

No 1 March 2015

LuxMundi 34



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and he cried**

**Diaconate is not something
done on the side**

**Annual Report of the Sudanese
Reformed Churches**

Shoulder to shoulder

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**The riches of the Old
Testament Revelation**

**The General Synod of the Reformed
Churches in The Netherlands (2)**

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“O Lord, how long?” The slaughter of Christians in the world by Islamic militants continues unabated. The heart-wrenching wailing of family members bereft of their loved ones fills the skies. This past February 15th the world was shocked, once again, by another nauseating video released by ISIS. This time it was of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians, beheaded in Libya. The Egyptian government called immediately for seven days of mourning. And bombed ISIS posts in Libya for good measure.

Cry out to the LORD!

■ An increase of terror

It is not so that the ISIS movement is only targeting Christians. In Syria and Iraq they have been fighting and killing fellow Muslims, and killing Yezidi's, a syncretistic group, with a vengeance. But their fury seems particularly focused on Christians.

We must not imagine that ISIS is representative of Islamic faith as a whole. Nevertheless, ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the Middle East, Boko Haram in Nigeria (and bordering countries now), Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya, and allied movements around the world, have their roots in an accepted form of Islam, wahabism. Now these radicalized movements are consciously making Christians one of their chief targets. And it seems their activities are increasing. The threat exists that Christian churches in the Middle East, which have been there for almost 2,000 years, will be destroyed or forcibly closed, and the Christians left alive forced to migrate to safe havens.

■ Reformed response

Member-churches of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC: <http://www.icrconline.com>) have not yet been directly affected by such terrorist attacks. However, members of Biblical churches of Reformed confession in Nigeria, Kenya, and Pakistan, to name three countries, are daily at risk of being attacked and killed. And, more widely, we as orthodox Protestants know that many of our brothers and sisters in various denominations are on the smoking front lines, mourning lost loved ones and fearing the future.

Further, it is not so that the fate of Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Coptic believers leaves us cold. We feel a deep connection to all confessors of the name of Christ, even when our theological and ecclesiastical divisions remain serious obstacles to church unity.

Many of us in The Netherlands are members of or sympathizers with the Christian organization which has done so much through the years for persecuted Christians of all confessions, Open Doors. Just a few months ago I attended the yearly Open

Doors gathering, attended by some 7,000 people in Utrecht. I was deeply moved by the talks and the information conveyed, particularly those talks by representatives of churches in the world which are regularly the object of assault by Islamic militants. Their testimony to faith in Christ, and their witness to the love of Christ, even towards their enemies, in the midst of unimaginable suffering, was inspiring.

■ The Gospel and Government

It is our Reformed conviction that God is working in multiple ways, with multiple strategies, with multiple callings, in this fallen world.

His saving work, once and for all achieved by the Lord Jesus on the cross, and made effective for His elect by His priestly work in heaven (Hebrews 7), is what the Gospel is all about. In spreading that Gospel, our weapons are not bombs, but the Word of the Cross. Paul wrote: “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds..., bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...” (2 Corinthians 10:4,5).

Paul writes in Ephesians 6: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (vs. 12).

However, at the same time God has given legitimate civil governments another, distinct task: to keep a measure of order in human society by physical means. Romans 13:1-7 is the classic text on this theme. Paul writes in verse 4: “For he (the civil ruler) is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain...” Paul means: a physical, metal sword!

Let us continue to pray for our brothers and sisters on the front lines: “Lord, please, protect them; Lord, comfort those who are mourning; Lord, bless their testimony to Your grace.” And also pray: “Lord, please, use the governments of this world to combat terrorism effectively, and restore peace and justice to those parts of the world under threat. Amen!” ■

J.M. Batteau

How can you talk about the Creator God with people whose starting point is evolution? Or should we, to reach modern society, trade in the creation story for the story of evolution?

The blind man sat by the road and he cried

About seeing and not seeing



Dr. Jakob van Bruggen (b. 1936) is Professor Emeritus of the Theological University of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands at Kampen.

The following lecture (at a conference of college students in Dronten, 2014) aims to lend a helping hand to people who are struggling with questions about creation and evolution, faith and science. The theme of the conference was ‘Open your eyes’. We will consider: 1. Light, 2. Eyes, 3. Seeing; and return at the end to the title.

■ Light in order to see

It was on the first day of the world. A world where darkness lay over the primeval flood. It was the first thing God spoke: “Let there be light”. And from then on there was light, separated from the darkness. It was there, and it came back after every dark night. A permanent recurrence: days full of light. Nobody knows what light is. Waves? Particles? People acquire much knowledge through the light of sun and lamps, but what that light **is** they do not know. Only God knows, who surrounds us with it.

He himself is The Light. He dwells in inaccessible light. For us that is totally incomprehensible. Light is all about opening and accessibility. Is there light that is as impenetrable as darkness and yet still light? There is, and God lives in it! Therefore He who is the most exalted light cannot be seen by us. His light is too strong for our eyes to see.

God is Light, and the first thing he gave the world was light. On the fourth day he also set up lampstands for this light: sun, moon and stars. And so we know where to look for light. But the light itself is more than the lampstands. It is a mystery that surrounds us. The light itself does not come from the sun or moon, but from God who ignites it. And who is himself Light. As John says: God is Light, and in him there is no darkness at all. So far about the light of the first day, the beginning of the beginning.

After this first day the world was filled in a few days with land and oceans, with fruit trees and plants, with celestial bodies for fixed times, with birds and fish, with all sorts of living creatures in the wild. And at the end of the creation days, on the sixth and last day,

God created the eye that is able to see all this. The eye which receives light. The light that bears and delivers all the images of lands and seas, fish and birds. Man: open your eyes and see! The eye is as equally mysterious as the light. Evolutionary theory falls apart when it comes to the eye, at least when this theory doesn’t shut its eyes to it. The eye is miraculous! Actually, we shouldn’t talk about ‘the eye’. God did not create the eye, but humans in His image. People with two eyes. You do not talk with eyes, but with people. You can say to people: Open your eyes! Utilize the most complex element of creation. It was given to you!

When we take the time to stop and reflect, light and eyes become for us breathtaking miracles in which we lose ourselves. Light and eyes frame and encompass the six days of creation. With what we do not comprehend, we are allowed to observe and investigate the creation. With what we do not understand, we are allowed to acquire knowledge. When you want to know what people are without light and eyes, read José Saramago’s book ***The city of the blind***. This book is about people who once had sight and so still have knowledge in their memory. As such, the book only tells half the truth of what a city of the blind would be like. In fact, in a city of the blind no book about that would ever be able to be written.

‘Open your eyes’ could, of course, mean anything. At this conference, at the very least, it means you should be aware of the world around you. That you should not close your eyes to parts of reality. To poverty, injustice, environmental pollution. Open your eyes and do not turn away from your neighbor and his or her problems. Do not be a one-sided or biased person in this world. Open your eyes to research for new opportunities. In short: be a responsible human being and do not play blind man’s bluff!

These are all good and useful meanings of the conference theme, and elements thereof will certainly be worked out and expanded on. For that, it may be helpful to realize upfront that light and eyes are gifts that are not understood. Mysteries from God that require us not to be lazy. Be thankful, wake up and look around you! It’s a miracle that this can be **said**. Open your eyes!

■ Eyes to give light

This evening I want to mention two things you must not forget when you start looking around you. The first of those two is that your eyes not only **receive** light, but they must also



The blind man sat by the road and he cried

themselves **give** light. Seeing properly does not begin with the outside world, it begins with your inner world. The world behind your eye. The heart with which you look when you open your eyes. To look properly, you must be a virtuous person.

