).

Yet, because of the increasing openness towards the CGK (Christian Reformed Church) and the NGK (Netherlands Reformed Church), which began to manifest itself in the early 1990's, a rapprochement would also arise towards the PKN (Protestant Church of the Netherlands) with which the synodical churches had merged in 2004.

Dekker notes here that in 2005 the RCNlib joined the interdenominational Nederlandse Zendingsraad (Dutch Missionary Council) (p. 47). Whoever looks up on the internet to find out what this Council stands for and who its members are, can read that under the slogan 'one in mission', besides the RCNlib, the CGK and the PKN, the Mennonite Brotherhood, evangelicals, Baptists and Pentecostal churches are also represented.

It is therefore not surprising that, in this context,

Prof. Dekker also describes that at the last synod of the RCNlib, Prof. B. Kamphuis was given permission to attend the National Synod and that the decision was made to also participate in a possible following assembly. With that, mention was also made that 'the synod also decided to investigate if it was possible to associate with the Council of Churches in the Netherlands.'

This 'Council of Churches', of which the CGK is already a candidate-member, is formed, amongst others, by the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, the Roman Catholic Church, the Old-Catholic Church and the Remonstrant Brotherhood! It therefore does not surprise us at all, that the deputies of the RCNlib wholeheartedly accepted the invitation from the synod of the Protestant Church in January 2013, to get round the table with the different denominations to speak about unity and being a witness.

What a change, what a revolution this is, compared to the past! But above all what a miserable loss of Scriptural confession and of the marks of the Reformed identity are revealed here! For how is this attitude compatible with the confession adopted by the RCNlib, the confession where one must be governed according to the pure Word of God and rejecting all things contrary to it (Art.29 B.C.)? How can one justify this towards the only Head of the Church?

This was propagated and shown in life so very differently in the past. Surely one knows his history and confession? And was not one insistently warned since the 1990's, to strive for unity in the truth only and not a false ecumenism? Is it not the sad conclusion for the development in these churches that it went from on-going reformation to on-going revolution?

This sad development had a beginning. A beginning that became visible in the attitude towards the CGK and the NGK.

More about that in the next article.



From Reformed to secularized churches? (3)

We continue our discussion of *De doorgaande revolutie (The on-going revolution)* by Prof. Dr. G. Dekker on the developments in the Reformed Churches (liberated) (RCNlib) in the period from 1970 to 2010.

Enormous change

The previous article dealt with the so-called 'on-going reformation' which, after the Liberation of 1944, extended through to the areas of life in which church members moved during the week. This on-going reformation was incompatible with the cooperation with members of other denominations in relationships whose foundation was Scripture and confession. Prof. Dekker describes how in the 1980's and 1990's more openness arose. Eventually, around the turn of the century, this openness also arose towards the synodicals, who merged into the PKN in 2004.

From an attitude of on-going reformation it changed to an ecumenical formation with those who were earlier judged, in 1989, as having lost their reformed character. This openness has broadened in recent years, even to organized ecclesiastical consultation with Baptists, Mennonites and Roman Catholics.

We also note here that not only do they pass over the consequences of the Liberation of 1944 (synodicals), but also over that of the Separation of 1834 and the Secession of 1886 (protestant-reformed), the Synod of Dordt of 1618-1619 (remonstrants) and the Great Reformation of the 16th century (Roman Catholics, Anabaptists).

How can this enormous change in the last 25 years be explained? In order to answer this question, we must look at the development of openness that has come about, on the one hand in the churches with regard to the CGK and the NGK, and on the other hand the developments in the G-organizations (RCNlib-organizations) and schools (in our articles we refer to both of them together as 'G-organizations') in relation to those from other churches.

Of course these two lines of development have everything to do with each other. Although Prof. Dekker firstly deals with the interdenominational relationships and then continues with the developments within the G-organizations in the systematic classification in chapter 4 of his book, we prefer to start at the openness of these organizations, since we are convinced that this is the starting point of the process described by Prof. Dekker.

Isolation

In the period after the Liberation of 1944, church members established their own associations and organizations, published own magazines - including an own newspaper (Gereformeerd Gezinsblad, later called Nederlands Dagblad) - and founded an own political party (Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond). This was followed later on with school associations and liberated-Reformed schools. All of this happened within the framework of the on-going reformation of the church.

Dekker notes, via a citation, that founding their own liberated organizations became more urgent and more obvious when, in the eyes of the liberated-reformed members, the existing Christian organizations started to lose their Christian identity (p. 49).

There was a close relationship between the churches, which is apparent in the publishing of the weal and woe of all the associations and organizations in the church yearbooks. Initially there was also a strong involvement of the church members towards their organizations.

This did bring on isolation. An isolation they did not wish to 'glorify', but to accept as a result of a consistent attitude of faith.

Dekker calls this isolation 'the result of their own views and their own striving.'

He quotes a statement by Prof. Douma (in: *Het vuur blijft branden*, 1979, p. 332):

The isolationism threatens us time and again when we are unable to reach the maximum (cooperation within the church) for the concretization of our task in the world and then not being satisfied with the optimum (cooperation based on 'a program', or simply 'on certain issues') with what there is to achieve.

