

# REFORMED CONTINUA

Magazine of The Reformed Churches (restored) of The Netherlands

Proverbs 8:32

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## From the editor

May 2014

It is with thankfulness to the LORD that we can present to you the 16th edition of the magazine Reformed Continua.

This edition contains:

- **An Old Error**  
by T.L. Bruinius, published earlier in 'De Bazuin'.
- **Where the Word is, that's where the church is and**
- **Woman in office in the RCN?**  
Both these articles were written by Rev. S. de Marie and published earlier in 'De Bazuin'.  
These articles are very relevant to our times.

- Introducing you to... the congregation of De Gereformeerde Kerk Zwolle and environs

Thus far the articles in this Magazine.

In all this we may know and experience that it is God Himself Who preserves His Church and will do so to the end. It is His work that the Church still exists and that there are still so many possibilities to let His Word be heard.

Finally, we hope and pray that this edition also may be well received and that eyes may be opened world-wide to the right view on the Church.

*Joh. Houweling, Bleiswijk*

# An old error

by T.L. Bruinius

There has always been a lot of talk and a lot of thinking about the church. In all times. Also today, yes, especially today. The call for unity of all protestant churches is strongly increasing. Just think of the National Synod of the Netherlands that has already been held twice. Or, closer to home, the question of how to view, for example, the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (the Christian Reformed Churches [known in North America as the Free Reformed Churches]). Or, the Hersteld Hervormde Kerk, the HHK (the seceded part of the conservative flank in the Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (Dutch Reformed (state) Church) that did not wish to merge with the Reformed Church (synodical) and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church to form the Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PKN) in May 2004). Or even closer to home: the Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt (the liberated Reformed Churches (RCN)). Or the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, (the GKN, who separated from The Reformed Churches restored (RCNr)) and initially formed a provisional bond of churches). What about the claim 'lawful church of Christ'? To which church should we give that title and which church group are we to consider as 'unlawful', a church of which we cannot rightly say that Christ calls and gathers there?

## Good sermons, peace and quiet

For this is what it's all about: where does Christ call us? Not: where do we feel at home? Or: where do we find peace and quiet? Or: where does reformed preaching still occur? If those are our most important considerations, then there is a big chance that the outcome will not be good for us. Then we will likely go astray. Then we do not first and foremost listen to Christ, listen to the head of the Church, but we put our own wishes on a par with, or even above the calling of the Lord of the Church.

You hear things like that often nowadays.

Why do you now attend the Hersteld Hervormde Kerk? Well, in the local HHK, the preaching is very reformed. There we can listen safely, in contrast to our local RCN congregation.

Why do you not join The Reformed Churches restored (RCNr)?

Well, you have had a lot of arguing amongst yourselves. And they say you are harsh and in-

tolerant ... I don't want that anymore. I'm looking for peace and quiet.

Why do you attend a congregation of the Gereformeerde Bond (conservative flank) in the PKN? There they still have room for scriptural preaching. You still find the Word there. Therefore I can attend there, for where the Word is, that's where the Church is ... That congregation, that's where things are still normal and plainly reformed. The way it used to be ...

## Local

People then also look in particular to a local church. That such a local church may be part of a church community that as a whole, has departed from Scripture ... that such a local church despises the exercising of discipline to avoid bringing its sister-churches into a crisis, by not calling to reformation ... It is not considered important. As if a local church is solely responsible for itself! And not responsible for the deeds and errors of those with whom they have, in the name of the LORD, bound themselves!

## Erring

Such thinking about the Church has ancient roots. Very ancient roots. Already in the days of the Great Reformation there were discussions about the Church. And, fortunately, errors were rejected. On Biblical grounds.

Our Three Forms of Unity very clearly describe the Biblical doctrine. Not what we think, feel or want is determinative. Nor is that one particular mark of good scriptural preaching determinative. Scriptural preaching without exercising of discipline and without proper administration of the sacraments, in the heart of the matter, becomes deception and hypocrisy. Even without realizing it. Even if the intentions are good. In the true, the lawful proclamation of God's Word, in complete submission to Scripture, works of faith are included, as are exercising of discipline and works of reformation.

*'But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself goes away and immediately forgets what kind of man he was'.* (James 1:22-24, NKJV)

Whoever, when engaged with the question of where the Lord Christ calls, is fixated on that one point, that somewhere there is still a group of believers –

in an otherwise unlawful church, that somewhere there is still a minister who preaches Scripturally – in a church where on a broad front the truth of God's Word has been let go of, is in danger of becoming that man mentioned in James. He does not know where he is and who he is anymore. He is erring.

### Kuyper

As already mentioned, such ideas about the church are very old. Even if there are only a few believers, then that is still where the church is. If there is still proper preaching, then that is still where the church is.