Our Savior makes some remarkable statements about our eyes in his Sermon on the Mount. We read them in Matthew 6:22 and 23: *'The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!'*

Whether we are immersed in darkness or living in the light, our minds receive light from outside us. But Jesus says whether we are in darkness or light depends not on external light, but on internal light. Your eyes not only receive light: they are themselves also lamps. The headlights of your body. When they fail, you drive in the dark.

By speaking so crassly of the eye as a lamp, Jesus underlines the central importance of our seeing. Where the eye looks, the feet follow. Our eyes focus our attention and our body follows.

The Bible is full of examples of a bad eye darkening the whole body. Eve looked with 'bad eyes' at the only fruit God had denied humans. She opened her eyes and saw that the fruit was appealing for food. When she followed her 'wrong way of looking', her whole body became darkened: shame came to separate people, and guilt overshadowed their birth and labor. Michal, David's wife, looked with 'bad eyes' at David who danced and leapt with the common people before the ark. And her life became barren because of pride.

Judas opened his eyes to Mary when he smelled the scent of

the expensive perfume with which she showed the Savior love before his death. But he looked with a darkened eye. And the end was that he went and hanged himself because he had betrayed innocent blood.

How great the darkness is when the eye is not pure! Our eye has everything to do with looking forward to treasures in heaven and breaking with the service of mammon on earth. When our eyes are aroused and fascinated by the treasures of this earth, our body is carried away into the bondage of greed or jealousy or lust or stinginess. Those who want to attain heaven must be careful with how they look. The eye must be captivated by the things of God and his future. When our eyes are truly focused on God, as the eyes of a slave are focused on the hand of her mistress, our body is illuminated to be able to do all kind of good work. 'Right living' begins with 'right looking'!

In our visually oriented age it is good to learn that our eye is the lamp of our body. It is very important **how** we look and **what** we look at. When our eyes are pure, we look with joy at all that is good and worthy of praise; as we look at good examples we learn to follow. With a pure eye we also only look with great reluctance at that which is improper or which fosters bad character or feelings: we learn to get an aversion to evil. Pure looking keeps our life fresh and persists in looking toward the heavenly treasure.

In this age of the visual, we must learn that the eye is not a neutral receiver, but a lamp of our body. This light must shine by directing our eyes to God, the only Master. Make a sticker for your PC or tablet or smart phone: 'The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.'

As a college student, you focus on science and research and its results. Our current scientific world has the pretension of holding to a kind of holy objectivity. Research seems to go its own neutral path. And your eyes follow it. There is little attention given to the eye as an independent light source. Sometimes this is recognized and seen as a deficiency. The developers of the atomic bomb in the Second World War had not much of an eye for its potential consequences for humans, the environment, and the ethics of warfare. They looked at what could be and made it. Would the atom bomb have been created if the researchers had had an eye for its destructive and long term consequences? People dare to ask such questions with respect to nuclear weapons. But are those questions not in play as well in the development of drugs or space travel or the internet? Is the researcher nothing more than an obedient slave of what is possible, or are there yet, above the microscope, behind the telescope or while programming, loving eyes that are focused on fellow humans and world? Theoretically we can articulate this as follows: 'Is everything that is possible permitted?' As long as this general ethical principle is not translated into an individual ethic by the researcher and developer personally, much will be researched and developed that will lead to harm. Mephistopheles is not disqualified by his merely being scientific.

Bartimeus, © Kees de Kort, Kijkbijbel

Open your eyes: Look around you in the world, for that is good to do! It is God's world! But you cannot open your eyes without also asking what *kind* of eyes you have, what kind of *person* are you. Because –in science, in finance, in business and politics – being involved is about people. If this is something truly good, it's about people who have light in themselves. Without virtue, you do not see the world rightly. You think you are heading towards light, but you will be encompassed by darkness.

■ Eyes that see less than half

This is the first point you must not forget, when with open eyes you look around you in the light: your eyes themselves have to give light! Be a **virtuous** observer.

There is also a second point to remember: when we open our eyes, we see a lot, but more than half of what can be seen is not visible for us to see at this moment and at this time. That ought to make you a **modest** observer.

That we as people are more than half blind is a reality that we do not like to admit: how can there be things that we cannot see? For us, in many cases, what we do not see and that which cannot directly be observed, is unimportant. It simply does not exist, we think.

Yet there is always more that we do **not** see than we **do** see. Someone who once experienced this was the servant of Elisha. Getting up in the morning, he discovered that the village of Dothan, where they had spent the night, was surrounded by a large Syrian army with horses and chariots. He surveyed the situation and was terrified. Understandably. But then Elisha prayed: *'Lord, please open his eyes.'* Then this servant suddenly saw the larger half: *'behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha'* (cf. 2 Kings 6:8-23).

The human world is full of people who are full of themselves. But this same world is even fuller with angels of nations and guardian angels and heavenly powers and saints in heavenly places. Because we don't see them, we don't take account of them. The invisible doesn't count here on earth!

This invites us to reflect on today's dominant worldview.

That is the worldview of a closed, visible, and – for us human beings – researchable cosmos. That's our worldview too, to some degree, but it is very incomplete. It's limited to the observable. For the rest we only have knowledge from hearsay or incidentally through dreams or visions.

Only faith in what we have heard makes us aware of **more** than we see. As we read in Hebrews 11:3 *'By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible'*. Faith 'convinces us of the truth of things we do not see.'

We now arrive at the much-discussed distinction between faith and science. With as shibboleth, the issue involving whether or not to believe in the evolution of the history of the earth and mankind. In various ways people try to relieve the tension by devising an escape route:

1st escape route. "Faith is of a very different order than science.



Bartimeus, © Kees de Kort, Kijkbijbel

Open your eyes

Let science inform us how the earth rotates and the Bible how you get to heaven" (Galileo). This escape route is illusionary, because the Bible is about the exact same creation as the one we focus on in our research.

2nd escape route. "When it comes to reality, science comes before the Bible. Use science as a kind of lawnmower to trim the lawn of the Bible. Afterwards, whatever still remains of the Bible you may believe if so desired, without being old fashioned in our modern age." This escape is in fact denying the problem. Man remains the sole legitimate observer, supposedly duly authorized to trim the Bible and make it subservient to human insight.

3rd escape route. "The Bible supersedes all things, so attempt to fit all observations into the structure of the biblical revelation of creation, flood, etc." This escape route is a dead end, because the Bible is far too limited and incidental in information to use as a scientific handbook.

But why should we seek an escape? We need not be ashamed of our faith *vis à vis* the forum of a science that is half seeing and half blind. Our mistake, in my opinion, is that we accept science as complete and final. Without considering, that this science is not able to investigate even half the material at hand. No one knows what influence angels had at creation or beyond. No one can examine the effects the world of spirits and demons have had and still have in diseases and major events.

Psalm 115:16 reminds us of our limitations: *'The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth He has given to the children of men.'* And the book of Ecclesiastes never tires of making clear to us that man has the often fruitless task of exploring the world under the sun. That burden is imposed on him, while he



is not be able to find ultimate truth in all his searching. All scientific conclusions should be accompanied by a disclaimer stating: "As far as we can see now, with the incomplete information at our disposal, we come to the following preliminary conclusions."

These conclusions can be very workable on earth, while metaphysically or historically they are not the last word. The computational models that are released on strata may be useful for exploratory drilling, without thereby requiring that the mathematical models of processes lasting millions of years be deemed also historically accurate.

It can be useful, together as people precisely to question the absolute truth claims of human sciences: "How do you know that the observable world is the only factor in play?" A theory of evolution may be a useful model for organizing everything we observe in the world of fossils and animals, but it does not have to be at the same time a statement of historical nature. Simply because we have only been able to examine less than half the field, because our eyes have a limited range.

