

# REFORMED CONTINUA

Magazine of The Reformed Churches (restored) of The Netherlands

Proverbs 8:32

- Volume 23 - November 2017 -

## From the editor

November 2017

Dear readers,

We gladly present to you the 23rd magazine 'Reformed Continua'.

We are thankful to the Lord Who again made this possible.

It is He Who continues to provide opportunities for this work, to let His Word be heard all over the world.

The Lord will preserve His church to the end, we

may know and experience this. We continue to trust in Him.

*Contents:* In this edition you will find four articles about 'Training for the Ministry'.

These articles were written by Rev. S.de Marie and were published earlier in *De Bazuin*.

We pray that the Magazine may continue to be wellreceived, that it may work to the up-building of the church and open eyes to the right vision on the church.

*Joh. Houweling, Bleiswijk*

# Our Own Training for the Ministry – Why?

S. de Marie

This article contains the first part of a speech held on 26 March 2011 at the presentation of the Training for the Ministry of the Word in the Zuiderkerk at Zwolle and published in *De Bazuin* of 27 April 2011.

*Church Order Article 18:*

## **Training for the ministry**

*The churches shall maintain a theological university for the training for the ministry of the Word. The task of the professors in theology is to explain Holy Scripture and to defend the pure doctrine against heresies and error.*

*Ministers who are selected for the training for the ministry of the Word retain their bond, in the manner of minister emeriti, to the church they have served and hold the rights of a minister of the Word. The collective churches are bound to provide for their proper support, as well as to their widows and orphans.*

*Dear brothers and sisters*

A memorable moment, this first presentation about the Training for the Ministry of De Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands. In this series of presentations, we want to focus on the character and importance of this Training. When I say “we” then I mean the faculty formed by the tutors, the brothers T.L. Bruinius, A. van Egmond, Rev. P. van Gorp and myself.

## *The churches maintain a school*

Our own theological training – why? Are we not too small for this? When answering this question, we must consider that it is an essential matter for the churches that there is continuance in the ministry of reconciliation, the proclamation of God’s Word and the administration of the sacraments. The churches shall therefore endeavour that there be students of theology. Training and competency for the ministry of God’s Word is needed for those who qualify for this. This training is something that churches themselves are obligated to do. Obligated to the one Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. He requires that of His church, but He also gives the means for this.

It speaks for itself that especially ministers of the Word, as ambassadors for Christ, are primarily

chosen for this task. That is why the Churches also formulated this in their church order since Dordrecht 1618. We read this in article 2:

*Some ministers are selected and set apart for the training for the ministry of the Word.*

Then article 18 C.O. says the following:

*The churches shall maintain a theological university for the training for the ministry of the Word.*

Thereby, the Church Order responds to what the Lord grants – and thus demands. What the LORD has entrusted His congregation with is His Holy Word. Furthermore, He equips her with gifts of the Holy Spirit. He also calls to the office those whom He wants to use for this. In this, the churches must obediently follow their Lord. And thus there has to be a school for and by the churches, for the pure preaching of the Word.

## *Secession*

In this way, the Church Order of Dort filled an essential need. The churches needed their own Theological School. However, when the Secession of 1834 occurred, the churches lost their scholarly training. However, they quickly set up their own. That already took place prior to the training at the Hogeschool (‘seminary’) at Kampen, which started later, in 1854. At first, local schools came into existence, set up by ministers. The first was started by Hendrik de Cock who, by permission of the Regional Synod Groningen in 1839, received the official instruction to do this, thus 5 years after the Secession. Every 2 weeks he instructed a group of about 20 men in the most important ecclesiastical subjects. That resulted in the so-called Groningse Hogeschool which was later continued by Rev. T.F. de Haan in a Gronings-Friese training.

In this manner, under our Lord Jesus Christ, they worked on the Training for the Ministry of the Word, with the limited means that were available. In all humbleness and with limitations, but yet under His blessing and His providence. That is worth more than all human scholarliness combined.

## *An Own Training*

We are now confronted with a similar task. We lost the theological university at the liberation. But we did not lose God’s Word, nor students, and there are still suitable workers. Additionally, we have a wealth of useful reformed literature at our disposal.