One of our great leaders, who also wrestled with these questions, was Dr. Abraham Kuyper. This learned theologian published extensively about the Church. Moreover, it makes quite a difference if we read something from his early years as minister, or from the years before and after the 'Doleantie' (Second Secession). Dr. Kuyper evolved considerably in his way of thinking about the church. From modern and liberal towards reformed. And then, unfortunately, away from that again. We shall see that in the following.

However, in his first congregation, he developed from a liberal young minister to a reformed preacher. Most of us know something of his life, how in the congregation at 'Beesd' he had to deal with the 'conventicles', also with Pietje Baltus, and how, through the contacts with them, he was put on a different, on a reformed path. He learned to see that in these conventicles, no matter what else you may have to say about them, the old reformed teachings had been preserved. The teachings of the Reformation and of the Synod of Dort, 1618/1619. Also his vision on the Church changed strongly in that period.

In the beginning of his ministry, for example, Kuyper was a furious opponent of Calvin's concepts about the Church. In his opinion, Calvin gave a disproportionate amount of attention to the organization of the Church, to the offices and the ecclesiastical assemblies. To holiness at the cost of love. (Do we recognize such thinking?) To legalistic principals, to judaic, roman ideas. According to him, Calvin took insufficient consideration of the mature, articulate believers in the free church of Christ. But during his years in Beesd he also changed his view on Calvin. He noticed that Calvin's theology was very similar to what the people of the conventicles pointed out to him about the church.

So Kuyper changed and began to see the Church as the body of Christ and that this body must be visible and is visible.

### Rooted and grounded

Yet ... Of course we cannot discuss all the developments and all the nuances of Kuyper's concepts in this article. We will limit ourselves to a few of the matters and will outline them briefly and in our own words.

When Kuyper was installed as minister in Amsterdam, he held a sermon with the theme: 'Rooted and grounded', words taken from Ephesians 3:17:

*'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love; ...'*

(This is how it is written in the King James Version, which was in use at the time.)

Kuyper used those words, those images – being rooted and grounded – to make clear how it is with the Church.

The first word, rooted, then points to the essence of the Church, to the spiritual roots, to the life in faith, to the work of the Holy Spirit. To the whole body of all believers throughout the ages. Kuyper called that 'the church as organism'.

The second, grounded, then has to do with matters such as the church as edifice, as temple: the organization of the Church, the form in which the Church becomes visible. The offices and the assemblies. This is 'the Church as institute'.

Grounded and rooted, essence and form. Also, and that probably sounds more familiar: invisible and visible Church. Initially Kuyper clearly stated that the two, organism and institute, invisible and visible Church, cannot be separated. They are one. They are in line with each other. After Pentecost, Kuyper claimed, there was first the organism. Three thousand came to faith in one day. From there the institute followed: the tending of the flock by office bearers.

### Pulled Apart

Now, that seems to be reformed. Scripture and the confessions also teach that unity. Neither of them make a distinction between that which is visible of the Church and that which is not visible. The body of Christ can be found, can be pointed out.

And yet, the use of such man-made concepts that cannot be found in the Bible, holds a danger.

Dr. K Schilder, in his time, explained to his students that he did not attach much value to such concepts and that they could easily be the cause of many errors. He proposed that we should simply and plainly abide by the language of the Bible and the Confessions, that we should not try to fit matters of faith of and about the church into our limited and human scheme of things.

We have much to thank Dr. Kuyper for and we may thankfully remember that. However, Kuyper did not develop his thoughts about the Church in accordance with Scripture. Eventually, in his view the organism and the institute were, as it were, pulled apart. He began to see them as separate, one from the other. They were no longer together.

That was also apparent in his view on the 'Doleantie'. Kuyper did not want to break with the organism, with the believers in the Dutch Reformed (state) Church, but only with the institute, with the church council and the church regulations; with the unscriptural church government. This was in contrast to the 'Afgescheidenen' (the Dissenters) who did not make this difference. For Kuyper, the church as an organism and the church as an institute were actually separate matters. We believe that he indeed started to err in this.

### *Group*

That had major implications for the question concerning the matter of which is a lawful or which is an unlawful church. Kuyper wanted to be very reticent in identifying a church as false. He did not want to relate to the Dutch Reformed (state) Church in this way either. The church government was totally unscriptural and serious errors were proclaimed in many local churches, but ... and that is what it is all about, in many local churches there was still good, scriptural preaching. The institute was wrong but in many places the organism could still be found.

Yes, Kuyper taught that if somewhere there was still a small group of believers, even within a large group of unbelievers, then the essence of the Church was still present. No longer the form, but the principle was still there. A church, a local church, a gathering where faithful believers are still present, even if there are no longer any faithful office bearers, still has the essence of the Church. For in that place there is still the possibility to work on reformation. There is still a chance that faithful office bearers may again be installed.

Finally, Kuyper, continuing in this line of reasoning, taught that in almost every institute there is

something visible of that organism. Yes, there are limits. The deterioration of the institute can go so far that finally nothing remains of the organism either. But Kuyper, in his time, did not want to indicate that anywhere.