■ Summary

I come to the conclusion of these three points, summarizing as follows:

1. Open your eyes: enjoy the light. Be thankful.
2. Open your eyes: let your eyes be lights for others. Be virtuous.
3. Open your eyes: be aware that you see less than half of what is there. Be humble.

In summary: be happy that you may peek through Gods fingers and firmly grasp His hands when you open your eyes!

■ The blind man sat by the road and he cried

I come now to the title of this lecture. It is the first line of a Negro spiritual about Bartimaeus:

*The blind man sat by the road and he cried :
Show me the way to go home!*

Perhaps we are tempted, like the crowd, to walk quickly past the blind beggar. Fortunately, we are able to see, and we only have to open our eyes to see.

But is that really true? Was that true with the servant of Elisha? And with Saul on the road to Damascus? And with Balaam who struck his donkey? And with the Areopagites who sent Paul away because he believed in a resurrection? Call out to one another: Open your eyes!

And, for yourself , it is at all times best to join the blind beggar, and cry with Bartimaeus: "Open my eyes, and show me the way to go home!" ■

J. van Bruggen

■ Note

This article also appeared in the Dutch language as 'The blind man sat by the road and he cried: Over zien en niet zien' in *Nader Bekeken*, vol 21 no. 3 March 2014.



Theological University Kampen

■ ATSF 2015

The fourth Advanced Theological Studies Fellowship (ATSF) will be held during the month of June 2015. The ATSF is a unique opportunity for every PhD theology student interested in doing a month-long research on a subject of his own choosing, and fully funded by an internationally acclaimed university. Please see the university website www.tukampen.nl for further details.

■ Rector

The Supervisory Board has appointed **Prof. Roel Kuiper** as its chair, starting May 2015. In this managerial function, Prof. Kuiper succeeds Prof. Mees te Velde, who will be retiring on June 26. On this same date, Prof. Kuiper will become the new Rector Magnificus of the University.

■ Appointments

In January, the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands appointed **Dr. Hans Burger** and **Dr. Dolf te Velde** as lecturers of Systematic Theology to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of Prof. Barend Kamphuis in October 2015.

Dr. Kees van Dusseldorp, minister at Schildwolde and a guest lecturer in the Homiletics programme at the TU since 2011, was appointed by the Board of Directors as part-time lecturer in Homiletics (0.2 FTE).

■ Honorary doctorate

On the occasion of the University's 160th anniversary, the Senate decided to award an honorary doctorate to the Japanese organist, harpsichordist, and conductor **Masaaki Suzuki**.

Suzuki received the honorary doctorate in theology as a recognition of his extraordinary merit in the field of interpretation of the cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach, and of the explicit connection he makes between the music of Bach and the Christian faith.

The degree ceremony was held during a public meeting in the Bovenkerk in Kampen on January 28, 2015. Prof. Kees de Ruijter, emeritus professor of Practical Theology, acted as honorary supervisor. During the ceremony, Suzuki reflected on the now completed cantatas project and performed some works of Bach.

■ Dissertation

In January 2015, **Steven van den Heuvel** was awarded his doctorate after defending his dissertation entitled: *Bonhoeffer's Christocentric Theology and Fundamental Debates in Environmental Ethics*, in which he demonstrates Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology to be relevant to the environmental ethics of our day. Supervisors were Prof. P. Nullens (ETF Leuven) and Prof. A. L. Th. de Bruijne (TU Kampen).

'The diaconate? That's something our deacons do', we are quick to think. But they are really not the only ones. The diaconate is about you and me. It is an essential expression of our being a Christian. And by that I do not mean the incidental diaconal activity or a coin in the collection bag. Above all, it is about our lifestyle, individually, but certainly also as a congregation. Because the diaconate is a task for the whole congregation.

The diaconate is not something done on the side

A question of sheep and goats



Derk Jan Poel is adviser at 'Diaconaal Steunpunt', the Diaconal Support Office of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

*"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant",
'Many who are first will be last, and the last first'.
'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'.
'Love your enemies'.*

Jesus continually turns our world upside down with his words. Jesus does not look at things the way we do. He weighs and judges in a totally different way. What is unimportant, helpless, and insignificant in the eyes of the world (and frequently also of the church), he views with love and embraces with his care.

He was not one to leave it at words alone, but was seen touching lepers, eating with prostitutes and tax collectors, and starting up a conversation with a Samaritan woman with a rather dubious lifestyle. He did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life for many. This King did not seat himself on a throne, but ended on a wooden cross. For us.

In his words and deeds, Jesus is the ultimate source of our diaconal actions. Just as he came to serve others, so he asks us to serve our neighbour, summarized in that one, so familiar sentence: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' (Mathew 22:39).

Yet it is exactly because this sentence is so familiar that its impact can easily escape us. We often insufficiently realize that to 'love your neighbour as yourself' means that we must apply the same devotion, sensitivity, commitment, urgency, and resources with which we take care of ourselves to fulfilling the needs of others.

That is a radical call that entails more than just a Christmas present for the sick and a donation to charity. As Tim Keller puts it in *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road* we are all, like the Good Samaritan, walking on the road to Jericho and the question is: what do we do when we see injustice, oppression, poverty, famine, human trafficking, family breakdowns, aggression, disease, racism, and crime? Do we walk on by? Or do we stop to help? The answer to that question could be of vital importance.

■ Secondary

How crucial this is becomes clear when we read the story about the separation of the sheep and the goats in Mathew 25. This story is also familiar, so that here, too, we can easily miss the important lesson. Speaking about his glorious return, Jesus made a clear and definitive distinction between people, and did that on the basis of very practical deeds of mercy, such as looking after the poor, homeless, sick, and imprisoned. Jesus does not look at our outside. He looks much deeper than that. What does My mercy do in your life? To what extent have you started to look like Me in caring and attending to those in distress? Has your heart been changed by My infinite love for you?

For Jesus, taking care of the weak and vulnerable is of overriding importance, because it reflects his heart and the heart of his Father. And he wants his heart also reflected in our life and in our life as a congregation. And if this is so important to the Lord of the church, shouldn't that also be of essential importance to the church?!

Naturally, we as churches are not, in general, against helping people in distress. But this is often considered to be a secondary task. Something we do if there is some time and money to spare. Or it is considered to be something that can be outsourced to a club of 'enthusiasts' – the deacons, for example. It is something we take on once we are satisfied with the teaching and evangelization in our churches.

However, the parable of the Good Samaritan and Jesus' words in Mathew 25 make short work of this way of thinking. In both these cases, Jesus is teaching us, through the works of mercy, how *essential* is what God asks of us: acting justly in our relations with others. Not at all secondary!

■ Outsourced

In this respect, we can learn much from the Early Church (see the text box 'Learning from the Early Church'). The original Christian congregations looked after the needy in a radical way. At the same time, they also established a new office: that of the deacon, who was to coordinate the works of mercy in the church. This shows that mercy is a charge of the church, just as preaching the gospel. And through the diaconate, we are executing that task.

The diaconate can be found wherever Christians, inspired by the gospel of Jesus Christ, look after and take care of their

* Learning from the Early Church

In the summer of the year AD 312, the harvest had failed in the eastern Roman Empire. The following winter brought great famine. On top of that the plague broke out, which led to mass deaths. Bodies were left to lie in the streets with citizens begging for bread among them.

How did the church react? Eusebius, the historian of that time, wrote: 'Only the Christians displayed proof of human feeling and compassion in this dreadful situation. All day long some of them tended to the dying and to their burial. (...) Others gathered together from all parts of the city a multitude of those withered from famine, and distributed bread to them all. (...) The Christians' deeds were on everyone's lips, and they glorified the God of the Christians. Such actions convinced them that they alone were pious and truly reverent to God.'