Antithesis and call

When discussing this important topic we wish to draw attention to the fact that we find something lacking in the assessment of Prof. Dekker and the isolation observed by him. On the one hand we find lacking, the notion of the Scriptural antithesis with the world, and on the other hand, the call to the believers to join the true church.

The Lord Himself sets the antithesis between the faithful followers of His Word and the world, which does not follow Him. This antithesis arises where

God's Word is kept pure and is followed, and which confronts itself with the world. Such antithesis brings the believers into isolation. Ecclesiastical separation from others certainly touches the content of God's Word. Uniting with those who deviate from God's Word therefore harms the Word of God. Furthermore, doctrine and life should be one. Co-operation affects the God-willed antithesis. That is one factor.

The other factor concerns the call to believers who are not members of the church, believers with whom you would like to co-operate. The discord among believers can only be solved by calling faithful members of unlawful denominations to join with the true church. Remaining in such communities implies tolerance of false doctrine and participation in the sins of others (1Tim. 5:22). Only when we bend our necks together under the yoke of Christ (Art. 28 BC) can we, as believers, co-operate in order to propagate God's Word in word and in deed.

In the abovementioned citation of Prof. Douma, it is therefore incorrect to consider a union, in which one is united on the basis of 'a program' or on 'certain issues' as being 'optimum' (as the best solution).

God demands obedience in all areas of life. That is where it comes down to. This requires submission to the Word of God. That also implies being a member of the church which is gathered by Christ. That therefore, requires a call to all those who should be there, but are not members yet. But it also brings along estrangement, slander and scorn. Isolation is part of the suffering of the church.

GPV

When considering the development of the ChristenUnie (Christian political party) – into which the GPV merged in 2000 – we found that with this 'optimal approach' politicians allowed themselves to make 'optimal compromises' in practical politics. But this meant a departure from the truth of God's Word. This was most clearly reflected during the participation of the CU in the cabinet in the years 2007-2010. This participation also included, in practice, that one had to accept the responsibility for the current abortion and euthanasia policy, even when they themselves would have liked to reverse this. As for the foundation, the CU also made a turn. New members are no longer required to express approval with birth papers (Forms of Unity), but merely with a political conviction that

emanates from this range of ideas. (website CU). Thus one has, in the GPV and the CU, by following the suggestion of Prof. Douma, lost its isolation and with that also lost the binding to the pure Word of God.

Prof. Dekker leaves the demand for antithesis too much beyond scope. That is why Dekker's judgment of the G-organizations is not correct. His essay does not connect up with the deepest motivations of these organizations. These motives are namely directed at falling back onto the Word of God, that is preserved within the communion of saints, this for the calling that the church members have with regard to society.

This deeper fundamental layer of motivation for reformed life in the first period after the Liberation is essential for understanding this. In this way it can also be understood in what way the developments, with regard to openness, went hand in hand with the letting go of this Scriptural antithesis.

How it started

Already in 1994 Prof. Dekker pointed to the opening of the GPV for members from other denominations, as a sign that they were possibly moving onto a slippery slope. In his most recent book he also discusses the development within the Gereformeerd Gezinsblad/ Nederlands Dagblad (ND), p. 51. From the beginning, this newspaper stood on the foundation of the on-going reformation. However, so Dekker writes, in the beginning of the 1990's there was a change in the statutes: editors no longer needed to be members of the RCNlib. This does not pass unnoticed. In the yearbook of 1993 Dr. W.G. de Vries wrote that in this manner confession and church are, in a certain way, disconnected from each other. In 1992 Prof. Kamphuis wrote in *De Reformatie* that the ND has emphatically cut the bond with the church of Christ and has placed itself ecclesiastically on neutral ground. But, writes Prof. Dekker, 'the development continued. The subtitle of the newspaper changed from *gereformeerde krant voor christelijk Nederland (reformed newspaper for the christian Netherlands)* into *christelijk betrokken (confessionally involved)*. Now it appears that also many non-liberated reformed people read the newspaper.'

So Prof. Dekker places the beginning in the early nineties. Yet, the change of course should be dated earlier, namely, fairly simultaneously with

the discussion about the abovementioned merging of the electoral list of candidates of GPV and RPF. Prof. Dekker does discuss the proposal of the ND editors of 1982 to publish two editions of the ND, each having a different page on 'church news': one edition for the liberated-Reformed Churches (RCNlib) with church news from these churches and the other edition with other church news. This already had to do with the clear change of course within the editorial board. Prof. Dekker mentions that this proposal was rejected by the subscribers. But what he obviously was not able to notice was that the editors very quickly came up with an alternative, but without consulting the subscribers. A page with mixed church news was published. In an article, 'Samen aan het ene front' (*Together on the one front*) issued in 1983, the former editor in chief, J.P. de Vries argued 'that we should stand together with other Christians at one and the same front. Therefore, we should appeal rather than confront and therefore, we should work together

(citation from *Laten we ons bekeren*, LWVKO, 2003).

So together, the GPV and the ND, were in the forefront in the change of course.

In other G-organizations the same process also became visible, not to forget the schools. Dekker writes about the schools: the bond of family-school-church (the triangle-thought) which was considered unbreakable, was given up in the course of the 1990's (p. 53). He quotes from the yearbook of 2002, that besides this, it was observed that 'also within our churches, reformed education is no longer a matter of course.'