He was also very careful when it comes to the question: when must one break with the church? That had to be delayed as long as possible. He saw much more value in a lengthy silent protest than in openly accusing a church community of becoming a false church.

The churches that came forth from the 'Doleantie' were, in his view, churches which had, out of necessity, temporarily organized themselves independently. They had temporarily broken with the institute, but they never did break with the organism of the Dutch Reformed (state) Church.

### *Close by today*

Again we have to be brief, there is so much that can be said about this. But it may be clear that this way of speaking about the church as organism and institute, about an invisible and visible church, about essence and form, detracts from the simple credibility of Scripture and confession:

*'... all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the Church. They must submit themselves to its instruction and discipline, bend their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and serve the edification of the brothers and sisters, according to the talents which God has given them as members of the same body.'*

*To observe this more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate from those who do not belong to the Church and to join this assembly wherever God has established it. They should do so even though the rulers and edicts of princes were against it, and death or physical punishment might follow.*

*All therefore who draw away from the Church or fail to join it act contrary to the ordinance of God'. (Belgic Confession, Article 28).*

We believe that Kuyper's old errors are becoming visible again today, not only in PKN circles or in Reformational denominations (Reformatorische kerkgenootsschappen). No, very close by. People who want nothing more than to simply believe, leave their church when unscriptural teachings are permitted and/or embraced. This also applies to seriously concerned brothers and sisters from the RCN. But the path some take, gives reason

for serious concern. Some join a local Hersteld Hervormde congregation (HHK). Some join a Christian Reformed Church, for that congregation is 'really very reformed'. One minister justified his move from the RCN to the PKN on the fact that 'the Word' was still there. And there are more examples. Yes, it is very close by. It concerns brothers and sisters with whom we have, until recently, sat in that one Church of Christ. They are seeking a place in a church federation because, in the words of Kuyper, there is still a local circle or group of believers. Because locally there is still a good minister. Because locally there is still room for the Word of God.

### An old error

Do we see that this is still the same old error? That, very human, one only looks to where there is still good preaching locally and to the good intentions of the still present believers? Do we see that then maybe one does take into consideration the first mark of the Church, but not the other two? Do we

see how, unfortunately, a choice is made in the line of separation between organism and institute? Do we see how brothers and sisters, just as did Kuyper, choose for the organism and ignore the unlawful institute? Or accept it? And thereby finding room for themselves?

At the depth of it, people go where they believe they will find a good place. Whilst the question, the question of faith, for it is a matter of faith, should be: where does Christ call us? Where does He reveal His body? Where do I find all the marks of the Church? We must point out these things to the brothers and sisters who are being called away from a church community that has lost its lawfulness. Make a choice for the Church, and not for a local group!

Going back to James: '*Be doers of the Word and not hearers only*'. The danger is so great that brothers and sisters no longer know who they are or where they are; that they are erring.

Our prayer is that the Lord may prevent that.



# Where the Word is, that's where the Church is

by S. de Marie

In October last year, Rev. H.J.C.C.J. Wilschut of the RCN (GKv) at Smilde announced that he was going to withdraw from the RCN to become a member, and if possible, become a minister of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Bond = the Reformed flank of the PCN). This news of his departure will have surprised many. Some would even have been stunned, because Rev. Wilschut was known to be a fighter for the truth within the RCN. For many of the concerned he was still a figure of support in a church that is slipping away. On further consideration, it appears that the departure of Rev. Wilschut is not entirely unexpected. It is a consequence of earlier publications in which he explained his vision on the church. The big question is: how is his decision compatible with what God's Word says about the Church of Christ? For an answer to this we will discuss his justification which he has posted on his website.

## Church-gathering

What Scripture says about the church is extremely important for the following of the Lord and for the participation in His church-gathering work. Therefore it is not a side issue of our faith, but a very essential matter of faith. It is certainly not a doctrine where one can think differently about, if conditions would force one to do so. Scripture teaches us how we, as baptized people who have received faith, are to be real disciples of the Lord. Therefore we must observe all He has commanded us (Matth. 28: 20). This concerns the whole of Scripture (2 Tim. 3: 16). This certainly applies to His glorious work of the gathering of His church. From Scripture we know that we are called there, where Christ reigns with His Word and Spirit. There we may have full communion with our Saviour. There we may have mutual communion with all those whom Christ gathers through His Spirit and around His Word. All that demands obedience from us: to be willing to bend our necks under the yoke of Christ, together with all other brothers and sisters, who also let themselves be gathered there.

To know that together we have been called to serve the Lord in unison and to honour Him in the unity of true faith. That will cost many a struggle and gives

a cross to bear. To that end we will receive strength through prayer and we may therefore expect God's blessing.

The first matter of importance is therefore that the church-gathering work is the work of Christ, through His Spirit and to the honour of God. Christ gathers *unto Himself* a church. To the greater glory of God. It is therefore His church, of which we may be and remain a member. That determines the care designated in Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession, to distinguish the true church of Christ from among the many groups that call themselves 'church'.

