

# REFORMED CONTINUA

Magazine of The Reformed Churches (restored) of The Netherlands

Proverbs 8:32

- Volume 13 - October 2013 -

## From the editor

October, 2013

This is the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the Reformed Continua and we thank the Lord, Who again made this possible.

This issue comes in October, a month later than planned. The annual holidays, the ordination of candidate C. Koster and the general busyness of the beginning of a new season was the main cause of this.

In this issue you will find:

- **Editorial: Postmodernism and faith (part 1)** (Parts 2 and 3 will be published In the following two issues of the Magazine. These three articles were written by Rev. S. de Marie and were published earlier in De Bazuin. It is worthwhile to read these articles so that the many errors in Postmodernism can be recognized.)
- **From the churches.**

- **For the first time we also have an article for the 'young people', titled: What was it about again? The Liberation of 2003.**

So far the articles in this issue.

Day by day the Lord preserves His church and He will do so to the end. We may know and experience this as we share in all His treasures and gifts. May we use these gifts for the benefit and well-being of the other members and win our neighbours for Christ.

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

In the next issue of the Magazine we hope to publish part 2 of: 'Postmodernism and faith'.

*Joh. Houweling, Bleiswijk*

# Postmodernism and faith (1)

## Postmodernism as reaction

by S. de Marie

### Examples of postmodernism

What is postmodernism? How do we recognize it? What influence does it have on society, on church members, and in theology? How are we to react to it?

Before we go into that, I would like to mention two real-life examples, that illustrate the topicality of it.

The first is taken from the *Reformatorisch Dagblad* of 13 January 2013. This newspaper gives a report of a symposium at the Gereformeerde Hogeschool at Zwolle (a Reformed vocational college). Two speakers are quoted. Both are theologians who trained at the Theological University of Kampen (GKv). One is still 'Vrijgemaakt' (GKv), the other is now 'Old Catholic'. The topic of the symposium was the promotion for more understanding in the church for cohabitation instead of marriage. Both speakers agreed that the concept on marriage is in need of renewal. It is no longer the only form in which one can be happy. That was always only a presupposition. It is time to turn away from the old traditional views.

The one speaker says: 'We are too much under the spell of the (wedding)ring and too little under the spell of Jesus Christ and His liberating Gospel'. The other speaker states that 'the traditional concept on marriage was a 'hermeneutic' (exegetical) construction', that cannot be based on the Bible, but where 'unknowing assumptions' do play a role.'

And: 'The concept on the traditional marriage is 'contextually (the context in which it occurs) dependent', and can form an obstacle in the relationship between modern man and God.'

In short, these speakers consider the ecclesiastical concept on marriage as being dominant and prohibitive. They see a wrong application of Scripture when marriage is seen as the only God-given form of living together. In their view there is talk of: (1) Imposition of norms that oppose the freedom of the Gospel, (2) dominance of 'contextual

dependency', therefore subjective views and (3) an unsustainable 'hermeneutical construction'.

In an article in *Una Sancta* of the Australian churches titled *Discerning the times*, Rev. Retief from Australia wrote an interesting article about the influence of postmodernism. In it he gives the following example. The Scriptural hermeneutics is based on God as being the one primary Author of Scripture, the absolute truth thereof, the unity of the Scriptures, and the necessity to compare Scripture with Scripture. This shows, with reference to 1 Timothy 2:11-13, that the woman is not permitted into the offices as office bearer.

But what if you were to apply a completely different hermeneutics to these verses, namely the method to see what the contextual message was in that time? And to see what this can mean for us today? Then you could argue that in these texts Paul adapts himself to his time. In his time the woman had little to say. Therefore it must be like that in the church: the woman is not to be admitted into office.

But in our present society the situation is completely different. The woman is allowed to come to the fore. Therefore we must now allow the woman into office. That would then be the meaning of this text. Other times, other norms, also with regard to the role of the woman. Thus far these examples.

In three articles on postmodernism we will discuss the following:

- (1) The origin and purpose of postmodernism: Where does it come from? What philosophy is behind it.
- (2) The post-modern society: What is its influence on the society in which we live?
- (3) Postmodernism with regard to faith and experiencing faith: How does this influence theology, church life and faith?
- (4) Adapt or reject? How should we react to it in the church and in theology?

We will deal with the first part in this first article.