They wanted openness instead of isolation, but in this way they lost the bond with the confession of the church. Synthesis instead of antithesis. Thus the developments within the G-organizations have been catalytic in the process of openness of the liberated churches in comparison with other denominations.

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From Reformed to secularized churches? (4)

We continue the discussion of 'De doorgaande Revolutie' (*The on-going revolution*) by Prof. Dr. G. Dekker on the developments in the Reformed Churches liberated (RCNlib) in the period 1970-2010.

Interaction

We have been able to determine that Prof. Dekker very accurately indicates the new openness towards other denominations and their members, as core of the revolutionary development within the RCNlib. Developments that are very aptly typified by him in the title of his book as 'on-going revolution'.

These developments are in opposition to on-going reformation, that was first widely seen as the Scriptural mandate for being reformed in doctrine and life: *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* (the reformed church must continually be reformed).

Prof Dekker observes that change to openness towards other denominations, not only in the Reformed press, Reformed organizations and Reformed schools, but also, since the 1990's, in the search, as churches, for unity and cooperation with other denominations. This last process already shows the active approach towards a denomination, to which 25 years earlier, the reformed character had being denied (PKN). They even enter into relationship with denominations that have never been Reformed (Roman Catholic Church and others).

Prof. Dekker describes in chapter 4, to which he has given the salient title 'The position in the Dutch society', how this interdenominational process went. Here he includes both interdenominational and 'social' contacts. Obviously he, as sociologist, wants to put both developments into one category. It can also be that he wants to emphasize the mutual influence between all external (ecclesiastical and social) contact. Either way, the mutual interaction between the attitude of church members and the church government is undeniable. In our opinion the open attitude, which was already taking shape in the GPV (Reformed Political Party) and in the ND (Reformed Newspaper) in the 1980's, had far-reaching influence in the ecclesiastical forming of opinions with regard to the interdenominational contacts. The latter initially and mainly began to take shape with regard to the Christian Reformed Churches (CGK) and the Netherlands Reformed Church (NGK).

Tolerance and Revolution

Prof. Dekker makes mention of the long period in which the liberated-Reformed Churches, already directly after the Liberation (1946), seriously sought contact with the CGK. This search for unity however constantly came to a deadlock because of the conditions set by the CGK, conditions that went above Scripture, as was determined, after seven synods, by the GS Hooegeveen in 1969. In this way the liberated-Reformed Churches were 'prevented from entering the way to unity of ecclesiastical living together with the CGK'. At the same time, it became clear for this synod that there was an 'ecumenical striving' in the CGK towards 'community practice with others', which, according to the synod 'was not according to the Reformed confession'.

Prof. Dekker however has a different view on this than the GS Hooegeveen, and also different to what we like. He sees these obstacles 'not in the last place by the high standards set by the RCNlib for the possibility of dialogue and union'. (page 43).

It is particularly unfortunate then that Prof. Dekker summarizes what had taken place after 1969 in the contacts with CGK in only a few sentences. For it is precisely in these contacts that the on-going revolution first fully came to light as ecclesiastical initiative. He does still indicate that in the beginning of the 1980's there was concern about the 'increase in non-reformed ideas' in the CGK, but does not mention that this had to do with the Scripture criticism, while GS Arnhem 1981 had pointed to the Scripture criticism of Prof. B. Oosterhoff. This synod still explicitly summoned CGK to choose for the truth and against the error.

Neither does Prof. Dekker make mention of the tolerance within the CGK regarding Scripture criticism, such as Dr. B. Loonstra publicly interpreted and defended this in his books since 1994. Dekker leaves all this unmentioned. We cannot imagine that he – seeing the keen insights he has shown in other matters – did not notice this issue of Scripture criticism. The consequence of his presentation is that he, in his appreciation of the development (last chapter) then does not come so far as to naming this revolution as being a revolution against Scripture. Nevertheless we do have to see it as such, for the openness towards others included unscriptural tolerance, which affected the Scripture and its authority. Therefore it concerned a tolerance which is an abomination to God, and against which our

Reformed Confession warns us in Art. 7 and Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession.

That Prof. Dekker did not indicate it as such, does not mean that, in our opinion, he can put it down to the religion-sociological character of his study. It may possibly have to do with his own conviction. Until 2004 he was a member of the synodical Reformed Church and presently he is – according to the *Reformatie Dagblad* of 28 Feb. 2013 – a visitor to the meetings of the Amsterdam Students-ecclesia, in which, among others, the poet-theologian Huub Oosterhuis is involved. We will come back to his appreciation of the development later, when we discuss his last chapter.

Isolation abandoned

What Prof. Dekker does indicate, is the change in attitude: already in 1999 they 'agreed upon a federative growth model in which both churches would grow toward each other in phases'. The fact that later on, the CGK consider that the RCNlib are (somewhat) overdoing things, only underlines the radical change in thinking and striving.