## Binding to the doctrine of the Church?

We will first pay attention to Rev. Wilschut's following statement:

*I have definitely not changed my views on the binding to the reformed confession and other issues ... (with the exception of my vision on the church).*

When members of the Reformed churches publicly professed their faith, they promised faithfulness to the doctrine of the Scriptures, also the doctrine about the church. They confirmed with an oath that they would, in life and death, steadfastly continue in this doctrine of salvation, which is taught here in the Christian church. A solemn oath. Ministers have made an additional declaration about that when signing the Subscription Form, with which they declare that the doctrine of the Three Forms of Unity are completely in accordance with the Word of God.

Rev. Wilschut does not openly renounce the Reformed confession, but he does say to have a 'different vision' on the church. That 'different vision' immediately becomes apparent when he gives his assessment of the RCN:

*A church that has spiritually come adrift has not yet become a false church. You must not 'leave it in a great hurry'. (...) More than one secession from the RCN has taken place since 2003. I did not want to go along with any of them. I did recognize some of the objections. But I did not think that the foundation of church life was affected.*

The foundation of the RCN, according to Rev. Wilschut, was and is therefore still in order. That

is not his reason for leaving. But what then is the 'foundation of church life' other than the upholding of the Holy Scripture in its entirety and the adherence to the Reformed Confessions? Doesn't it then follow on that we have to uphold God's commandments, that we must fully preserve the authority of Scripture, exclude Scripture criticism and fight errors.

How can we recognize this within the RCN and what is still left of the marks of the true church according to Art. 29, BC in these churches?

Rev. Wilschut's 'different vision' apparently implies that in his judgment on the RCN and the PCN, he no longer wants to apply the Reformed Confessions. He apparently does not want to bind himself to this anymore. He has other criteria, as stated below.

### *The way it sounds*

Rev. Wilschut does point to Art. 29, BC when he writes: *Where the Word is, that's where the church is – and not the other way around. It brought me to the conviction that the hervormd-gereformeerde (protestant-reformed) congregations are to be regarded as true churches, in the sense of Art. 29, BC, although I initially considered the totality of the PKN still to be a false church.*

But how does Art. 29, BC function here, other than 'the way it sounds'?

*Where the Word is, that's where the church is*, is an expression from the time of the great Reformation. This statement made it clear that it is not the church that reigns over the Word, as it did and does in the Roman Catholic church, but that the Word reigns over the church. Also this statement can be misused, when one goes by 'the way it sounds'.

After all, it is all about the pure Word, when it comes to recognizing the true church of Christ. It is about the application of that pure Word: whether that Word is preached according Art. 29, BC, or whether the sacraments are administered according to that Word, or discipline is practised, also according to that Word.

It is Art. 29, BC that indicates so clearly and strongly what the summed-up characteristic is of the true church of Christ:

*In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary it, and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head.*

We hear nothing about this in Rev. Wilschut's assessment of the RCN and the PCN.

### *True Church?*

Rev. Wilschut writes that in the meantime, because of his altered vision, he can no longer say – what he 'initially' still did – that the PKN is a false church.

How can Rev. Wilschut defend this whilst the PCN leads the way in today's false ecumenism (e.g. the National Synod with a false creed), gives every possible room to false hermeneutics, does not exercise church discipline over members and not even exercise discipline over false teachers? Not even discipline over those who say that God does not exist (Rev. K. Hendrikse)?

Rev. Wilschut must then be asked: how can there, according to him, be a case of a 'true church according to Art.29, BC' in the 'Gereformeerde Bond' if the affiliated churches of the above-mentioned bond of churches don't break away from the PCN and do not reject everything that is in conflict with the pure Word of God? How can that be consistent with the tolerance of the views of a professor, emanated by the 'Gereformeerde Bond' itself, Dr. G van den Brink, who in his new book *Christelijke Dagmatiek* (= 'Christian dogmatics', Boekencentrum 2012, chapter 13) renounces the verbal inspiration and the absolute authority of God's Word and gives room to pluralistic interpretation of Scripture.

Rev. Wilschut however, not only wants to consider the churches of the 'Gereformeerde Bond' as 'true church' alongside the RCN, but also the PCN. Then why not call many more 'churches' true churches, where the truth may be heard alongside accepted and sanctioned untruths? Where one can, in places, still listen to 'nice' sermons, but where one does not stand up in everything for the honour and rights of God?

What does Rev. Wilschut then do with the confession regarding the church, in his assessment, particularly with Art. 27-29 BC? Nothing at all. He does not even confront himself and his own actions with Art. 28 BC which states that you may not draw away from the true church (he still sees of the RCN as such). How does he see his office of pastor and teacher, with regard to the flock that the Lord has entrusted to him? Does he just leave them behind in the care of the RCN?