### Modernism

Postmodernism is a reaction to modernism. To be able to understand postmodernism, we must

therefore begin with modernism. Modernism begins with the rising of modern man with reason, the logical mind as starting point, rather than with faith. Man considered science as source for the knowledge of truth, instead of God's Word.

Great names are the philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) with his slogan: 'I think, therefore I exist' and Isaac Newton (1643-1727), a naturalist (natural scientist). The beginning of modernism is called 'rationalism': reasoning being the central point, instead of faith. This was further developed later on in the so-called Enlightenment, in which the modern ideas also reached the common man. Round 1800 names such as Voltaire (1674-1778), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882) were connected to this. At that time modernism was characterized by a faith-in-progress. In theology Hofstede de Groot (1802-1886) and Johannes Henricus Scholten (1811-1885) must be mentioned. These men gave plenty of room for Scripture criticism based on the scientific- historical criticism.

We can summarize this development of unbelief of modernism in general features:

- Knowledge leads to the establishment of the (scientifically proven) truth
- Man thereby accepts universally valid principles and theories
- Through his ability to reason, man is autonomous.
- But reasonable argumentation leads to consensus
- Knowledge in service of social development
- There is emancipation, manipulability, progress, positivism and idealism

The latter can be seen in:

- Industrialization and urbanization
- Technological progress, automation and communication, modern medical science
- Still further secularization, deterioration of the authority of Scripture,

### *Grounds for postmodernism*

With modernism man had a feasible and better future in mind. But when the balance was drawn up later, it appeared that all this progress-belief, also in the eyes of unbelievers, was a failure. It did not bring what one had expected of it. Concentration camps such as Auschwitz, oppression by dominating powers, criminality, arms race, unemployment, worldwide poverty etc. were signs of the failure of this philosophy. This led to the situation where

man started to massively reject totalitarian systems and universally proclaimed truths. For they had not improved the world. Through communications-media oppressed groups were able to assert themselves. In this way an increasing resistance arose against systems that claimed the power of truth. A major reproach was that only a few individuals benefited from this 'progress'.

Feelings of aimlessness and despair further led to the idea to let *all* prevailing truths, norms and values go by the board. Thus everything was thrown onto one heap: truths of faith and human truths.

Not only were so-called proven scientific matters more often interpreted as being relative, the Christian faith was also no longer permitted to have a 'prevailing' significance in society. Women, homosexuals, blacks, and whichever suppressed groups, must, in future, have equal rights, this according to the opinion of the post-modern philosopher.

### *Forerunners of postmodernism*

This so-called post-modern thinking only became a clear recognizable movement since the 60's and 70's of the last century. Even so, it does have forerunners from the distant past. The most important forerunner is possibly the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who lived from 1844 to 1900.

Nietzsche was the man of the 'nihilism'. Over against Hegel with his dialectical theory of expectation and disappointment of the "Enlightenment", Nietzsche preached its collapse: everything leads to death, everything is in essence empty and is nothing. There is no progress whatsoever. Everything is vanity. God is dead and death is God. Christianity, in his view, tried to overcome death. But it does that by dominance, with a claim to the truth.

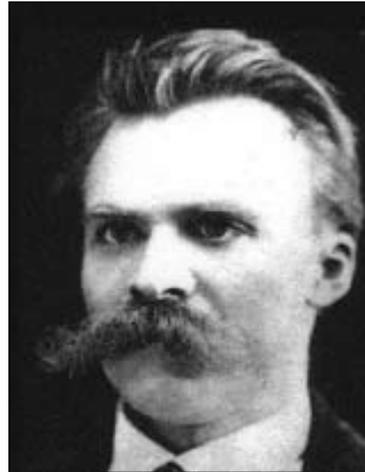
Science does not bring us any further either, for each so-called fact is merely an interpretation. There is never a 'being' but always a 'becoming'. The truth therefore, is not tangible, but is always developing. This emptiness and this relativism we again see in postmodernism. Man not only gave up his faith in God's Word and in the authority of Scripture, but now also his faith in science, manipulability and progress.

Another important forerunner besides Nietzsche is the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), the colleague of the theologian Rudolf Bultmann.

Heidegger is the man of the hermeneutics (exegesis), and the 'contextual relational' reference framework. Hermeneutics is to be understood as being the interpretation of what we perceive or of what we read. That 'understanding' is a process, a constant happening. It depends on the situation (context) as to how you see things. Real post-modern philosophers such as Lyotard (1924-1998) and Derrida (1930-2004) have developed one thing and another further.