At our first synod after the liberation, that of

Mariënberg, we were directly confronted with the question: can we use another existing theology training for our students in the Netherlands or elsewhere, with our necessary mentorship?

We then chose the Theological University at Apeldoorn, of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken. Other possibilities were eliminated. By closely monitoring the training in Apeldoorn during the coming period, it would become apparent to us whether this was a right choice. In the meantime, over a number of years, experience has been gained, and momentarily there are three students (in 2011) from our churches studying in Apeldoorn.

At the General Synod at Emmen a proposal was accepted to formally take on the responsibility which the churches have for the education, and to set up *training* instead of *mentorship*. With an annotation that many of the courses will be followed at the university of Apeldoorn, but that the own Training has final responsibility.

Of course, this is not an exaggerated issue, in which we want to puff ourselves up, but it is a matter of *responsibility* that we have as congregations of our Lord Jesus Christ. The development and guarding of a Scripturally reformed training is our aim. In the time of Hendrik de Cock the entire training was done locally with one or two minister(s), today we have set this up differently, with the means that we have now. But primarily we have the same responsibility.

### Interaction School – Church

The necessity of an own Training becomes enhanced by what we see elsewhere in developments in the field of theology. The situation in the churches has had its effect on the quality of theological training. How could it be otherwise? After all, the training is provided by ministers of those churches. There is interaction between the training and the churches. But that interaction works in two directions. When things go wrong in the churches, then it also goes wrong in the seminary of those churches. But often we see that decline in the churches is steered by decline in the seminaries. And this too is logical. For when you are educated with erroneous thoughts, that will work through in the place where you will serve in office.

In this manner, churches who have given up their pure reformed character for pluralism can be called 'post-reformed' – we will come back to this

expression later. This has its effect also on the training. This concretely means that not only must we be very careful with respect to the Theological University of Kampen, but likewise to that of Apeldoorn. I will try later to shortly describe what we learned from it.

### Thetic and Antithetic

Firstly this. Our task is not only reactionary. We have the Gospel especially as a positive message, with a rich and full content. In order to convey this, a rich reformed heritage of Scripturally sound theological works are at our disposal. These are not only antithetic, but also thetic. That is to say, not only disapproving towards others, but also positively up-building. Both are necessary. We need to build and to preserve, also with respect to the own training.

The Church Order also gives these two directions for the task of the tutors – in the C.O. they are still called 'professors in theology':

Firstly, the *positive* aspect, the building-up. Art. 18 calls this 'The explanation of the Holy Scripture'. That is primary: explanation of God's Word, as it must be worked out in all kinds of subjects. Which subjects do we include? You can find this in our new study guide.

I will now mention the most important ones:

- *Exegesis* of the Old and New Testament, i.e. the translation and explanation of Scripture.
- *Hermeneutics*, the method of exegesis being exercised. I will say something more about this later.
- Then we also have a subject known as *Historia Revelationis*, or the History of God's revelation. You probably know this name from the well-known books by Rev. I. de Wolff, ("De geschiedenis der Godsopenbaring"). This subject provides us with Scriptural lines and relations in the individual Biblical histories or with regards to the work of Biblical persons.
- Then we also have the subject of *Dogmatics*, which explains the doctrine of Scripture in depth. That is a very broad subject.
- Related to this is *Ethics*, which examines how we should deal with God's will in our practical lives.
- Then there is the subject *Symbolics*, which details and studies the content of the confessional documents.
- Practical ministerial subjects are *homiletics*, which is the theory of preaching; *Liturgics*, which studies the worship service; *Poimenics* which studies pastoral care; *Evangelisation*; *Catechetics*.

- Then there is *Church History*, in which not only the facts must be taught but lessons must be learned and lines drawn from the past.
- Finally, we mention *Church Polity*. Very important for the functioning of the church federation.

You will understand that in all these subjects positive matters can be dealt with that are neglected or even omitted at other universities. But besides the building-up, there must also be preservation, in the sense of refutation and the defending against erroneous thoughts.