One could now argue that it had become very difficult for Rev. Wilschut in the RCN. He was irritated by

the emptiness and banality of the worship services in the RCN. He ran up against a lot of stress because of criticism on his sermons.

In itself we should not trivialize this. It can bring a minister into difficulties, with tensions and health problems. Rev. Wilschut also mentions this in his justification.

Yet this is not a reason to go wrong ways and, as pastor and teacher, to abandon your own flock. In the whole of the justification for his departure we miss the Scriptural voice of our Confession. We do hear of annoyance and of 'not being able to function fully', but not of a moral dilemma for Christ's sake. We do hear of a personal problem, but not of a problem of principle.

### *Room*

Which arguments did Rev. Wilschut then use to justify his entering into the PCN / Gereformeerde Bond? These are derived from his following statement:  
*You may not write off and leave a church as if it is a false church when there is still room for God's Word.*

Is this a valid application of the above-mentioned starting-point of the Reformation: 'where the Word is, that's where the church is' or do we also have a citation 'going by the way it sounds'? It seems to be the latter. For 'room' for the Word is something different than 'reigning' of the Word. 'Room' for the Word can exist without fighting heresy, without rejecting all that is contrary to the pure Word of God and without exercising church discipline. Only room for the Word, where untruths exist next to the truth, where the untruth reigns, is not the true mark of the church that belongs to Christ, the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

Rev Wilschut describes the trouble of the RCN:  
*there is no evasive place to go to for classic reformed church life and preaching. The bond of churches is too small for this.*

His choice for the PCN is that it is larger than the RCN and it has alternative places to go to.

This is how far you can go in your vision on the church. The existence of enough evasive places makes a 'church', a true church.

This statement surely does not fit in with the command to follow the one Head, Christ (Art. 29 BC), He Who is the Head of His Church and Who governs it by His Word and Spirit? Christ is not satisfied with

an alternative place in His own House! Sometimes He does let His faithful Church become really small, but that is fundamentally something else.

Rev. Wilschut's vision seems to come forth from an opportunistic, pluralistic and post-modern way of thinking. However, this vision leads him to a situation in which he in fact becomes co-responsible for the denial of the one Head of the Church, Christ.

### *Calvin*

Rev. Wilschut appeals to Calvin as regards the right to secede. According to him Calvin teaches:  
*that you may leave a church only when the fundamental truth of the Christian faith is officially denied and faithful members are excluded or are being forced to participate in wickedness.*

He is of the opinion that the right to secession – as in 2003 – did not exist because there were not yet any fundamental matters of faith that had been affected. Apparently, he wants to apply this to the PKN as well.

What then does Calvin write in book 4 of the Institutes from which Rev. Wilschut deduces this? We quote some passages to do Calvin justice. First of all he deals with the marks of the church in chapter 1, par. 7-9:

*Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence.*

In par. 11 we read about the use of the marks to distinguish:

*That we may not be imposed upon by the name of Church, every congregation which claims the name must be brought to that test as to a Lydian stone.* But Calvin then also warns for unjustified secession on the basis of Anabaptist perfectionism, but without however, condoning errors (par. 12):

*I have no wish to patronise even the minutest errors, as if I thought it right to foster them by flattery or connivance; what I say is, that we are not on account of every minute difference to abandon a church, provided it retain sound and unimpaired that doctrine in which the safety of piety consists, and keep the use of the sacraments instituted by the Lord. Meanwhile, if we strive to reform what is offensive, we act in the discharge of duty.* (bold print SdM).

Calvin wants to point out that small differences of opinions should be dealt with in the church-orderly

way, and that therefore one cannot just leave the church. It is very different in the case where 'the doctrine on which pure piety is based' is affected. We believe that for years the latter has been the case in the RCN and for many years to very many decades this has been the case in the PCN (and earlier in the Synodical Reformed Churches and the Dutch Reformed (state) Church): there God's Word itself is affected by Scripture criticism, new hermeneutics, letting go of God's commandments and undermining of the Confession.

Participating in such a church is participating in ungodliness and is therefore sin. God's Word makes clear that God does not dwell where His Word is violated or abandoned (1 Sam. 4; Ez. 9; Ps. 78:60; 1 Tim. 3:15 Rev. 2:5). One must then depart from there, to break with iniquity (Is. 52:11; 2 Tim. 2:19). This is the only legitimate reason for secession: obey God more than the church institute. Continuing to follow Christ in His church-gathering work wherever He goes, means, according to Art. 28, BC, but above all to God's command: choose for Christ's yoke of 'the sound doctrine'. This therefore also means: choose against the yoke of heresy, wherein one – how cunningly! – would still allow some room for the Word.