*Postmodernism versus modernism*

In this way we see, as common factor, the following image of postmodernism versus modernism:



Friedrich Nietzsche

MODERNISM / RATIONALISM	POSTMODERNISM / RELATIVISM
God's Word contested	God's Word relativized
Knowledge is absolute => scientifically proven truth	Knowledge is subjective/contextual => there is no objective truth
Universally valid principles and theories 'big stories'	Plurality and a continuous shifting renunciation of 'big / boarded stories'
Autonomy through rational reasoning	Room for the irrational subconscious
Consensus by reasonable arguments	Dissent by plurality
Man strives for unity	It emphasizes the being different of the other
Knowledge aims for social development	No targeting
Emancipation, manipulability, progress, positivism and idealism	Relativism, negativism, pessimism, emptiness

Just like the Enlightenment, postmodernism rejects the existence of a God Who creates, Who maintains His creation and Who governs. Postmodernism not only denies sureties and providence, it lives by chance. Everything is coincidental and ambiguous. Man sees it as a challenge to lead a 'positive' life in such a chaos, in which everything is fragmentary and coincidental.

*Post-modern language*

Postmodernism does not only concern a philosophical and ideological movement, but also lives strongly in the field of art and, remarkably enough, in language. In terms of language, man states that where the



Martin Heidegger

text is concerned, it is not about what the author intended, nor about the message or even about the listener. It is only about what the text itself, in a continuing process, wants to pass on, depending on whether the listener makes something else of it.

There is no fixed purpose, no set significance that a text should teach us. We must therefore stop searching for the true purpose of the text. Truth changes constantly because it is based on the situation, the context of the reader.

That is why the truth must always be questioned. To take in the text we must 'deconstruct' it. That looks a bit like demythologizing, but goes much further. The deconstruction of the text already requires the assumption that there is no absolute truth in the text. Also the assumption that behind the picture that is given, no (spiritual) meaning would be discovered.

The text must merely be taken 'linguistically', to know the 'deeper purpose' in the changeable context. With the interpretation of the text, the reader's prejudices will then come up or that which plays subconsciously in the reader.

In this way an open-end-story arises with an unremitting change of the context, whereby the reader does not even have to have any thoughts about it.

Even though this so called 'deconstruction' is a difficult to follow philosophical method, one thing

is clear: namely that all is done to quell all forms of 'truth', to thwart every rule and to place everything in service of the individual who may give his own noncommittal input.

Releasing this method on the Bible inevitably and immediately leads to a complete breakdown of God's truth. What remains are terms that constantly change their meaning. Terms that everyone can interpret in his own way and then can think it is 'nice'. This is relativism at its best.

There are people who see postmodernism as gain with respect to modernism. Indeed, there is more room again for the individual to have some form of experience. However, that is the biggest logical error one can make. Modernism disputed the truth of God's Word, but postmodernism undermines every form of truth. It maintains texts as being meaningful, but only meaningful to the reader to discover something of a higher order in himself. Modernism, where man's reasoning had high priority, rejected God's Word as being ridiculous. But postmodernism accepts God's Word only if it does not claim the truth. The truth, in the eyes of the post-modern man is, after all, pluralistic and subjected to a never ending multiplicity of interpretations. Each interpretation has its supplementary value.

In a way postmodernism is even more dangerous than modernism because of its deceptive side.

*(to be continued)*



# From the churches

by Joh. Houweling

## 1. Rev. C. Koster

During the recent months Rev. C. Koster successfully passed his preparatory exams and classis declared him eligible for calling. Calls from three different congregations in our federation were extended to him and he accepted the call to the congregation of Berkel & Rodenrijs/Bergschenhoek, together with the ward congregation at Amersfoort. After that he successfully passed the peremptory exams before classis.

On Saturday 7 September 2013, history was again written. On that day candidate C. Koster was ordained into the office as Minister of the Word by Rev. P. van Gulp. We are very thankful and happy that the Lord has given us an own Training, that candidate C. Koster could study there, complete his studies and could be ordained by Rev. P. van Gulp so that we now have a Reverend C. Koster in our midst. (The ordination was held on Saturday afternoon to enable all ministers and guests to be present and giving everyone, living near, far and very far, the opportunity to return to their homes the same day.)

Rev. C. Koster preached his first sermon the next day, in Berkel & Rodenrijs/Bergschenhoek in the morning and in Amersfoort in the afternoon.