To this we ourselves add: in this striving there was no longer room to listen to the many appeals from within the churches, appeals pointing to the nature and cause of this, that were tabled at the synod of Zuidhorn 2002. Appealing to Scripture and confession no longer worked. Already in 2002 a kind of blinding occurred: the train had to and

would continue. There was no way of stopping it. Prof Dekker: the self-selected isolation has been abandoned (page 45).

The same ecumenical striving with unscriptural tolerance has developed in the direction of the NGK. Prof. Dekker mentions that in the 1990's discussions commenced with the NGK. The coming to unity of local churches is being stimulated. The fact that the confession speaks of one Church has been abandoned (page 46). In the meantime there are many congregations that have already merged with the CGK or the NGK.

Prof. Dekker does mention one important stumbling block for national union with the NGK, and that is the ordination of women to church offices. He does not go on to mention the existence of other errors, or the problem of binding to the confession in the NGK

In chapter 5 he elaborates on the matter of the woman in office. Also within the RCNlib a major shift has taken place. Prof. Dekker quotes: 'It appears that there is support for female deacons' and 'the impression exists that people now want to go further'. In the new Church Order that has been submitted as draft to the churches, room has been created to possibly allow female deacons. Prof. Dekker himself concludes on page 78, that 'given the speed with which the opinions are developing at present, one can hardly expect anything else than that in time women may also become office-bearers in the RCNlib'.



From Reformed to secularized churches? (5)

The first 4 articles dealt with the openness (interdenominational trends) of the Liberated Reformed Churches which, linked with greater tolerance, increasingly manifested itself from the 1980s onwards. Prof Dekker goes on to show a series of consequences in three chapters: church life (5), doctrine and confession (6), and ethical issues (7). A few of these matters are touched upon again in the following chapter wherein he also draws conclusions about the whole subject. We won't go into everything here but will dwell on some main points, beginning with the basis: doctrine and confession (6).

Doctrine and discipline

Prof Dekker sees occurring, over time, a steady shift away from doctrine (orthodoxy) to life (ethics). He has observed that in all sorts of other church groups, and has seen that process over the years evident not only in the synodical churches but now also in the liberated churches. Whilst for a long time it was said within the RCNlib that they continued to be true to their heritage in such things as church, Scripture and confession, a change was quietly taking place, a change that could no longer be denied even by the deputies Dienst and Kerk (office and church) in 2008 (page 89).

As example of this change Dekker mentions the established doctrine of reconciliation. The attack on this doctrine by Dr Wiersinga in the synodical churches was still fiercely opposed in the 70's by the liberated churches. But when the liberated Prof Dr G. Harinck in 2008 criticized the doctrine of reconciliation (besides also speaking sympathetically about the Roman Catholic mass, women in office and homosexuality), an indignant response by the church members was suppressed by a joint declaration with the university board by means of which 'a few things had been explained and clarified'. However nothing was withdrawn, no reprimand followed, let alone a suspension. Dekker states that this testifies of a relativizing of the doctrine of Scripture (page 90):

Here we clearly taste – just as was the case in a certain period of the synodical Reformed churches – 'a relativizing of the doctrine with a view to the life of the community of faith or the unity of the church.

And here, says Dekker, we can echo what Plomp said at the time about the settling of doctrinal matters in the synodical Reformed churches:

Not only in 1926, but still many years thereafter, this would have been impossible: to note a similar deviation from the confession without following it up with corrective measures.

According to Dekker, doctrine is put on a lower level in the RCNlib churches, just as it was earlier in the synodical churches (page 91). He observes a similar parallel for church discipline, which disappeared almost completely in the practice of church life within the synodical Reformed churches in the 1980s.

Confession and Scripture

Dekker also observes a position shift in respect to the confession. He refers to statements of Prof Dr E.A. de Boer (and others) who already in 2004, through the publication of the third volume of *Vuur and Vlam*, spoke about the 'historical and theological relativity of the confessions'. There Prof Dekker also considers that for practical purposes it is possible 'that one easily comes to doing confession of faith, because one realizes that one is not bound to express agreement with the literal meaning of the text' (page 92).

Hereby, too, he indicates agreement with the image reflected by the synodical churches at the time. There the confession was not changed either, but on the one hand there was greater freedom in the application and interpretation, and on the other hand the confession took on a less important position in the life of the churches.

With regards to views on the Bible, too, changes appeared gradually within the RCNlib. Dekker mentions the discussion about the providence of God and the continuing discussion on the authority of the Scripture.

Increasing attention is being paid to the human factor in the origin of various Bible books and to a greater awareness that the authority of the Bible does not allow itself to be rooted in a theory, but in essence remains a secret.

Whilst earlier the practice of 'Scripture criticism' had been condemned, later this was no longer the case (page 96). Developments in the area of literary theory were welcomed and applied to the study of the Bible. Whilst earlier there had been a clear rejection of the influence of the spirit of the times in the decision about women's voting rights (1978), now there is an acknowledgment and acceptance that it does play a role in the time in which we live (page 96).

Dekker concludes that in the course of time the Bible has come to be seen differently and to be applied differently.

Protest

Dekker also observes that these shifts give rise to differences which undermine the established unity and solidarity that previously existed. He pays very brief attention to the disturbing effects these shifts had in the early 90s and which found expression in the establishment of the paper *Reformanda* (page 100). Further he mentions that as result of the great changes and liberality of the last years, groups of congregational members separated themselves from the liberated-Reformed Churches. Dekker's opinion on this is that the growing openness led to protests because people were afraid that by means of this openness they would lose the 'traditional elements of Reformed church life'.