Endangering their own lives, without fear or favour, Christians took care of the needy. We know from other sources that many people came to believe in the God of the Christians. The diaconate is preaching the gospel in(-)deed!

neighbours, individually and through organizations and churches. The diaconate can be described with three verbs:

- **Serving.** That is the recurring pattern in Christ's work. As his followers, we, too, should be known for this (Mark 10:45, John 13:15). That means devoting ourselves lovingly towards the interest of others, as Christ gave himself completely in our interest.
- **Sharing.** Jesus gave up everything and became poor for you and me (2 Corinthians 8:9). His life and death makes us richer than we could ever have imagined. This inclination of Christ should become more and more visible in our lives (Philippians 2:5), for example in offering our time, energy, mind, attention, talents, and money to serve others. In this way, we are turned into generous and sharing people by the gospel.
- **Doing.** The diaconate regards the concrete deeds we do to put our faith into practice. The diaconate is a wonderful possibility to testify of the hope that is in us. Sometimes with words, often also with deeds. That is why it is so important that we do not counteract our words by our (missing) deeds.

Let it be clear that the diaconate is a task for the whole congregation. For this reason it can never be outsourced to a small group of deacons. Deacons should not wish for that. Their task is to stimulate and coordinate the diaconate of the congregation. That means that they explain what the diaconate is and why it is important. They enthuse the congregation

* In his words and deeds,
Jesus is the ultimate
source of our diaconal actions



Source: WikiArt

We are all, like the Good Samaritan, walking on the road to Jericho and the question is: what do we do when we see injustice ...

[Painting: The Good Samaritan, after Delacroix by Vincent van Gogh, 1890]

towards commitment, and they provide the necessary pre-conditions. Thus they work specifically towards a diaconal community.

It is wonderful when many members of the congregation become diaconally active in their own environment. At the same time, we cannot do without a more organized form of the diaconate. Some problems, for example, are so large and complex that individual commitment does not suffice.

The research project *Help!* - which was conducted by the Gereformeerde Hogeschool [a Dutch Reformed College] - shows that there is clear demand for a well-organized diaconate. Here lies an important task for deacons and the congregation: on the one hand they must shape the diaconate into the right form and content; on the other hand they must take care that the diaconal lifestyle is not being 'organized away'.

■ Wish

In the church, we have a strong responsibility to help each other. As members of God's family, we look after each other and carry each other's burdens. But the Bible does not allow us to ignore the needs of people outside the church. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that we cannot set a boundary around looking after people. Indeed, the Bible even calls on us to take loving care of strangers and even our enemies.

Our churches are generally quite internally oriented, as was confirmed by the research project *Help!* That has to do, among other things, with the pillarization [compartmentalization along socio-political lines] and the role



Source: Web Gallery of Art

To what extent have you started to look like me in caring for those in distress?

diaconate concerns our lifestyle – 24/7 – day by day.

Jesus did not commute back and forth between heaven and earth, but he became man and came to dwell among the poor (2 Corinthians 8:9). He was born as a baby into a family that brought doves as an offering at his circumcision, which was the offering prescribed for the poorest families (Luke 2:24, Leviticus 12:8). He lived, ate, and was associated with people from the fringes of society.

The Bible calls on us to follow in Jesus' footsteps, and let our lives be ruled by the inclination of Christ. This has direct consequences for our diaconate, which is more than the incidental or periodical diaconal activity or a donation to a charity. It demands our attention, time, and perseverance. It regards a way of living, a life characterized by serving, sharing, and doing.

It's a way of life!

D. J. Poel

Note

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Just as Jesus came to serve others, so he asks us to serve our neighbour
[Christ Washing the Apostles Feet by Rembrandt van Rijn (1616)]

played by the government in the past. However, these last years have seen a growing awareness that the church should be diaconally involved in the local community. As far as that is concerned, it is good that many churches (according to the research) have a strong wish to increase the role of the diaconate outside the church.

But at a time when everyone is busy, that calls for fundamental reflection. For the diaconate is not something we do on the side. And we will not achieve it by means of a few well-organized diaconal projects. The

* What can you do?

The diaconate starts at home and fans out from there, like the circles of rippling water that develop when you have thrown a stone into the water. You can practise the diaconate within the following circles:

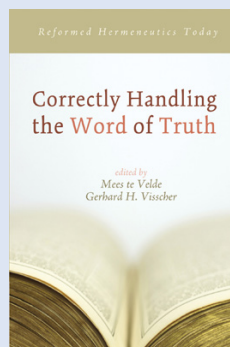
Your own congregation. Caring for brothers and sisters in your own congregation. Think, for example, of visiting the sick and lonely, and inviting new church members for a meal.

The local municipality. Caring for people who live in your own living area. Supporting the nearest food bank, participating in an organization that offers practical help to the needy, and in local platforms with attention to the welfare of the poor, etc. This 'workfield' is becoming more and more important now that many countries are experiencing severe cutbacks on welfare and health care.

The country. Nationally, the diaconate can take shape in all sorts of ways. For example, by supporting national diaconal organizations with prayer, commitment, and donations, but also by the churches speaking out at a national level against injustice.

The world. As churches, we can become involved in the worldwide diaconate. Consider emergency aid and supporting diaconal development projects. How valuable it is to adopt relations with, and support, other churches in the world!

* | Book announcement



Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today (Mees te Velde (ed.), Gerhard H. Visscher (Series Ed.); Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 280 pages.

This book is the compilation of addresses given at the conference on hermeneutics at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, together with the Theological University in Kampen, held in January, 2014.

The book's cover: How should the Word of God be interpreted and applied today? Does our modern culture affect how we read the Bible? Can certain passages be interpreted in different contexts and in different ways, all the while acknowledging that God speaks with a clear and consistent voice?

In this volume, sixteen Reformed scholars join together to tackle the hard questions that often arise when we busy ourselves with the weighty responsibility of interpreting Holy Scripture. These Reformed scholars challenge each other and their readers to ask not only how hermeneutics can be done, but ultimately, how it should be done so that God's Word of Truth may be handled correctly.

This book can be ordered via <http://wipfandstock.com/correctly-handling-the-word-of-truth.html>

Lux Mundi thanks Rev. Patrick Jok Ding, General Secretary of the SRC, for permission to publish this summary, made by Kim Batteau.

2014 Annual Report of the Sudanese Reformed Churches (SRC) General Synod

A Summary

The Sudanese Reformed Churches (SRC) started as a small house fellowship in Khartoum, Sudan in February, 1992. It was a time of severe persecution of Christians in Sudan. By God's grace the SRC has now grown to sixteen churches, twelve in South Sudan, and four in Sudan, with a total membership of 3,000 members.

■ Civil War

South Sudan before 2005 was in war with Sudan for five decades, in which, tragically, some three million people were lost to war, disease and famine. Unexpectedly, it is back again to days of war, displacement, and famine just two years and half after its independence from Sudan. This started in December 15th, 2013, as a political difference within the SPLM ruling party, and turned quickly into brutal tribal war, subsequently dividing the country between the government and armed opposition. At the outbreak of war thousands of Nuers were targeted and killed in Juba on the basis of their ethnicity, and Dinka were also killed for their ethnicity in other towns in the north of the country.

It is estimated that more than 50,000 people have died so far and more than 1.5 million have been displaced from their homes. Some 450,000 people have fled to neighboring countries, and more than 4.9 million will face famine if violence escalates. The number of internal displaced people (IDPs) within South Sudan is estimated at 917,000. Military clashes are still continuing.