Art. 18 of the Church Order provides for this in the second part of its instruction for teachers, which says: '*to defend the pure doctrine against heresies and error*'.

Therefore, our task is summarized as follows:

1. To explain Holy Scripture in depth and breadth, and 2. To defend the pure doctrine against errors and heresies.

To build and preserve. To explain and defend. A beautiful task, but also a difficult task, especially with regard to the second point of preservation and defence.

We will discuss this last point in more detail in the second article.

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<sup>1)</sup> Please note the Church Order used in De Gereformeerde Kerken differs in numbering of articles and content from the Church Order (Book of Praise, 1984) as used in e.g. the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford. In these articles we use the translated wording and numbering of the Dutch Church Order.

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

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Magazine of The Reformed Churches (restored) of The Netherlands

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## Magazine details

Subscription is free of charge, and can be obtained by adding your e-mail-address to our mail-list on the following website:

[www.reformedcontinua.nl](http://www.reformedcontinua.nl)

Via this website you can also unsubscribe.

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This magazine is issued by the 'Deputies for Contact with Churches Abroad' and is distributed automatically via the website:

[www.reformedcontinua.nl](http://www.reformedcontinua.nl)

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# New Hermeneutics as Pivot of Post-Reformed Theology

S. de Marie

Part two of the presentation speech of the Training for the Ministry of the Word and published in *De Bazuin* of 4 May 2011.

## Post-Reformed

In the previous article the term 'post-reformed' was mentioned. If we call a church post-reformed it concerns an institute that originates from the reformed churches. Reformed thinking will still be present. Many terms that fit with reformed doctrine and life will still be used. There is still a certain tradition. However, it is post-reformed, which means that the inheritance in essence has been left behind. We used this term 'post-reformed' in our recent liberation, to indicate the church developments going on in the GKv.

After all, the falsehood has been allowed and tolerated, next to and in place of the truth. Being reformed is nothing other than having returned to the Word of God, to the pure Word of God. However, that is over and done with when 'yes' and 'no' receive equal status. Such a church could also be called pluralistic.

In which manner that will come to the foreground in a theological school or university will differ per subject and tutor.

Yet that is exactly why a post-reformed situation is a dangerous environment, because heresy is possibly not easily detected. It is often still wrapped up in familiar terms. Erroneous literature is not necessarily placed on top of the list, but yet it is offered as literature to take note of, also as required literature.

Of course, during your training you must be confronted with heresy, to be able to defend yourself. But what if the necessary defence and rejection of these heresies is missing? And if it is left in the air, without any comment or opinion, what are you to do?

Post-reformed – pluralistic: sometimes it still seems so reliable, yet heresy has a place and, like leaven, it works through, destructively. Much in-class education at the TUA (Apeldoorn) is given to sketch the literature of today's age, and it is given

for consideration; instead of rejecting the heresy by using Scripture.

It is a daily struggle for our students and also a huge task for the tutors of our own Training to deal with this in a good and responsible way. A lot of discernment is necessary. Scriptural discernment. Prayer is continually needed for this, by those involved and in the churches.

## New Hermeneutics

Is there a common cause of the deviation from the pure doctrine? And then we have in mind especially the doctrine in the literature being offered, which forms the vast majority of the study material. Is there a common factor? If we can recognize this, then we must also defend against this in particular.

Well, if there is one important factor that can be mentioned, then it is the so-called new hermeneutics, which has entered in training courses, also in courses that are called reformed. Hermeneutics is the theory of exegesis and deals with the method of explanation. This subject provides rules that the exegete must follow in the explanation of a part of Scripture, with regard to, e.g. the grammar of the language, the verbal connection, the context in Scripture, the dispensation of the Old or New Testament and the cohesion of the entire Scripture. Also, the historical context: in which time was the Bible book written?

In new hermeneutics, that last point has been made dominant as an independent factor. In the explanation of Scripture, new hermeneutics wants to strongly take into account the so-called "Umwelt", that is, the situation in which the authors of the Bible lived at that time. This influence is seen as a deciding factor when explaining the meaning of written Scripture.