Further he compares, on the one hand, the Voortgezette Gereformeerde Kerken (which he wrongly calls Gereformeerde Kerken hersteld (=RCNr)) which wanted no part of being fused into the PKN with, on the other hand, the 'new liberation'. Here he refers to our liberation of 2003 on the grounds that we could not go along with the new developments (page 102). Personally I consider this to be a very superficial comparison. The principle grounds for our reformation from a deformed church are not identified by Dekker. To him our liberation is merely seen as a matter of holding on to tradition instead of a participation in a new development.

Mid-term review

Whilst we hope to write more, at this stage we will just draw some preliminary conclusions. Although Dekker does identify important shifts, much of it is barely, if at all, touched upon. That is partly because Prof Dekker limits his source of information to the series *Vuur en Vlam* and to the annual handbooks. This has restricted his understanding and given him a one-sided view of the developments.

But it is also partly because he does not apply a theological analysis on the basis of Scripture, Reformed confession and Church Order. Surely these are the criteria for judging doctrine and life.

By this superficiality and one-sidedness Dekker has failed to expose the true nature of the 'revolution' within the liberated churches (namely, that it is a revolution against the Scripture and the Lord of the Church). He sees the revolution too much as a process of new developments coming into conflict with earlier, traditional ideas.

But this also prevents the extent of the revolution from being clearly presented. To give an example: How much has the toleration and application of 'Scriptural criticism' and the changed perspective on the Bible affected the content and assurance of people's faith? There is much more to be said about this than Dekker does in his book.

In the following article we will discuss the chapters on church life and ethical matters, after which we will conclude with our assessment of the conclusion and views of Prof Dekker.



From Reformed to secularized churches? (6)

Centralization and freedom

The openness within the RCNlib not only fostered tolerance in doctrine and confession but also became evident in daily life. Prof. Dekker draws attention to this in chapters on 'church life' and 'ethical matters'.

He first describes the increasing organizational growth within the RCNlib through the establishing of all sorts of national agencies and centres with their officials. This was evident in the work of mission, evangelization, deacons and congregational development. All this occurred at the cost of the work of office bearers and the involvement of the church members. It also led to professionalization and centralization. As example, Prof. Dekker refers to the recent establishing of an association for church workers. In this way church members have increasingly found themselves divorced from all sorts of church matters. This is reflected in the declining interest in the annual 'School Day' of the Theological University at Kampen.

Prof. Dekker sees a relationship between this development at the national level and the freedom that the local churches can permit themselves. A quotation from the 2011 RCNlib Year Book referring to the new draft Church Order (known as work order) clarifies this:

In general it is striking that in this work order (the new draft Church Order), various matters are not so fixed as the churches were used to. This reflects the growing diversity amongst the churches, in which you must find your way.

As example of this diversity Prof. Dekker refers to the many baptism and holy supper forms, the freedom to join a congregation of one's own preference and the new types of pastoral work whereby congregational members are enlisted into the work of office bearers. In all this Dekker sees no difference between what is happening in the RCNlib and the way that the synodical churches went (page 71).

Offices

In certain ways the ministry has become a profession like other professions. The ministers' association has become a professional group. Moreover, the special position of the minister, as minister of the Word, is adversely affected by placing it on the same level as other professions and by the introduction of church workers. Quotation from 2001: 'The fact

that the minister of the Word is no longer placed on the same pedestal as previously, is gain'.

As for the office of elder, Dekker observes that in over half the congregations it is difficult to find office bearers. The pastoral work is now organized differently in many congregations: the elder has become more a coordinator of other members who are actively involved in the pastoral work of the congregation. In some of the congregations the yearly home visits prescribed in the church order, are no longer made. Sometimes they proceed to mutual pastoral care or mini-wards (page 73). Here again Dekker sees much similarity to the way the synodical churches developed (page 74, 123).

This certainly also applies in respect to women in office. Dekker points out once again how active voting rights for women was introduced. That happened a mere 15 years after the decision of the GS Groningen Zuid 1978 'that it is not in harmony with the submissiveness that Scripture gives to the position of women in the congregation, to be given an own independent voice'. And therefore it declared 'that the current long-established rule is not to be changed'.

However, at the General Synod of Ommen 1993 it was decided overwhelmingly (with merely one abstention) that confessing sisters can no longer be withheld from taking part in voting for office bearers. It was emphasized in the grounds, that the arguments are not based on the spirit of the times but on what is commanded by Holy Scripture (page 77).

As could be expected, says Prof. Dekker, this would inevitably lead to a discussion on whether the offices in the church could be open for women. And that's exactly what happened. In the 1990s this was actively discussed, and at the most recently held synod it was decided to investigate whether it is permissible on the basis of Scripture to appoint women to the offices of deacon, elder and minister.