2. The general meeting of the Bible Study Associations will be held on 15 March 2014.

3. On 24 May 2014 we hope to hold our annual League Day, in Bergentheim/Bruchterveld.

4. The Church Day on 21 September went very well and we were able to welcome brothers and sisters from Australia and Canada in our midst, who also enjoyed this day together. The singing of two verses of the national anthem Het Wilhelmus was certainly a moving moment.

5. The Students Society 'Virtute Dei' will meet again in October 2013.

6. A conference for deacons will be held in Zwolle on 2 November 2013.

7. Christmas concerts have been organized for 13 December 2013 in Zwolle and 20 December 2013 in Hardenberg, the Lord willing.

8. At present the Training for the Ministry of the Word has 2 students. These are student M. Dijkstra, who has commenced his final year of study and student M.A. Sneep, who, since April, is studying full-time.

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*Click on this line to find information on internet about all the local churches*

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# What was it about again? The Liberation of 2003

by *Berdien Heres*

'Which church do you go to?' 'To The Reformed Church (restored).' 'Oh, I've never heard of that! What kind of church is that?'

Does this sound familiar to you? Maybe you've had a discussion like this yourself, in which you've had to explain which church you belong to. What was it about again? What were the reasons that The Reformed Church (restored) came into being? How can I describe this clearly and understandably to someone? Such discussions make you sit up and think again. It makes you become aware again of the Liberation of 2003: what was it about again? Why is it important that I should know this?

## *10 years ago*

In September 2013 we may remember that it was 10 years ago that the Liberation took place. The liberation from the Reformed Church liberated (GKv = RCN). It is a good while ago. You were 10 years younger then. Maybe you were not yet aware of what was happening, or you may have forgotten a lot of it. Therefore it is all the more important that in this article we go back to the beginning and go into the reasons for the Liberation of 2003. For a liberation (or making oneself loose) from a church doesn't just happen like that. Nor is it allowed to. A lot of things happen beforehand and that shows the seriousness of the liberation.

## *The beginning*

In the years before the Liberation of 2003 it became more and more clear that in the RCN, there was a straying away from God's Word. There was a straying away from the doctrine, but also in church life. We can mention three important points here:

1. The secularization. That is the adjustment to a world that lives without God.
2. The ecumenical striving. This means that the unity in faith between churches has become more important than the truth of God's Word.
3. The letting go of the authority of God's Word. Everyone can and is allowed to say anything

he wishes about God's Word, whereby a lot is tolerated. We will get back to that further on in this article when we will talk about criticism of Scripture.

Church members who saw this straying away more and more, had filed their objections (sent in appeals) against this. In many letters and discussions, and founded on God's Word, they explained why the direction in which the RCN was going, was wrong. There was a call to reform: a full return and subjection to God's Word: the only Truth.

## *The synod*

In the churches there is a set rule (the ecclesiastical way) that one has to follow when one wants to bring forward objections. An objection is a type of complaint that you can make when you don't agree with something. The ecclesiastical way is that you first go to your consistory to send in an appeal. When the consistory rejects this, you can send the appeal to the General Synod, which meets once every three years. The synod shall study these appeals and make a decision. When the appeal is rejected, a 'second appeal' can be made. This means that the following synod studies it again, and again makes a decision. When this second appeal is also rejected and the (unscriptural) decisions are ratified (enacted, officially confirmed), then the ecclesiastical way ends.

Many church members followed this ecclesiastical way. A lot of work was done to call back to the Word of God. In the end nearly all the appeals were rejected by the synod of the RCN (the synod of Zuidhorn, 2002-2003). The only way to go now was to liberate, to obediently follow the Lord and to only stay with the pure Word of God .

## *The reasons*

And now, what were the actual reasons for the liberation? Why was it necessary to liberate ourselves? We will try to give a short explanation of the reasons. Maybe this will help you, in your

talks with people, to explain why The Reformed Churches (restored) were formed and why you are a member of this church.

The first is the Sunday as the day of rest, the fourth commandment.

It is said that you do not necessarily have to see the Sunday as a divine command, the Sunday which the Lord Himself sanctified (read Gen. 2:2-3). The Sunday rest, that was commanded by God is not just a divine institution, but it may also be said that it is a man-made institution.