That is also linked to the denial of the *absolute* divine authority of Holy Scripture. One lessens this by getting rid of the divine inspiration through the contribution of the writer, his culture and his situation. In this way one no longer recognizes that all words of Scripture originate from God. One does not want to accept that the LORD wrote the whole of Scripture, also with an eye to us, who live so many centuries later.

## Defence of the Pure Doctrine (Art. 18 CO)

However, in doing so the new hermeneutics departs from Scripture itself. In article 3 of the Belgic Confession, we believe and confess that this Word of God

*did not come by the impulse of man, but that men, moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God, as the apostle Peter says (2 Pet. 1:21).*

In article 7 of the Belgic Confession, we confess and believe that Holy Scripture *fully contains the will of God and all that man must believe in order to be saved is sufficiently taught therein.*

In this the confession the well-known Scripture words are echoed, in 1 Pet. 1: 1-12, but also in 2 Tim. 3:16:

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

We also believe that what is taught in God's Word is perfect and complete in all respects. In this regard, we also mention Rom. 15:4:

*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*

Positively stated: the LORD, with an eye to us, had all words of Holy Scripture be written as words that came from Him. Not only with an eye to the world of that time. Not only with an eye to the fulfilment of a prophecy in ancient times. But also with an eye to our preservation in Christ. Also with an eye to our life with God and our salvation. Paul says that everything was written for our learning, our preservation and to our comfort.

Negatively stated: everything that departs from this is not to our benefit and diminishes from the service to God and from the honour to Him. Therefore, this must all be opposed.

Unfortunately, that does not happen. Room is given, yes much attention is approvingly given to views in which Scripture criticism has a place. And from this Scripture-critical stance the word of yesterday is attempted to be translated to the man of tomorrow.

This so-called new hermeneutics is, in fact, not so new at all. What is new, is that reformed training allows and even embraces this. This goes against article 18 of the Church Order, the article that we discussed in the previous article.

## Improper

In the study guide 1974 of Kampen (*Orientation in theology*), which was reprinted in 1987, 'new hermeneutics' was already mentioned. It was then noted that this 'new hermeneutics' presented reformed theology with an 'improper problem' (page 85).

Improper – because it did not fit with a reformed identity, with holding firm to Scripture. And therefore, it should not have been given a place when explaining Scripture, although it did need to be studied and warned against.

Well, that has really changed in reformed universities which provide much room for this new hermeneutics, and do not reject it. This is reflected in all subjects where the truth of God's Word is discussed. In dogmatics, which deals with the doctrine of Scripture; in ethics, which deals with the practice of life in accordance with God's revealed will. In fact, this works through in all subjects because in all of them the content and meaning of Scripture is at stake. Again and again we clash with the truthfulness of God's Word in all kinds of things.

Time and again our students are confronted with what Peter, in the above-mentioned passage of Scripture, calls: 'self-willed interpretation'. In this way the prophetic word threatens to lose its power for our students, if this heresy remains uncontested. And that could have far-reaching consequences for the churches.

## Training for the Ministry of the Word

That is why our own Training has such a important task, as pointed out in article 18 of the Church Order. First of all in building-up, namely the explanation of Holy Scripture according to the rules of Scripture itself, assuming the unwavering fact that in Scripture man, moved by the Holy Spirit, divinely spoke of God Himself. And that all of Scripture is also written for our learning.

To this end, we can fortunately still use our reformed literature from the past. We may

thankfully ascertain that. That literature you can find mentioned in our study guide.

Alongside the building-up we must focus with just as much energy on the preservation and defence of the pure doctrine of Scripture over against heresy. Therefore we must also delve into the literature provided in Apeldoorn. This literature is also mentioned in the study guide.

May our Training be able to show to be true, what it has taken as its logo from Scripture: That it may be of service to the training of the Word in the church of Christ; whereby this church as God's house, as congregation of the living God, is and must remain: a pillar and foundation of the truth.

The board of the Training desires to pursue this sincerely with the help and blessing of God, and with the support and prayer from the churches.

## Explanation and Defence of the Pure Doctrine

### *S. de Marie*

Opening speech, with some minor additions, held at the synod meeting of 11 February 2012 at Hasselt and published in *De Bazuin* of 29 February 2012.