Prof. Dekker sees this as a direct consequence of society's changed views of the position of women and as illustration refers to the RCNlib's changed form for marriage. The earlier form used in the RCNlib said that man 'as head, has authority over his wife' and that the woman is to 'accept his leadership in obedience'. However, the new form for the solemnization of marriage no longer speaks of 'authority' and 'leadership'; the position of the man and that of the woman are now described as

being more equal. 'When Gods Word speaks of the relationships and responsibilities in marriage it is first the unity that is accented.'

The church services

Prof. Dekker did no 'fieldwork'. That implies also that he did not attend the worship services of the RCNlib as part of his investigation. What we 'know' about the phenomenal liturgical changes that have occurred in local RCNlib congregations therefore could not be featured in his book. However, he does pay attention to that what entered the RCNlib, as a result of synod decisions, on liturgical innovations, including the introduction of the Songbook (Het Liedboek voor de Kerken) into the churches after the General Synod of Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996.

Also here Prof. Dekker makes astute observations about the changes taking place. He recalls an earlier remark of Prof. J. Kamphuis about the Songbook (Liedboek) as a collection of songs of the 'false oecumenical movement' which played 'a powerful role in establishing an unscriptural ecclesiastical unity' (page 83). But after 1996 it was impossible to turn the tide: despite a 'flood of objections' lodged at the General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002/2003 work continued on a new collection. Prof. Dekker: 'and then at last a decision is made to participate in Liedboek 2012, a decision that is radically different to the original refusal to adopt the Songbook (Liedboek)'.

Regarding the church services Prof Dekker refers to the quiet introduction of the simultaneous church services for children, the 'open' Holy Supper celebrations in which guests from outside the churches can take part, and the decline in church service attendance. The open Holy Supper celebrations are only casually mentioned by Dekker (page 84). Yet also here much more could be said in relation to his investigation. For here we see, as a result of the openness of the RCNlib, all the marks of the true church at issue: the absence of admonition and discipline and therefore an impure administration of the sacrament, coherent with a doctrine of false ecumenism. .

Prof. Dekker does go into the decline of church attendance more deeply (page 79-81). He quotes the 2003 Year Book (!): 'from experience we learn that many find going to church only once per Sunday is sufficient'. In 2009 deputies declared 'that people have different thoughts about the need to have a second church service and catechism sermons as stipulated in the Church Order'. They decided to 'formulate this in a more open manner'.

In the sitting of synod in September 2012 it was actually decided by a majority to stipulate that the congregation should 'as a rule' hold two services per Sunday. Prof. Dekker: 'the developments on this point are changing more rapidly than many had thought possible' (page 81).

Ethical matters

Prof. Dekker notes a shift taking place in the church life of the RCNlib in general whereby 'the emphasis on dogmatic questions, on the doctrine and the confession, has been replaced by a situation in which behaviour, way of life, and thus ethical matters become more important (page 105). He also points to the link between changes in church life on the one hand and changes in walk of life, ethics, on the other. In his book he points to these changes in the area of marriage and divorce, homosexuality, and lifestyle (including Sunday observance).

Here we only mention the most important points. In the early 1990s Prof. Douma still stated that the churches 'adhered to the old established norms in relation to marriage'. But even then he had to observe: 'Many began to consider the phenomenon of 'living together' quite normal. Later (2010) it was explicitly stated that living together before marriage was on the increase (page 107).

It is becoming repetitious, but also in relation to marriage and divorce Dekker sees a parallel with the synodical churches. He notices that church policy on divorce is adjusted to accommodate the changing practice. He calls it a 'nuanced position of the ecclesiastical point of view' when deputies (at the General Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003), 'approach the Bible in a different way than was formerly the case , and attempt to approach the questions on divorce and re-marriage from the Bible as a whole'. That leads to an 'understanding for the hardness of hart, also in our time. Sometimes there is just no other way.' At first there is still a plea not to solemnize a second marriage in church. But Prof. Dekker quotes the 2009 Year Book about the decision of the synod of Zwolle Zuid 2008: 'At the synod the subject of divorce came up for discussion again; it is decided that a second marriage of a divorcee may be solemnized in the church if the consistory agrees with that marriage. A previous synod had refused this.'

Concerning homosexuality Prof. Dekker observes that the official position (Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008) continues to be that the living together of two homosexuals in an active relationship is wrong. However, Prof. Dekker fails to mention that in the

same decision the synod refused to declare that this living together – under promise of excluding sexual relationship – would also be worthy of discipline. It has been directed back to the consistory, ‘as this belongs to the pastoral room that a consistory has in concrete situations’ (Acts, art. 52). Meanwhile, the RCNlib has jointly with the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK) developed a website offering ‘assistance to local churches in relation to homosexual congregational members’.

In the last paragraph of this chapter, just before his conclusion, under the heading ‘lifestyle’, the issue of Sunday observance is finally raised again (page 115). Remarkably, however, Prof. Dekker concludes that on this point there appears to be a noteworthy difference with the synodicals. He motivates this by saying:

That this matter is still the subject of vigorous discussion in this century (and the difference of opinion on this could even lead to ‘the new liberation’) indicates that this is, in the life of the liberated-reformed people, an important point.