### The true Confession

Rev Wilschut wants to use Calvin's words for his own minimum-foundation, which for him still makes the PCN a true church of Christ:

*In all brokenness, the confession of God being the Triune God, has remained.*

We ask ourselves here, what is this confession worth now? Is the triune God still the God of the Scriptures in this PCN confession? Does it concern God the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth as He has made Himself known in His holy and infallible Word? Have they not since long broken with that true confession? Is the Christ in this PCN confession still the Son of man, seated at the right hand of God, to judge the living and the dead?

Should we not, full of sorrow, determine that in the PCN and in the RCN, through influence of all sorts of doctrine, it in the meantime, comes down to the worshipping of a God according to a multifarious own model?

Once we start looking for 'more room' in the church, then things will go wrong. In the House of

God, it must be about the honour and right of the Lord. That makes us tolerant towards all who seek God in truth, but intolerant towards damage to the foundation of His Church, His Word.

Therefore we may not seek room for ourselves in a broad, unfaithful church, because then we too are guilty of terrible 'church'-sins, for which we will have to give account.

But we shall, in full confidence, go the narrow path, where the Lord will lead and preserve His Church that wants to remain faithful to Him, no matter how small it may be (Rev. 3:8).

We hope that Rev. Wilschut will reconsider and return from his wrong path. Not to stay in the RCN, but now, in faith and in obedience according to Art. 28, BC, to join the Church of Christ, which he is easily able to recognize, on the basis of the marks pointed out in Scripture and Confession.





## Introducing you to ...

*the congregation of De Gereformeerde Kerk Zwolle and environs*

At present our regional congregation has approximately 140 members. All age groups are represented. The local ward at Ermelo is also part of the church at Zwolle.

The members of our congregation have, over the past years, liberated themselves from the Reformed Churches (liberated). This is not a new church being formed but it is a continuation of these Reformed Churches. We believe that Christ gathers for Himself a church from the beginning of the world to its end and that we, as members of The Reformed Church at Zwolle and environs, belong to this church (Lord's Day 21, H.C.). The LORD has, through the recent liberation, again preserved and restored His church.

In the autumn of 2003 our congregation was small.

However, the LORD very soon gave growth. He also blessed us in January 2006 with an own minister of the Word.

Initially there was good growth, not only in Zwolle, but also in the sister-churches. That was cause for thankfulness to the LORD, Who gave continuance of His church.

Nevertheless, serious tribulations arose within the bond of churches which did not pass by Zwolle. Already in 2005 a movement of independentism developed that led to the breaking away of the congregation at Zwijndrecht from the young bond of churches. This happened in 2006. Shortly after, schisms occurred elsewhere through members who sympathized with the independentism of Zwijndrecht.

In December 2009 a large number of members broke away when 5 provisionally suspended office-bearers called the congregation away from under the supervision of the consistory.

In the years that followed peace and quiet returned in the church and church life flourished.

There were numerous meetings of the Bible Study clubs.

The Saturday Bible-school supported parents in their task of Biblical education.

Church days were organized to strengthen the unity in the congregation.

Courses for marriage and for confessing members could be started.

Office-bearers could also be elected and installed.

In 2013 the congregation at Dalfsen, with its

minister Rev. E. Heres joined our bond of churches. Consequently, church members who lived in Dalfsen joined the congregation of Rev. Heres. Because of departures with attestations to other congregations and also some members passing away, the number of church members dropped to below 150

Yet, through all these trials and tribulations, the LORD kept and preserved His church. The LORD did not put our trust in Him to shame. He has done great things and has preserved for us His Word and preserved our faith.

Soli Deo Gloria, to God alone be the glory.

*C. Baan, Zwolle, May 2014*



# Woman in office in the RCN?

## Slip-up or structural decline?

by S. de Marie

This month the general synod of Ede 2014 of the RCN (GKv) will have to deal with deputies report 'M/V in de kerk' (Man/woman in the church). Many are waiting in suspense, for since the publication of the report, a storm of diverse responses has risen. The synod also received objections from 10 consistories and from at least six churches abroad. Furthermore, there was a notice of appeal, signed by more than 1500 church members, in which, besides objections to this case, other concerns were included.

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Because of our great concern for the liberated churches and our sympathy with the concerned members, it is good to again pay attention to the content of this report. In addition we will discuss the question whether it is a glitch, a 'slip-up', or whether it testifies of a structural and general decline.

### Introductory remarks

Already at the GS Amersfoort 2005 a deputyship for 'women in the church' was set up. Their report to the GS Zwolle 2008 already propagated a hermeneutical (exegetical) line that declares the Biblical message being time-bound, next to a more Scriptural hermeneutic line.