What does this mean? It is a damaging of God's commandment and therefore of all the commandments (James 2:10). It is the beginning of free doctrinal teaching, where everyone may say what he wants and with that, not taking God's Word as the absolute norm (the only truth) anymore. What's more, church discipline cannot be practiced any more, for isn't one allowed to give his own interpretation of the Sunday? Why then is discipline necessary?

The second is criticism of Scripture.

This occurs when it is said that we do not have to take everything that is written in the Bible literally anymore. Some parts of the Bible do not count for our time and therefore can be explained in a different manner, for example: the role of women, in Paul's letters, and bringing into discussion the authenticity (the truth) of the days of creation. The consequence of this is that sections of the texts are adapted to the perception (experiential world) of the people. This criticism of Scripture comes out in the co-operation and the unity that is being sought with other churches, such as the Christelijke Gereformeerde Churches and the Nederlands Gereformeerde Churches, where Scripture criticism is already tolerated. The consequence of this is that this keeps on going much further and the truth of God's Word is not purely and completely maintained and preached from the pulpit.

Thirdly we mention the hymns from the 'Liedboek van Kerken', (an interdenominational hymnbook). A number of these hymns deviate from God's Word. Wrong ideas and errors are praised in song, such as the doctrine of universal reconciliation, a kingdom of peace on earth, and where wrong accents are given to the sacraments: Baptism and Holy Supper. The contents of the hymns are not in accordance with God's Word. However, the 'Liedboek' has been approved for use in the worship services, with the

result that errors come into the church through the hymns that are sung.

The fourth is the seventh commandment: *you shall not commit adultery* (see also Matthew 19:9).

The synod has said that this commandment must be upheld, but at the same time it says that one must look at each situation to judge what is the best. One has to look at the 'hardness of heart', (the insensitivity) and the 'mental capacity' of the couple (can the couple still deal with the situation?). Human situations and needs are being placed above the commandment of the Lord.

Now that we know the reasons for the liberation, let us have a look at Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. Read what is written in it. This article mentions three marks of the true church. I'm sure you can name them: the pure preaching of the Gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments and the exercising of church discipline. The Lord calls the Church to turn to the pure Word of God and to reject everything that is contrary to it.

Things go wrong when people follow their own ideas. God's Word must be the only norm, in everything. Can you understand now, after reading all these reasons, why the liberation was necessary?

### *Remaining faithful*

Do you find it hard to explain of which church you are a member? Is it hard to explain when friends, classmates or colleagues ask why you go to this church? Or to have discussions about it? It is indeed hard. You may feel that you are on your own, because you're the only one. It can also be a delicate topic when you have discussions with family members and can give a lot of sadness and maybe distorted relationships. You may feel unwanted when you speak about the church and you can become discouraged. However, continue to cling to God's Word in faith. The Lord asks us to remain faithful, also in your churchgoing. Make sure you know why the liberation was necessary and that you know all about it. You need to know all about this when you discuss this with others. You grew up in this church, but do you know why you are a member of this church? You are responsible for your choice of church. Also when you profess your faith, you must know why you want to profess your faith in this church and not in another church.

The truth of God's Word comes first. In church the ministry of the Word takes place. When the Word

is not purely preached, there is a danger, a danger of being loosened from God's Word and following a path of one's own choice. Therefore, remain faithful to the Lord and His Word and pray for the Holy Spirit that you may receive strength to remain vigilant. Study the Bible for the Bible teaches you to know the way of the Lord, the way that we must go.

### 10 years later

A lot has happened in the last 10 years. Joy and sadness went hand in hand. We have seen many people leave, but have also seen many come. We may be thankful that the Lord preserves and leads His Church, even though it is small.

Let us, especially, remember other people and pray for them. Remember those that are still in the RCN, but also those in other churches with whom we have contact through schools, work or elsewhere. Let us

not feel superior or proud towards others because we have liberated ourselves. We must much more realize that we are sinful and without the Lord we can do nothing (John 15:5). It is undeserved grace that the Lord gives us insight and that He opens our eyes for everything that is happening in the churches. Let us be thankful for that!

The church struggles will always remain in this life. The Lord Himself said that in His Word (see e.g. Revelations 12). We do not know what the future will bring for us. We do know that the Lord will continue to gather, defend and preserve His Church till the end of the world (H.C., Lord's Day 21).

We also know that whoever serves the Lord faithfully, may soon be with Him forever. Let us always remember that.

*Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock. (RSV)*

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