#### *2 Peter 1:19-2:2a*

*19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;*

*20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,*

*21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*

*1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.*

*2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.*

Article 18 has been mentioned more often at synod. It is an important article because it deals with the Training for the Ministry, and in its aim and goal wants to conform with Scripture.

*The churches shall maintain a college for the*

*Training for the Ministry. The task of the professors in theology is to explain Holy Scripture and to defend the pure doctrine against heresies and errors.*

### *Explanation*

The first two chapters of the second letter of the apostle Peter contain important grounds for this article of the church order. We would like to examine this in our opening speech.

Firstly regarding the primary task of the training, namely the explanation of the Scripture.

In 2 Peter 1:16 and onwards, it points out to us the manner in which Holy Scripture must be considered. Here the Word is given as proclamation of Jesus Christ. The author of this letter, Peter calls himself, in the first verse, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ.

From out of this calling, he makes every effort to convey the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1: 2, 3, 8, 16). He was, after all, sent out to proclaim the glory of the gospel of the coming Christ. And the power with which the eternal kingdom of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is manifested.

In the first chapters, therefore, he calls the reader to see their calling through the knowledge of Christ. And to give answer to that through a life of zeal in godliness (verses 3-15).

The power and authority with which Peter speaks about this he derived from the fact that he was eye and ear witness to the Lord Jesus in His majesty. In particular, Peter refers to the transfiguration on the mountain from which he heard the voice of God out of heaven say:

*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

That Word which Peter heard contained the fulfilment of the Word of the LORD that the prophets in the name of the Lord had spoken in the Old Testament. Now that Word is to be considered even more sure, says Peter. For the prophecy has been fulfilled precisely because it was the Word of God Himself. That is now extra confirmed by what the apostle Peter could witness. And so Peter says in verse 19 *we have the (more sure) prophetic word confirmed.*

### Fully reliable

In this way Peter proves that these are not fables which he presents to the readers about the glorified Christ (verse 16). As if he comes with a nicely devised fairytale. No, he has seen and heard this with his own eyes and ears as a completely reliable witness.

But moreover, the prophecies of the Old Testament witnessed of the Christ. Those also were God's Word and therefore may not be explained in a self-willed manner.

Not a single prophecy, being God's Word, may be interpreted according to one's own idea (verse 20). It is indeed God Who as Holy Spirit inspired the writers (verse 21).

This sure Word of God, that is available to the congregation, is therefore certainly a reliable and indispensable guide to go the right path. Peter writes that it is so important to pay good attention to this, for it is as a light that shines in a dark place (verse 19). Without that light you grapple in the dark, you put yourself in misery. To put down your feet properly, you really need that light. That light lightens the way and makes it possible to take the right path even if it is completely dark around you. Well, that is the Word of God, it proclaims Christ as Saviour. An absolutely safe and certain guide for true life with God in a sinful, miserable and hopeless world.

Through the working of God's Spirit the light of

the Word must enlighten our minds. The gospel of Christ shines through that Word in our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6) and enables that we can follow Christ with sure tread to the day of our glorification, Judgment Day.

### Pure

That light, however, only shines so brightly when the Word is explained purely. When the Word is proclaimed unabridged and complete, namely – and it is indeed – as Word of the Spirit of Christ and from God the Father, the only primary Author of the Bible (see also 1 Thess. 2:13). Not as word of man, which in itself is unreliable.

Yes, then God's proclaimed and explained Word will also have to be accepted as such.

Then it can work out its power in our lives as power of God to salvation.

The reliability of God's Word sets high demands to remain in its purity in translation, interpretation and proclamation.

If something is added to God's Word or that Word is twisted or obscured, or robbed of its power it not only means that God's right is being affected. It also means a great danger for church members, whereby they can become lost. Not only do they then no longer see the right path due to the dimmed or obscured light, they are in fact, led on an erroneous path that does not lead to the Lord and His glory, but away from Him into the darkness, if the Lord does not prevent it.