■ War's Effect on the SRC

The SRC have been greatly affected by this conflict. Some of our church members are living in United Nation Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) protection camps for their safety and protection. Another 316 members have fled for refuge in the neighboring countries (Sudan 85; Ethiopia 110; Kenya 53; Uganda 65). In terms of death, SRC has lost 27 members including 2 pastors, 5 evangelists, 4 elders and 1 deacon. SRC members in the areas affected by war have lost all their property and houses. Three church buildings have been completely burnt down. Psychologically, as a church we are deeply traumatized by this merciless and devastating violence. Spiritually, nevertheless, we are encouraged that God is in control.

■ Humanitarian Crisis

The living conditions in the UN protection sites are miserable. In the early months of the crisis, the Christian Reformed World Mission (CRWM) gave

needed help. Another diaconal response came from the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA). This relief fund is being used to purchase basic food items and non-food items. The GKSA's Rev. Malan Van Rhyn's visit to our churches was very much appreciated.



photo via m.knockfreechurch.co.uk

Rev. Patrick Jok Ding with Rev. David Miller and Rev. James Maciver of the Free Church of Scotland

■ Recovering from Trauma

The brutal violence that erupted in December 2013 has traumatized thousands of South Sudanese, including church leaders. We have experienced high rates of death, injuries, widespread displacement, disrupted livelihoods, severe food insecurity and a major malnutrition crisis. The CRWM organized a workshop of trauma healing in early November, 2014, in Nairobi, Kenya. The workshop was attended by 20 SRC and other denominational leaders. The participants told their heartbreaking stories of trauma. The workshop was timely, inspiring, and healing. The leaders went back home equipped with skills and action plans that would help others to recover from the deep wounds of the violence.

■ SRC Joins the ICRC

With great joy and gratitude, SRC joined the ICRC membership in October, 2013, during its eighth meeting that was held in Cardiff Wales, UK. The SRC delegate Rev. Patrick Jok Ding Wic was seated as a member.

■ The future

What is God calling SRC now to do in South Sudan? Here is what SRC leaders have proposed: 1. Gospel witness in IDP's camps and refugee camps in Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda. 2. Work of mercy and compassion among those affected by war, particularly to SRC members and their children. 3. Provide trauma counseling to those affected. 4. Rebuild the Juba Sudanese Reformed Church to become the SRC hub. 5. Start an orphanage center in Juba (the war has dramatically increased the number of orphans in the country).

■ SRC's Vision and Mission

The SRC has formulated this vision and mission statement: "To lead individuals, families and communities in Sudan and South Sudan to salvation, discipleship and integration into a local church, in order to serve, to worship and to become agents of holistic transformation to exalt the triune God." ■

Women in office, a hot item? Let us take a wider view and see what the New testament tells us about women who hold a position in the congregation. In this article we are focusing on Romans 16, which names and recommends active women. Scripture deserves the first and the last word on this matter.

Shoulder to shoulder

Paul's co-workers [M/F] in Christ's service



Rev. Egbert Brink (PhD) is lecturer of Old Testament and Practical Theology at the Theological University of Kampen and teacher at the Reformed Academy in Zwolle. He is still part-time minister of the congregation in Waddinxveen and regular guest lecturer at Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de Bangui and Faculté Jean Calvin in Aix-en-Provence.

What is your reaction? Do you exclaim: at last, it's about time! Or would you sooner be shocked: what on earth is happening? Women in office? This topic has already been discussed at length in the churches. It would be a pity if all the arguments would be directed only at that hot item. Let's not hone in exclusively on women in office, but rather broaden our view and see how both men and women were engaged in Christ's congregation. First and foremost we must, as always, let the Scriptures speak. It will then become apparent that women had an important role in the first Christian congregations. Did you know that during the first centuries of the early church the deaconesses had a unique task? And did you know that John Calvin staunchly supported the position of deaconesses?

Tonight we will zoom in on a list of Paul's co-workers in Romans 16. Just as after a film or play all the actors/players are shown, so too in this letter we are shown a list of co-workers. They are apparently helpers in the church, both male and female (see text box 1). We are going to get acquainted with Phoebe, Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple, and Andronicus and Junia, another couple, in order to show that men and women stood shoulder to shoulder. They worked together in full harmony during the establishment and edification of the first Christian congregations. This co-productivity is completely in line with the Lord Jesus, Who employed both men and women in their own various ways (Luke 8:1-3). (See text box 2).

1. PHOEBE

Phoebe has a Greek name. She was named after the goddess Phoebe... also known as Diana. The name means: bright, radiant. She would not have been a Jewess as Jewish parents would not have named their daughter after a Greek goddess. Phoebe was from Cenchreae, situated close to the harbour city of Corinth on the coast (in the Saronic Gulf). How and when exactly she came to faith is not known. But the fact that she journeyed from Greece to Rome shows she was an independent person. She may have been a businesswoman, like Lydia who was a dealer in purple cloth.

■ deaconess of Cenchreae

This Phoebe is a *deacon* in the congregation of Cenchreae. On purpose I'm not using the word *deaconess*, for Paul uses the masculine *diakonos*. She shares this title with the male deacons mentioned by Paul in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3. She has an official task and function in the congregation of Cenchreae, a position that is characterised by providing practical hands-on aid. She has an actual function as representative or delegate of the church of Cenchreae. Only she is not, like Paul, called a servant (*diakonos*) of Christ/God, but of the congregation. This points to an official function. The early Christian churches had a council of elders (men who gave leadership) that was assisted by *diakonoi*, consisting of men and women (Van Bruggen).

She is also called sister, maybe alluding to a co-worker's title, in the way that brother is used for Sosthenes, Timothy, Tychicus and Onesimus, as co-workers and letter-couriers. Paul calls Epaphroditus 'my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier.' (Phil. 2:25). In like manner, Phoebe is sister. Considering the ending of Paul's letter, she may well have been a courier for his letter. She brings Paul's letter to Rome in the capacity of delegate, agent of the congregation, to deliver the letter and explain it.

■ assistant

Phoebe has to deliver the letter, explain it, and provide added information. She is given an extensive recommendation by Paul. He uses standard terminology, as is found in the papyrus scrolls: I recommend her (*sunhestimi de humin*). Her task to explain the letter and give added information where needed is thus affirmed.

* Male and Female

Romans 16:1-7 ¹I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, ²that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

³Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. ⁶Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.

✱ All things that are being done in a Christian congregation today by both men and women, would in those days be the task of a deacon, a helper, male or female.

This is no mean task, considering the sensitive matters the letter contains.

■ an open function

In its original meaning, the connection with love and devotion is not found in the early Christian wording of *diakonia*. A deacon or deaconess serves, provides assistance and supports. That *can* include financial or material works of mercy. At the same time it can be pastoral work. There was no marked distinction in those days.

Let me put it this way. All things that are being done in a Christian congregation today by both men and women, would in those days be the task of a deacon, a helper, male or female. Whether it be a job as catechism instructor, minutes secretary, ward-coordinator, organiser of fellowship meals, member of calling committee, liturgy committee, evangelisation committee, these are all *tasks that lend assistance*, and they would be the task of a deacon (male or female) in Paul's days.

Phoebe stood out. She was noticed and had served the congregation of Christ well in that city. They were prepared to hand over this *diakones* to Rome for the sake of mission work and church building work that had to be done there. Phoebe was a woman you could apparently depend on. She was willing to tackle all kinds of jobs; a woman with a willingness to help... one who knew the ropes. Paul asks the church at Rome to receive her in the name of the Lord, in a manner befitting Christians: lovingly. Do not exclaim: 'What is that woman doing here? How emancipated she is...!' Give her a warm welcome, greet her in a friendly manner. *Thankfully make use of her services*, in whatever area you need help. Accept her without reserve, so that she will have a chance to develop her talents.