He says no more on this. We are of opinion that Prof. Dekker makes a mistake in this assessment about the Sunday observance within the RCNlib. He has failed to notice the fundamental change of course. Consequently he has not considered this matter in the light of the ongoing revolution described in his book. In our Liberation of 2003 we had to see the departure from Gods law concerning the Sabbath as symptom of an overall decline (see the brochure *Laten wij ons bekeren/ Let us repent* of 2002). It is also remarkable that Prof. Dekker does not link this matter to what he observed as the decline in church attendance in the RCNlib (page 79). Could the masked words of the document ‘*Zondag, een heerlijke dag*’ presented by deputies to Synod Amersfoort 2005, have played a part? Perhaps the absence of fieldwork and the one-sidedness of his sources is to blame.

Next time we hope to present our conclusions with an evaluation of the developments within the RCNlib as presented by Prof. Dekker. We will then also respond to reactions on the publication of his book.



From Reformed to secularized churches? (7, concluding article)

In this installment we will round off the discussion of the book of Prof. Dr. G. Dekker: *The ongoing revolution of the Reformed Churches in perspective*.

Following the synodicals

The final two chapters of Prof. Dekker's book give the conclusion and the criticism of the observed developments. There the most important question was whether the changes within the RCNlib resemble the changes that were previously evident within the synodical-Reformed Churches. It will not surprise the reader of this series of articles that, in relation to many of these changes, Prof Dekker provides an affirmative answer. Moreover, the totality of the changes reflect the same direction the synodicals took at the time, even though Dekker sometimes noticed differences in speed and intensity of the changes. He also adds that it is possible that the RCNlib- members, in their daily lives on certain points (for example, Sunday observance) distinguish themselves more strongly from the rest of the population. But this is questioned within the RCNlib, as Dr. K. van Bekkum did at the presentation of the book on 1st March 2013 when he said:

in the areas of Sunday observance and loss of the church awareness, changes are occurring more rapidly than Dekker thinks.

In the conclusions drawn by Prof. Dekker we further miss any reference to the influence of postmodernism on the developments he outlined. A postmodernist is more open for 'pluralism', whereby truth is smothered by the acceptance of a variety of opinions. In addition, one works more with his feelings than his mind. The post-modern man no longer wants absolute 'fixed' truths. That is precisely what creates room for all sorts of evangelical influences. The words of the former chief editor of Nederlands Dagblad, P. Bergwerf, in an interview with Reformatorisch Dagblad on the 16th March 2013, confirm this:

The resemblance with the Gereformeerde Kerken (synodical, SdM) lies in the increasing validity given to a subjective understanding of truth. But the difference is that with the reformed (synodical, SdM) people the mind stands central. Professor Kuitert states that everything from above comes from below. With the liberated

people, on the other hand, feelings are being elevated to a central position. What I feel is true.

Nevertheless, that does not alter the fact that the direction the RCNlib developments have gone is indeed comparable to that of the synodicals. According to us the changes outlined by Prof. Dekker therefore form an intensely sad story of ongoing revolution within the RCNlib. It is an ongoing revolution against God's Word by continually adjusting doctrine and life to a watered down Christianity and thereby an increasing adjustment to the world. And that happened despite all the recent warnings!

Valuation of the revolution.

But after giving his conclusions Prof. Dekker has still not finished. His closing chapter provides a personal review, a 'valuation' of the developments he has outlined. If you place the book's preface, written by Prof. Dr. G. Harinck, head of the RCNlib's Archives and Documentation Centrum, next to this valuation in the closing chapter, you cannot escape from the impression that this book has a specific agenda. In his preface Prof. Harinck gives the example of cohabiting as being on the increase in the churches. But he does not just want to see this as sign of decline. Dekker's book is published by his 'Centrum' and should, according to him, serve to 'broaden horizons'. What this includes becomes evident in the last chapter. From that it also appears that Prof. Dekker does not want to use his findings to illustrate that the RCNlib have deviated from Scripture and to call it back from its errors. It seems more like he wrote the book to promote a particular ideology about being church in the world.

Prof. Dekker does not include maintaining God's laws and maintaining the Scriptural antithesis in his evaluation as matters that affect the essence of the church. And so it is that he quietly bypasses the letting go of the 4th commandment. The toleration of Scripture criticism through the unity with the CGK and NGK are not mentioned by him. Neither does he pay attention to the acceptance of Scripture criticism and 'new hermeneutics' in own ranks at Kampen. The sympathy shown there in Kampen towards the false doctrine of theologians such as

K. Barth and D. Bonhoeffer is not mentioned either. Is that then not to be classed as revolution?

Prof Dekker's own position finally becomes clear in the last chapter. His assessment of the developments in respectively the synodical and the liberated churches, is that they have both adjusted themselves to the world. But by doing so they had to let go of what they in earlier days still proclaimed as the truth of God. In this way however both churches have lost all credibility in this world (page 130). Therein lies his real criticism on the course of events. In his valuation Prof Dekker does not test the issues on basis of Scripture, Confession and Church Order. He does not test the changes by using the marks of the true church. No he is concerned that the world may distrust such a church in which there is so much shifting of positions. Therefore, as Dekker states, his findings ask for a re-consideration of what it means to be church in the world.

Church and world

There he points to three possible approaches to be considered in relation to the position of the church (named 'churches', by him) towards the world.