It is of great importance that the pure, clear light of God's Word continues to shine in the ministry of reconciliation, in the preaching of the Christ in its fullness. And that this pure light may reach hearts.

Also in this current age the Training for the Ministry is called to explain God's Word purely to students who are preparing to become Servant of that same Word. The Training will have to do this in the breadth of areas that are covered in the Word itself. That concerns many theological subjects. Besides reliable exegesis and Bible knowledge, there is also the unfolding of the doctrine of Scripture and of life according to the Scriptures in subjects such as dogmatics and ethics. This also applies to church polity and pastoral subjects. In all these areas, the pure Word must shine. Also the Scriptural view on the church in church history is of great importance.

All this is a huge task for the tutors. They can only do this through the power and working of the God the Holy Spirit, not just physically, but also and especially spiritually. Therefore, continual prayer in the church is necessary.

### 'False' teachers

Peter continues his argument in chapter 2. He now speaks about false prophets in the Old Testament and as continuation of this the false teachers in the New Testament. And so we come to the second task of the training in article 18 of the Church Order:

*The defence of the pure doctrine against heresy and errors.*

What does the word 'false' mean with regard to false prophets and false teachers? Here the word 'false' does not mean bad-natured against good-natured. But the word 'false' is the same as the word 'pseudo' and stands over and against true or pure. 'Pseudo' is semblance, counterfeit. False prophets are prophets that very much look like prophets but are not. They pretend to speak the Word of God, but have adapted that Word to the people who must hear it, or to circumstances in which one lives, or to ideas and notions that he himself has.

In the meantime, the hearers of these false prophets are put onto the wrong path. That is what happened in the Old Testament. These false prophets were unmasked by true prophets who, on behalf of their Sender, challenged their message.

But the nations happily went along with the false prophets instead of the true prophets, for the nations heard what they wanted to hear. The sad end however, was ruin and destruction. This is what happened in the Old Testament.

Now, with the coming of Christ, the presence of false teachers has not disappeared. The father of lies is still active (John 8:44). He can pretend to be an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).

Peter does not only warn that false teachers (pseudo teachers) will come, but they will cunningly go to work. Our Bible translation (NBG) of 1951 has: *who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.*

What they teach is dangerous, even destructive, however they do so in secret; their doctrine creeps in, wrapped in familiar words. You easily become misled because their heresy resembles true doctrine.

The Dutch Herziene Statenvertaling (HSV) says about the false teachers *that they will secretly introduce destructive deviations in their doctrine.*

You can easily become misled so that you accept it as the true doctrine and surrender yourself to this doctrine. But the reality is, writes Paul, that with this doctrine they deny Christ, Who has bought them as members of His church. They spread destruction, and will undergo it themselves if they do not repent.

### Defence

To recognize heresy is a difficult issue that requires must knowledge, alertness and discernment. Heresy is indeed often wrapped and camouflaged in such a manner and creeps in so easily, that as church you must always be on the alert. Moreover, hidden heresy is flattering to the people. This clarifies why Peter had to add:

*And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.*

Therefore, in the Training for the Ministry, besides explaining Scripture, heresy must also be discussed and refuted by using Scripture. Old and known heresies will have to be dealt with, but especially it should be exposed in the light of the Scripture.

In particular, the cunning heresy of Scripture criticism, that the Bible is allowed to be called God's Word but that in reality it is the result of (a lot of) man-made work, be it by very pious people in their time. People who were influenced by their own environment.

In addition we also mention, as example, the heresy of Karl Barth who conquered traditional reformed training and who denies the Christ of the Scriptures.

Another doctrine that has defeated thousands is the heresy of pluralism and ecumenism, whereby the firm ground of the Word falls away, in favour of toleration and human feelings.

Furthermore, there is the compromise of secularization, whereby God's commandments are enervated as time-bound, and reference is being made to the powerlessness and brokenness of this world.

The church has therefore received a very important task from the Lord to expose heresy and false teachers. Students must train in this as well, so

that also in the future, with God's Word as sword of the Spirit, they are able to resist and eliminate heresies and errors.