Paul is preparing for his own visit to Rome and wants to promote the mutual trust between himself and the congregation. Most likely, Paul is busy taking concrete steps, preparing for the mission in Spain. For that mission plan, the cooperation of many churches was required. In Rome, they have to provide Paul with means

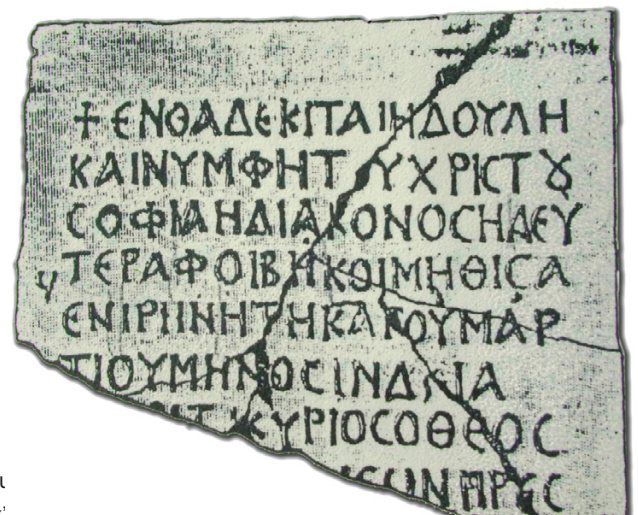
like money, escorts, translators, transport, etc. It strongly seems that the church at Cenchreae supplied their contribution by letting Phoebe participate in this mission as their representative. Other congregations also had possibly already sent co-workers to Rome. Hence Priscilla and Aquila, and the married apostle-couple Andronicus and Junia were in that city already. What then had made Phoebe to be the suitable choice to be sent as courier and as member of the mission team for Spain?

■ patroness

Phoebe had been a great *help* to many, including the apostle Paul. She was a woman you could depend on and in whom you could confide. There is something special about that word 'help' (*prostasis*). It is sometimes shown in Latin as *Patrona/es*. With that word Paul really describes the task of a curator, a guardian, or trustee of goods. This person could be influential in social, financial or judicial areas. The patron or patroness would lend financial or judicial assistance. Quite a prestigious title to have. Compared to Paul, Phoebe would even have a leadership function...! Or even in charge of a Christian house congregation? But that is not Paul's argument. She has helped others in the early Christian movement and is recommended on that ground, not because she has a leadership position. She is a Generous Benefactress.

We should think of prominent and prosperous benefactors, who assist others in numerous situations, like hospitality, advice, access to social networks, material support. The more general meaning of *prostatis* is Benefactor, Sponsor, Supporter. It is used in the context of a father being cared for and supported by his son; it is in relation to lending assistance to a family member, to be their guarantor and so. This description fits Luke 8:1-3; Mark's in Acts 12:12; Lydia, the business woman of Acts 16 who offers accommodation; Nympha in Colossians 4:15; Euodia and Syntyche in Phil. 4:2-3 and the woman mentioned in 2 John:1. It is a prestigious and flattering title that probably reflected her status and stature. She offered substantial assistance and was an important intermediary, or go-between. Through friendship, a relationship existed between a female benefactress and a male recipient.

In her role of Benefactress, she offered financial assistance. When her support was business-like and judicial she was Protector. She helped many. That is a more fitting meaning of the general usage of the word *prostatis*, which points to patroness and supporter, sponsor, benefactress. The goddess Phoebe was called Curatrix, Patroness, supporter and refuge! Paul makes subtle use of that word. Phoebe no longer saw the goddess Phoebe as her Patroness, but thanks to the grace of Christ she became a patroness herself (Van Bruggen). She is a real Phoebe, a support and refuge for many. A Caring person! This helpful deaconess was sometimes also called a guardian angel. And there were many like her in the first Christian church. Take Sophia, for example. On her grave (4th century) we read the following: *Here lies the slave and bride of Christ, Sophia, deaconess, the second Phoebe, departed in peace...* (see photo).



2. PRISCILLA AND AQUILA

■ greetings maintain the bond

'Say hi to...' 'By the way, regards from you-know-who.' It's nice, but it doesn't really mean much. It is a polite gesture. At best, it tells you that someone is thinking of you. But to pass on greetings in olden times was much more than a formality, or a raising of your hand in passing. If you went to greet someone, you made contact. You wanted to make a connection. That required time and attention. And via greetings you also maintained the bond. It included welcoming, acceptance, appreciation. That is what Paul asks the congregation in Rome. Not to say hello to various people, *but to keep in close contact with the following co-workers*. Young church, do not loosen the existing bonds, remain united together. Hold onto those who proved to be trustworthy. And don't join forces with those who are full of promises, but draw you away from Christ. Church of today, greet one another in the old manner. That is a good theory to apply when using social networks (hyves, facebook, etc.) in order to make contacts. But don't use these means to replace real, actual meetings and greetings. Maintain the bond also through eye-to-eye contact, by speaking with and meeting one another!



Priscilla and Aquila in the tent-maker's workshop, by Harold Copping. [Illustration in 'The Women of the Bible' (c 1920)]

✱ It is quite remarkable that Priscilla, wherever she is named, is mentioned first.

dedicated co-workers

Two of those trustworthy people on whom you could depend are Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple. They are old acquaintances of Paul's, fellow-Jews. He had met them earlier: 'And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla' (Acts 18:2). We know that Paul clashed with people every so often. Peter or Barnabas e.g., resulting in a conflict. Not so with this couple. They obviously clicked well with Paul. Priscilla and Aquila would do almost anything for him. They even risked their lives for him. This is derived from the expression: '*who risked their necks for my life*' (Romans 16:4). It can also mean that they made themselves wholly available, exerted themselves, put their shoulders under it. Anyway, it concerns two very committed persons. They unreservedly put themselves out for Paul. This pair has apparently taken over some important task from Paul in Rome. It is even questionable whether Paul himself had been to Rome earlier, before his imprisonment.

This husband and wife team had an important role as pioneers in the first Christian congregation. And it is quite remarkable that Priscilla, wherever she is named, is mentioned first. She maybe had outstanding gifts and qualities. She and her husband were active in educating and equipping the brothers and sisters to their tasks. See for example what they did when they heard the learned Apollos (Acts 18:24-26, see text box 3). Apollos was a competent, gifted preacher. People hung on his lips. However, there was something lacking in his knowledge, he had some blind spots, and he needed extra tuition or correction in some areas. Both Priscilla and Aquila gave him a refresher course and taught him some more, and explained to him the Way of God more adequately. Both had such insight in the Scriptures, that others could learn much from them. Earlier, they had already taken over from Paul in Ephesus, when he could no longer stay there and had to depart to Jerusalem. Now they are doing the same edifying work in Rome. Alongside Phoebe, this couple had a significant task in the work of mission and ecclesiastical upbuilding in the capital city of the Roman Empire. Shoulder to shoulder, men and women joined forces, building and establishing Christ's church. Their tasks were mutually divided and certainly not reserved exclusively for men 'in office'. That depicts much too narrow a view. It is remarkable that women had such an important role in the spreading of the gospel. Paul, who has so often been accused of female-unfriendly language, even puts them first!

✱ employed in various ways

Luke 8:1-3 'Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him,² and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,³ and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

■ from home

They worked from home and made their house available to the congregation. Priscilla and Aquila appeared to be quite well off and they used their possessions in the service of the gospel. They opened up their home and formed a house-congregation. This they had done before, in Corinth, and they do it again in Rome.



This missionary couple make themselves very approachable.