The first approach is that of the *secularization*, the world-conformity. That approach sees the world increasingly divorced from God. This creates problems for the church's life in this world (antithesis). But at the same time there is danger within the church of accommodating itself to the world. However, the church will seek to protect itself against this process of secularization by protecting itself against the influence of the world. With this approach the developments described in Dekker's book will be referred to as 'backsliding' (page 133). Although Prof. Dekker gives no examples, 'conservative church federations' would identify with this approach.

As second approach referred to by Dekker is the process of connecting with an altered world, an approach that he remarkably enough calls 'reformation'. In relation to this he refers to A. Kuyper who, he claims, was out to link the church with the world. The result of such an active progressive approach is that the church loses members who prefer to stay 'with the old' (page 134). Dekker recognizes this variant in the RCNlib, which he then characterizes as Kuyperian churches.

As third approach Dekker finally mentions the ideology which he himself supports. It is based on the teachings of Bonhoeffer, which he supports, as

is evident from his other books on church and world. It is a doctrine that takes its starting point from the so-called empowerment of the world through secularization. That empowerment means that as autonomous world it no longer acknowledges God. But, like Bonhoeffer, Dekker still likes to qualify this autonomy, this empowerment as being positive.

That does not need to be seen as conflicting with God and with God's authority over man and world; it can also be seen as being in line with the purpose of God with man and the world (page 135).

According to Prof. Dekker the church should not be averse to such a world (first approach). Neither should she continually adjust herself to it by just following the world without actively being involved in the process in the world (second approach). No, says Dekker, the church is to take an active part in the innovations of the world. Dekker's opinion:

The churches, also the RCNlib, in this view have never been up with the times; they have failed to recognize God's work in this world. They struggle against themselves. And in spite of their 'innovations' many drop out, because – without being able to articulate it or consciously experience it – they no longer recognize themselves in that church and in the struggle of that church (page 136).

Bonhoeffer and God's plan with this world

These ideas, however, are far from the Reformed doctrine regarding church, faith and world. Without background information it is difficult to place them. But as we already wrote, Dekker largely follows the views of D. Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), about which he himself has written more books *). Meanwhile, however, we have become fairly well acquainted with his views. In short, it boils down to this: the church is there for the world. The church should not direct itself upwards, neither turn inward to attend to itself. The church is to direct itself downward and outward. The church is not so much there for the salvation of the believers, to prepare them for eternal salvation. Nor should she occupy herself so much with religion (the worship of God) but she is to exert herself for the world. Hence the church is not to see to win the world through the gospel, and so to win it for Christ, but it is just to be there for the world. In order 'to be there for the world' as 'following Christ's example' the congregation takes on 'the stature of Christ'.

How is this teaching and this view about the church to be consistent with Scripture? We need to remember that the teaching of Bonhoeffer has as starting point that the reconciliation of Christ extends to both church and world (universal reconciliation). Thereby this teaching does too little justice to God's holiness, and is in conflict with the Scriptural doctrine of election and reprobation. It acknowledges insufficiently the enmity and antithesis set by God. In this way it relativizes the destructive influence of Satan through the world and fails to recognize the final judgment on the last day.

The plan that, according to Dekker and Bonhoeffer, God would have with this world is, in our view, not according to Scripture. This teaching does not properly see the fact that Christ came to save His people, also from the darkness of this world. He brought her on earth into the desert in order to save her and to bring her to eternal glory (Rev. 12). At the same time, she has her cultural mandate as a holy priesthood in this world, in order to be a lighting light and a city on a mountain. But the church is not from and of the world, and is not to become a friend of the world (1 John 2:12-17), for she is to seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, not the things that are of the earth (Col. 3:1, 2). For here we have no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come (Hebr. 13:14).

This is how the teaching supported by Dekker is narrowed down to a social gospel of neighbourly love, however much reference is made to Christ combined with the need to follow His example. A 'gospel' that had already been embraced earlier by the World Council of Churches and its world-

diaconate. It is a different gospel that is no gospel (Gal. 1:6,7).

We receive increasingly more indications that this teaching of Bonhoeffer is, in the meantime, conquering the theological universities at Kampen (RCNlib) and Apeldoorn (CGK). He is praised there as the 'prophet of the twenty-first century'. This perhaps explains also the way in which the book of Dekker was received in Kampen. The revolutionary developments outlined by Prof. Dekker were not seen as a reason for humiliation, but instead were seen as new opportunities for the church to become secular (Dekker would say with Bonhoeffer: 'emancipated') church in order to be busily at work within the world.

May many within the RCNlib still gain insight into the true nature of the ongoing revolution, outlined in this book, and see it for what it is: revolution against God's Word. And may they come to see that over against the approach advocated by Prof Dekker and Kampen, there is but one Scriptural way, namely that of humiliation and reformation.

Let us too be warned again by the continuing developments that are the result of openness and interdenominationalism. In the past they formed the necessity for our own Liberation. But thereby the danger of it for today and for the future has not been averted.

*) a.o. G. Dekker: *Het zout der aarde; Bonhoeffers visie op de kerk*, Ten Have, Baarn, 2002; G. Dekker: *De kerk lost niets op; Bonhoeffer over de relatie tussen kerk en wereld*, Ten Have, Kampen, 2006