The following is a quotation taken from this report via a booklet by H.J.C.C. Wilschut in 2010, *Vrouw en kerkelijk ambt; een bijbelse verkenning* (Woman and ecclesiastical office; a biblical exploration):  
*Both lines agree that the writers of the Bible were themselves rooted in the culture of their days. That, for instance, marks the way they take things for granted (and therefore can be omitted in the description) or rather, are recorded as striking. The question is, to what extent does that culture work through in the authority of the texts for today. When Bible writers pass something on as a message from God then already a certain 'cultural processing' is included, and both parties acknowledge that, but could that also mean that the message of God is, as it were, hidden under that cultural layer? So that Christian sensitivity is required in order to see through that layer and to receive insight on the message for today? Could it even be possible that*

*the Spirit intentionally remains hidden behind that cultural layer to challenge us to use our Christian freedom in wisdom? So that we, led by the Spirit, more or less grow out above the statements of the New Testament, in the sense that we are no longer bound to them? Are those statements so interwoven with the concrete situation in which they are given, that a direct application for today is not possible, may even be contradictory with Gods purpose?*

Very questionable words, that directly affect the authority of Scripture. The synod of Zwolle-Zuid 2008 did not reject this line of the new interpretation, but gave the TU at Kampen instructions to carry out a 'scientific reflection' concerning 'hermeneutical and theological questions'. So now, commissioned by the Synod of Harderwijk 2011, there is a report M/V (man/woman) in which the line of the Scriptural interpretation is merely represented by one deputy, D. Slump, in which he gives account of why he has not agreed with the report.

### Area of Tension

The report sees as its task the solving of a 'problem'(!): *how do we read the Bible, partly motivated by socio-cultural shifts and changes in thinking and lifestyles of church members.* Regarding the background of this 'problem', we read the following: Compared with the past, more and more women fully participate in the broad social life. Girls can now study and work. Women lead and carry responsibility. Within the RCN women also increasingly fulfil more leadership and teaching tasks. *'They give catechism instruction, are secretary or write minutes for the consistory, function as ecclesiastical or pastoral worker, do diaconal work, take part in the management of church goods, and are part of various committees, including calling- committees that assess sermons and other works of office of a minister'.* Also, so says the report, women have the possibility, since the synod of Ommen (1993), to participate in voting for elders, deacons and ministers.

The report shows the church members, because of this, coming into an 'area of tension' '*between the possibilities for women in social life and, in comparison, the limited possibilities for women in*

*ecclesiastical life.'* But as a result also '*the 'area of tension' between the doctrine', that is: the official standpoint concerning the closed special offices for women, and 'life', that is: the way in which the women at present deploy their gifts in the churches and thereby also perform leadership and teaching tasks.'*

### *Use of Scripture*

For the solution of the so-called 'problem', the well-known Bible verses about the role of the woman are now explained in the manner of the new hermeneutics: relate the message of the text that originated in an ancient environment to the current environment, so that it becomes 'trustworthy' and acceptable for today.

The authoritative relationship between man and woman in texts such as 1 Cor. 11:3-16, 1 Cor. 14:34-35, 1 Tim. 2:11-14, Eph. 5:21-33 is not completely denied, but is associated with the 'class system' in the society of those days. Paul himself would have affiliated with 'the prevailing moral standards' of his time. With it, Paul, in his argumentation, used '*typical Christian notions, such as awe for God and for Christ, references to the Old Testament (creation, the fall into sin and the giving of the law) and the prevention of unnecessary criticism from outsiders.'*

The essence of these Scripture passages is, according to the report, that in the 'subordination of the woman' Paul wanted to adapt himself to the culture of his days for the sake of the 'progress of the gospel'. That therefore, is its message for us today. They were guidelines to avoid outsiders raising unnecessary impediments for accepting the gospel and joining the church. *While Paul warns here for dominant behaviour of women towards men, in our culture there is mostly a warning for dominant behaviour of men towards women.* The Christian attitude must therefore not be unnecessarily out of step with the culture in which we live. Thus far the report.

### *God's order of creation and our 'problem'*

But does Scripture teach somewhere that God adjusts His own institution and ordinances to the world? Did God not put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:16)? Doesn't that also and particularly concern the obedient carrying out of His will and His ordinances?

Yes, the Lord God is long-suffering, especially towards the world. He wants none of His elect to be lost. But doesn't He, with that, maintain His right to His order of creation and His covenant demands against conformity to the world? See how the Lord Jesus Himself, referred back to God's institution in the beginning for the relationship between man and woman. Man is not allowed to interfere with God's institution – (Math. 19:4-6)! We know from Romans 1 how much God abhors people who reverse His orders of creation, nor honour Him in it.

When the apostle Paul speaks of the position of the woman in the church, he affiliates with the Scriptural position of the woman versus the man. The woman is the glory of the man, as the man is the glory of God (1 Cor. 11:7). As an equal in Christ (Gal. 3:28), the woman should be submissive to her husband, who is her head, and who leads in responsibility (1 Cor. 11:3, Eph. 5:23). Paul uses the interaction between Christ and His congregation as an example for the relationship between man and woman (Eph. 5:22-23). With that he excludes the woman from the special office (1 Cor. 14:34, 1 Tim. 2:12). That is not *his* interpretation of God's message, for his words are inspired by God Himself (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20,21). That is why Paul affiliates with God's teachings on the ordinances of creation, that are universally applicable to humans of this earth (1 Tim. 2:13, 1 Cor. 14: 34). That is the message of the whole of Scripture regarding man and woman.