When the heart is opened, the house also opens...

We see various pointers and indicators here. In those days the Christians did not have a temple or synagogue in which to meet, so they met at home. Wherever Christians met in the homes in that gigantic city, they are called Church (*ekklesia*). We think of church in connection with our Sunday services. But in the New Testament, wherever Christians meet – home groups, house congregations, large or small – they are called Church. Wherever the congregation gathers, in broad or narrow context, God's Church of all ages, places and times, is represented. As we said to each other at pre-confession catechism: speaking about the Church, we should start by saying: we are the church, sitting here together, given to each other. You, male or female, are the church! Each one of us is a serving member.

3. ANDRONICUS AND JUNIA

■ fellowprisoners and kinsmen, male and female

For centuries the Bible translations showed *Junias*. It was presumed that both were men. They were also considered to be apostles. Not of the 12, but belonging to the large group of eye- and ear-witnesses. Grammatical investigations have proved that it is more likely to be a feminine name. And in ancient Christian literature she also appears as Junia... a female person (Chrysostomus)! It is even possible that it concerns a Greek translation of the Jewish name Joanna. Junia could then be the same person as Joanna, who together with Susanna and Mary of Magdala were followers of Jesus and supported Him and His disciples out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3). Andronicus and Junia could have been a married couple like Priscilla and Aquila, but it is not certain. It could also have been a combination of married apostle-couples, as the apostles were known to travel with their believing spouses (1 Cor 9:5). *'Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?'* Together they stood shoulder to shoulder, in service of the gospel. Anyhow, this couple also meant a lot to Paul. There was a great feeling of solidarity. They had both apparently been in prison with Paul. Nothing further is known about that, however. Paul, however, *does not recall that they were fellow-prisoners with him, but calls them fellow-prisoners here and now*. He does not mean people that are locked in a cell, but those who have lost their freedom and are now serving the Lord who has captured them. That is how we can look at it. Christ has conquered this pair. He employs them in His service and makes use of their talents and qualities. He has laid hold on their lives. To be a slave of Christ gives true freedom.

■ outstanding among the apostles

Paul says literally: *Andronicus and Junia are outstanding among the apostles (and apostoloi)...* which does not have to imply that they themselves are apostles. Even if Paul *did* mean that, he could have meant it as a travelling married apostle-couple. Whatever way we look at it, this couple was known as being

outstanding among the apostles. Yes, Andronicus and Junia had such a good name among them that they held this pair in higher esteem than their immediate colleagues! They were in Christ even before Paul (Rom 16:7). Concerning Junia, we must rectify her position by acknowledging that women completely belonged, and shared in the honour and respect. Shoulder to shoulder they, too, are employed in the service of the gospel.



The Learned Appolos

Acts 18:24-26 ²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

■ unity with Christ

Paul says: *they were in Christ before me*. Andronicus and Junia even beat Paul to it, they were converted before him. When he was still snared by his old ways and proving himself to be a religious Jew, they had already found Christ. They were Christians, male and female, of the first hour. More importantly, this couple also shows unity with Christ. That is what it's all about! You can have endless discussions on women in office, and overlook the fact that unity with Christ is first and foremost. You could even end up being so divided on the matter that you lose the unity with Christ. Our discussions should not be at the cost of being united! Christ wants unity, as is shown by Paul's summons to greet these women and men in their mutual connections.



Our discussions should not be at the cost of being united!

The Lord Jesus gathers men and women and employs them both. Paul follows the line of his Lord completely. Male and female, each in his/her own way, gets involved in the spreading and edifying of the Christian faith. There is no one who can work unification, also between the sexes, like Christ. In the beginning there was harmony, but rivalry took its place. Christ rectifies the unity in the diversity of male and female. He employs both in his service. True enough, there may be a core of elders who give leadership, but surrounding them we see a balanced congregation of men and women who are engaged as *diakonoi* (servants). *'As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another'* (*diakonein*) 1 Peter 4:10. *As long as we do not stand opposite one another, but shoulder to shoulder, as men and women. Because Someone is carrying you.*

E. Brink

■ Note This translation by Renee Mulder, Dec 2012

What is the church, according to Scripture? What characterizes its reality and dynamics? What are hindrances to its unity and vital life? These are questions which existentially gripped the heart of the Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder (1890–1952), his entire life. In a certain sense one can say that his work as a minister and theologian was almost totally preoccupied by these issues.

Klaas Schilder on the Church



Rev. Kim Batteau is the minister-emeritus of the Reformed Church in The Hague-Center/Scheveningen and one of the editors of this magazine.

■ Schilder and the Reformed Churches

Schilder was born in 1890, and grew up in the small, historic town of Kampen. He was from a poor, lower-class background. He wound up excelling at school and, with outside financial help, attended the seminary in Kampen. This was the 'Theological School' of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*). This federation of churches was the product of two reformation movements of the 19th century in The Netherlands: the *Afscheiding* (Secession) of 1834, and the *Doleantie* (Mournful Protest) of 1886 under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper. Both movements protested against and broke away from the liberal, state Reformed Church (*Hervormde Kerk*). These two movements of churches came together in 1892 to form the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, except for a small minority, which continued as the Christian Reformed churches (*Christelijk Gereformeerde kerken*). There were two centers of education for the Reformed Churches: the Free University of Amsterdam, founded by Kuyper in 1880, and the *Afscheiding* seminary in Kampen, founded in 1854.

The Reformed Churches were orthodox, Protestant churches in the Calvinistic tradition. They had (and have) three confessions: the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dort (1619). The Belgic Confession says that the three ecumenical creeds of the early (Western) church are also 'willingly received' (Art. 9): the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed (held to by the Eastern Orthodox churches too), and the Athanasian Creed. The *Gereformeerde* churches had a certain diversity at first. The *Afscheiding* churches were in general more pietistic, often expecting members to have a distinct adult conversion experience, in order to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The *Doleantie* churches were more covenant-oriented, with the emphasis on infant baptism as the entrance into the covenant community, and were more culturally and politically active. Yet these two groups of churches found each other in their loyalty to Christ, to the authority of the Bible, and to the Reformed confessions.

Klaas Schilder grew up in Kampen receiving influence from both the *Afscheiding* and the *Doleantie* tradition. The two greatest orthodox Reformed theologians of his day were Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. From

Kuyper Schilder received his broad cultural orientation. From Bavinck Schilder received his desire to live close to the text of Scripture as the source of church life. Schilder became a pastor in various congregations, starting in 1914. His last congregation was in Delfshaven (Rotterdam), starting in 1928, where he published his trilogy *Christus in zijn lijden* (*Christ in His suffering*). He studied philosophy at the University of Erlangen, in Germany, and received his doctorate in 1933, *summa cum laude*, with a dissertation on *Zur Begriffsgeschichte des Paradoxon* (*Toward a History of the Concept of Paradox*), in which he criticized Karl Barth extensively. He became a Professor of Dogmatics in Kampen in that same year.

In the 1930's Schilder became one of the leaders of a renewal movement within the Reformed churches. The leaders of this movement, the philosophers H. Dooyeweerd, D.H.Th. Vollenhoven, the school teacher A. Janse, and Schilder, called for a return to Scripture, turning away from so-called 'scholastic' theology. They felt that traditional Reformed theology had been too influenced by Greek, neo-Platonic thinking. This meant that they were critical of Kuyper's thinking at certain points.