It is of great importance that the church sees this two-fold task, and takes up its responsibility in this. Ultimately, it is indeed about being in service for the perseverance of faith and the preservation of the church through the Word of God and the working of Christ's Spirit. A church that does not reject everything that goes against the pure Word of God no longer follows the one Lord of the church

and loses the undeserved privilege of grace to be Church of Christ.

That is why there is such a huge responsibility for deputies and the board of the Training for the Ministry where it concerns the organization of the training.

Even though the work of the Training is completed in weakness and if we are faithful to the Lord, we may expect everything from His strength.

May Synod, in its discussions about the plans to set up the Training for the Ministry, make wise and responsible decisions in this.

## The Best Training?

*S. de Marie*

Opening speech held at the synod meeting of 14 April 2012 at Hasselt and published in *De Bazuin* of 9 May 2012.

2 *Tim. 3:12-17 (NKJV)*

12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

13 *But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

14 *But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,*

15 *and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

16 *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,*

17 *that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

### Antithesis

Especially in its Training for the Ministry, the Church is in the antithesis.

It is the antithesis, the differences, in which the powers of the Kingdom of God clash with Satan's empire. The Church of Christ with the Word of Christ

and the Training for the Ministry of that Word finds itself in that play for power and field of tension.

That is indicated in the entire Bible: the preservation, upholding, proclamation and conveying of God's Word is exposed to trickery and deception. In this, the Truth stands in opposition to falsehood. The Wisdom from Above over against the foolishness of people.

These antitheses are not merely theoretical, but have far-reaching practical consequences. People are namely misled and grow worse and worse (verse 13): they become detached from the Truth and so from Christ, but also lead others away from the Truth.

How clearly we see this taking shape in our days, in the secularization and decline in the churches in the Netherlands! Through the recent Liberation the church is not even 1 % of what were faithful churches in the past, but in which trickery and deception becomes more and more apparent.

This mentioned antithesis between Truth and falsehood also has consequences for those who want to follow the Truth and counteract the lies. They will have hard times in this world. Paul posits, over against evil men and imposters, that all those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus: *they will suffer persecution* (verse 12). The church that desires to hold fast to the Truth will be oppressed.

## Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures

In that field of tension the call of verse 14 comes to Timothy. Note the word 'but', which indicates the antithesis:

*But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them.*

What is the purpose of the training Timothy received? The knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. Why is that knowledge so important?

*To make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

Paul points out to Timothy the enormous importance of knowledge of Scripture. When faith is given, Christ brings to salvation him and all those who desire to live godly lives especially through the means of knowledge of Scripture. Salvation is the eternal glory. Knowledge of Scripture and this salvation are connected to each other through faith, that therefore also can be called a saving faith.

As servant of the divine Word, Timothy must clearly discern which place knowledge of the Holy Scripture has in relation to the knowledge of human ideas, which do not stem from Scripture. The truth of Scripture must therefore be known. Christ brings this Truth so that faith in Christ can be worked. Faith that leads to salvation.

Timothy must also pay attention to *who* gives him this knowledge. It must be from trustworthy people that are known to be reliable by their fruits. Also in this he will have to use his discernment. Not just accepting anything from others who proved to be unreliable.

In this way Paul shows how wonderful the knowledge of Scripture is, and what a striking contrast it is to all heresy and human inventions that have been written. Inventions that perhaps still point to Scripture, but are not reliable and therefore misleading, yes, are extremely dangerous because they lead away from salvation.

## Being equipped

In the verses 16 and 17, Paul explains for Timothy – and therefore for the church – how Scripture must be used. But first he points out where the usefulness of Scripture come from: namely, from God Himself. He inspired the Scriptures in its entirety. Thereby, Scripture itself is the divine Word. And that applies to every Scripture passage.

It is God Who now through His Word, equips everyone who wants to stand in His service, every 'man of God'. Man of God is servant of God, and concerns first of all those with a special office, but also those who have the office of all believers.

They receive the necessary instruction through the God-inspired words of Scripture, in order to be able to fulfil the complete task that belongs to their office: thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In this way, Timothy is presented the usefulness of Scripture for his daily work as servant of the divine Word. With this knowledge of these Scriptures, he has to preach the Word on behalf of God, and to persevere in this, in season and out of season (2 Tim. 4:1,2).