Moreover, Paul's words were not only meant for the congregation of Corinth or for Timothy. They count as divine words also for the church of today. God already had our situation in mind, for our good (Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16)! His words warn us also not to take on the desire for emancipation of the world. At the Fall, the Woman had that emancipation desire, whereby she did not follow the order of creation (1 Tim. 2:13,14). That desire was also present in the days of Paul and can also be seen in the woman Jezebel in Rev. 2: 20 (see *De dienst en de vrouw in de kerk* (= The worship service and the woman in the church), by Prof. K. Deddens, Vuurbaak 1978, page 49,50). Nowadays this desire for emancipation obtrudes even more boldly. That is our real 'problem'!

### *The authority of God's Word*

Unfortunately these dimensions do not come into the picture at all in the report. Deputies do

repeatedly say that God's Word must have the first and the last say, but to that Word they impose their own framework of adjustment to the culture of the world. Because they do not know how to deal with it. Thus they come to an explanation that is at odds with Scripture, namely that the woman nowadays does not need to be submissive ('subservient') where it concerns the fulfilling of the special offices.

The used Biblical foundation of continued validity of the submissiveness of the woman, is dismissed with the thought that this was handy for Paul in his situation. The writers are saying implicitly: but this Biblical foundation does not suit us in our situation.

In this way they think to have found the solution for their described 'problem' and for the 'area of tension between doctrine and life'. They say to have done this under 'continual prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit'. But the question comes up strongly as to whether the word of 2 Tim. 4: 3, 4 isn't true here. In these verses we read: *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.* (NKJV)

### Broad development

How could it come so far? In his leading articles *Doorgaande deformatie* (Ongoing deformation) and *Lees wat er staat* (Read what it says), De Bazuin, volume 7, no's 33 and 35, br. T.L. Bruinius has already written a few things about it. In addition to this we want to point out various coherent lines of development within the RCN that, in our opinion, come together in this report. In random order:

The *first* line of development that we wish to mention, is that of the false ecumenism through which they now have firm bonds with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NRC) and are striving for unity with them. Recently there is also more rapprochement towards and cooperation with the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. In both church communities the woman has been admitted to the pulpit for some years now. For this also, a linkage with the culture in the time of Biblical events was brought forward as argument.

A *second* line of development is the increasing openness towards the world, with a desire for adaptation, amongst other things, in liturgy,

preaching and ethics (see our articles on the book *Doorgaande revolutie* (Ongoing revolution) by Prof. G. Dekker).

A *third* line is the dominating thought of being a missionary church, in which non-reformed teachings of, among others, D. Bonhoeffer play a major part. For a long time now one no longer wants to be a 'church with walls', but a church following the model of an 'open market'.

The *fourth* line of development is that of Scripture criticism within the TU at Kampen since the publishing of the Scripture-critical book *Woord op schrift* in 2002. In the meantime Scripture has been adapted in many parts. We mention the history of creation, the miracles in the Bible (Joshua), the power of expression of Gods law (congregation-ethics) including dealing with Sunday rest, divorce and homosexuality in a different manner.

The *fifth* line is the said decision of GS Ommen 1993 to allow voting rights for women. This, for the benefit of adapting to the time-spirit, already meant a break with almost 20 centuries of being church (see Acts Mariënberg 2005, Art.25.A.) At that time it was already considered to be a venturing on a 'slippery slope' and a prelude for the woman in office.

The *sixth* line of development is the changed view on the role of man and woman in marriage, as became evident in the new form for the solemnization of marriage of Leusden 1999. The main accent is in its '*doing things together*' with emphasis on equality, in which the Biblical teaching, regarding the diversity in tasks and order, is missing. (see Acts Mariënberg, Art 25. E.b.).

### Broad reformation necessary

The synod of Ede is yet to meet to discuss the report. Many hope for a rejection of this step beyond the 'boundary'. Then one can remain 'orthodox' and carry on in relief. But this would be a big mistake, given the broad apostasy in which this report has been established. Only a genuine and broad repentance is the only right step. A repentance that asks much more than just resolutely rejecting this report. That is true even if it can be prevented that small steps are taken on the road to women in office. True repentance means a radical repentance from the many paths which they have already taken in departing from God's Word. Much more

could be mentioned than what has been touched upon in this article. (see e.g. everything that the Australian churches have specified in their letter of admonition to the RCN and what GS Emmen 2009-2010 wrote in a letter to the RCN). Only if there is return to the pure Word of God, and a rejection of all that is contrary to it, then one can speak of a true reformation. Only in this manner can the RCN again become true church of Christ.

For the concerned who do see the breadth of it, it is therefore of the utmost importance to come to the deed of true reformation and to summon others. May the Lord help them in this and give courage of faith.



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