Thus he has to 'convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching', using the knowledge of Scriptures. This belongs to the calling of every minister, and so, on behalf of God, bring everyone under the authority and in the crisis of the Word.

## Training

What does this all mean for the Training for the Ministry and for the associated library?

Firstly: that the Word of God also in the Training has to be *defended* continually over and against all kinds of trickery and deceit. In this, also doctrinal errors in literature have to be studied, but in such a way that the differences with the pure Word of God are properly discerned. The Word of God has to judge all human ideas. This must lead to unmasking and counteracting doctrinal errors.

The reliability of literature depends on the author, but always the Word of God itself has to be the measure of judgment. This also applies to literature of those authors considered to be reliable. The light of God's Word must always stay shining in all subjects of the Training; in both the treatment of theological concepts, as well as the practical application of God's Word in all walks of life.

Secondly: for this purpose receiving factual knowledge and developing insight into God's Word must become more central and receive more attention, than is the case in many current theological training schools.

How can you become servant of the Word without having sufficient knowledge of the Scripture? How can you then comprehend God's will for all walks of life? Without sufficient knowledge, how can you

explain God's Word in the correct manner? Indeed, also in explaining God's Word the Holy Scripture explains itself, is its own exegete, and therefore Scripture must be known.

Finally, only with sufficient knowledge of God's Word can doctrinal errors be unmasked and rejected.

We live in an age in which gradually an unbelievably large number of theological books have been written about Scripture, or about subjects associated with Scripture. A lot of this is unreliable and therefore misleading. Thankfully, there is still much from the past that is reliable. In order to be able to discern in this, again a lot of knowledge of Scripture is necessary. In the meantime, the large number of books should never replace the use of the one Book, the Bible.

In short, everything in the Training starts with Scripture and a faithful use of Scripture. For this, alongside study and study materials, much prayer is needed for wisdom and lightening of our minds.

### *The Best*

Thirdly: Scripture urges a very *thorough* training. All shallowness must be avoided. All of Scripture is inspired by God, and is therefore profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for upbringing in righteousness.

The divine authority of Scripture not only demands formal recognition, but also actual and respectful application. Theology should not posit itself above, but under Scripture. In all subjects it must focus on the rich content of Scripture.

Scripture is therefore an extremely rich divine gift for the Training, but at the same time a divine task to use it very carefully and thoroughly.

This imposes requirements on the Training itself. Therefore, it is – according to the late Prof. dr. S. Greijdanus – in the name of God, a calling for the churches to ensure the 'best Training' with regard to the ministry of the Word (S. Greijdanus: *Het meerderheidsrapport van het Curatorium inzake het doctoraat aan de Theol. School te Kampen besproken*, Kok Kampen, 1929).

However, can we in our situation still speak of the 'best Training'? This seems very presumptuous, when you think of how few teachers and students the current Training has. It even seems laughable if one compares it with existing theological institutions.

Yet we as churches must strive for the best Training. That is also our calling. The best Training, the one to the measure of God's Word and with the possibilities which the Lord has left to us as churches. That will in any case, be a Training that is provided by the churches themselves, where God's Word has a central place and where doctrinal errors are rejected.

Such a Training, therefore, cannot simply make use of theological trainings in which Holy Scripture is no longer abided by, and the pure doctrine is no longer defended against heresy and doctrinal errors (Art. 18 CO).

Such a Training – wherever possible – gladly wants to make use of, and provide the opportunity to do studies that lay bare the treasures of Scripture.

Such a Training would also like to have access to the literature, to enable such studies, even if the availability of other sources would decrease or disappear in the future.

Such a Training will ask a lot of effort with few employable tutors.

Such a Training therefore requires continual support and prayer from the churches.

## From the Churches

### *Joh. Houweling*

The synod of DGK Lansingerland held its first meeting on Saturday 4 November 2017.

The worship and prayer service was held on Friday evening 3 November 2017.

Both these were held in the church building at Lansingerland (formerly Berkel en Rodenrijs).