■ Anti-Kuyper on certain issues

Schilder focused his criticism of Kuyper on Kuyper's doctrines of *baptism*, *common grace*, and *the church*. On the issue of *baptism*, Kuyper believed in 'presumed regeneration' in connection with infant baptism. According to Kuyper, one assumes that the infant in question is born again, baptize him or her, and wait and hope that it is true. Schilder, influenced by Janse, came more and more to believe in the covenant as a relation between God and believers and their children, regardless of whether those children were already regenerate or not, or even were elect or not. He criticized the 'presumed regeneration' theory for not being Biblical and for its leading to indifference and passivity in the church. This led eventually to the *Vrijmaking* (Liberation) of 1944, mainly on the issue of 'presumed regeneration.' Schilder's group was ejected from the federation, and formed (they said *continued*) the Reformed Churches, with the unofficial nickname 'Liberated' (*Vrijgemaakt*). This meant that the churches had 'liberated' themselves from the Synod's demand to adhere to the doctrine of 'presumed regeneration.' The 'Liberated Reformed' churches did not automatically

* Schilder sought new light in God's Word through careful exegesis and comparing Scripture with Scripture.

exclude members with a 'Kuyperian' view of baptism, but wanted to emphasize God's covenant with believers and their children, without making regeneration or election the basic issue.

Regarding Kuyper's doctrine of *common grace*, Schilder criticized it as not being Biblical, and as leading to a false optimism about Western culture. He posited an alternative: a 'common ground', in God's provision of a 'neutral' substrate for human life, and a 'common calling', the Cultural Mandate of Genesis 1:26-28: "Let them have dominion..." In his small book, *Christus en cultuur* (*Christ and Culture*), Schilder contrasts his views with Kuyper's.

■ The Belgic Confession

According to Kuyper, there is an institutional and an organic church. The institutional churches (denominations) can be more or less pure. Kuyper said that it's possible to have two true institutional churches in one place, one more, the other less pure. Institutional purity was necessary, therefore separation from the state *Hervormde* church in The Netherlands was legitimate. However, in the organic church, composed of all true believers, Christians in all churches could cooperate for educational, political, and other purposes.

Schilder criticized Kuyper's view of the 'pluriform' church. Schilder felt that Kuyper's way of looking at the situation was wrong, on the basis of the Belgic Confession, Article 27 to 29, and thoroughly in the tradition of the *Afscheiding*. (See box 1).

Schilder attempted to take these confessional words very seriously, and to apply them to the church situation of his day. Whereas Kuyper had said that these words in the Confession were no longer directly applicable in our day, due to the complication of ecclesiastical developments in history, Schilder said that they could not to be regarded as dead letters in the Confession. Schilder said: we cannot cooperate with the *Hervormde* church in doing evangelism, for that church (federation) is not a true church of Christ. The liberal and Barthian preaching, typifying many pulpits there, makes it impossible to

cooperate with such churches. We would like to cooperate with pietistic groups who want to be confessionally Reformed, such as the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* church, but they, as a rule, make a certain kind of adult conversion experience a condition for working together, and we cannot agree with that. Thus, said Schilder, we must be willing to see ourselves, the Reformed Churches, in principle, as the true church (federation) in The Netherlands, and live with the spiritual and practical consequences of that reality.

■ God's Word as the basis

Schilder was for his whole life an orthodox Reformed theologian who upheld the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible in the original autographs. In this he was not influenced by American Fundamentalism, as some have claimed, but was maintaining his own orthodox tradition in The Netherlands. According to Schilder, there were copying errors in the Hebrew and Greek texts as we have them now. However, "We Reformed people do *not* accept that in the *original* manuscripts those errors existed." (K. Schilder, 'Tegenstrijdigheden in den Bijbel?' in K. Schilder, *Verzamelde Werken, 1917-1919* (W. van der Schee, ed.; Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 2004) p. 349. This high view of Scripture remained a permanent fixture of Schilder's faith-convictions and theology. When J.G. Geelkerken was suspended from the ministry in 1926 by the Synod of Assen, due to his questioning the historicity of the speaking serpent (Gen. 3:1-5), Schilder stood firmly behind the Synod. If Scripture presents events as historical, we must hold to them as being historical!

Schilder attacked Barthianism starting in the 1920's, and continued this till his death in 1952, due to Barth's view that the Bible is a human *response* to God's revelation, and a *channel* of God's revelation, but *not revelation* itself. In Schilder's view, bowing to Scripture's authority was not just a demand for individual believers, but a necessity for the true church of Jesus Christ. Where loyalty to God's Word was undermined or unclear, there a church had ceased to be a biblical church.



Klaas Schilder as student in Kampen

photo www.dbnl.org

■ God's Word to be proclaimed by the church

Schilder, from his beginnings as preacher in his first congregation, sought to sound the depths of the divine revelation in order to understand better what God had revealed. While holding wholeheartedly to the Three Forms of Unity (the three Reformed Confessions), he was no mere confessionalist, content to repeat the statements of the confessions, but sought new light in God's Word through careful exegesis and comparing Scripture with Scripture. This led to sometimes surprising and fresh results, which was to be heard in his preaching.

Schilder was the first in history to develop an orthodox 'salvation history' approach to preaching from Bible (see Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: problems and principles in preaching historical texts* (Toronto: Wedge, 1970)). The Bible is not just a series of enlightening stories, separate from each other, each with a moral 'point' as an example for us, but a series of connected historical stories, one history of salvation, leading to the coming of Christ on earth. This story has to be proclaimed in the preaching. The church is the place where Christ is to be proclaimed in all His glory, from the totality of Scripture.

Schilder's ecclesiology was built on Scripture and continually oriented to Scripture. He was bound to the text, but because he was bound, he had freedom to listen anew and to seek new vistas in God's truth.

* 'The will to ecumenism' is the primary mark of the church

■ The Nineteen Theses about the church of 1935

Schilder published a kind of summary of his theology of the church in 1935, in the magazine *De Reformatie* (The Reformation), 19, 'Stellingen inzake de kerk' (Theses about the church). Let's look at some of these theses (my comments are in *italics*):

1. That a church exists -- this one cannot see, but only 'believe.' Every definition of the essence of the church (supposing that it is possible to speak about such an 'essence') using that which one can see in the world here below, or on the grounds of other axioms than the Scripture has 'revealed', is thus a work of nonbelief or unbelief -- even if many truths may be expressed. 'Discovering' or 'inventing' truths is pride in this case as well. *Here Schilder is rejecting an empirical, 'sociological' approach to the church. We cannot really see the 'essence' of the church by looking at phenomena and measuring them. We are bound to what God says about the church in Scripture to really know what it is.*

6. ...the church is gathered (brought together) every day by the living Lord (Kurios) Jesus Christ. This activity of gathering occurs daily in the 'imperfect present' tense. Every distinction between the 'being' and the 'well-being', between the 'invisible' church and the 'visible' church, between the church as 'organism' and the church as 'institute', is therefore false and fatal, if it disengages (abstracts) the 'coming together' of believers, occurring daily in the imperfect present tense, from the 'bringing together' of believers by Jesus Christ (the congregation of believers), which likewise takes place daily in the 'imperfect present' tense. *Here Schilder is taking his cue from the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21: "I believe that the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith,*

a church chosen to everlasting life. And I believe that I am and forever shall remain a living member of it."

This ongoing, present, dynamic gathering of the church into one body, is what the Bible says the church is. The 'scholastic' distinction between the 'visible' and the 'invisible' church, while in itself perhaps to a certain extent legitimate, can cause indifference and passivity with regard to church unity.

8. Making election or faith, or the demonstrable sanctification of the individual (as if this had to be 'cultivated', 'tended', or 'strengthened') the principle of bringing together believers and holding them together, without asking whether there is an actual 'coworking' with Christ, who is gathering the church together, can therefore be considered a disobedient way to determine the formation of the church. (...) Every church reformation, instead of asking how a particular fellowship of believers may find rest in their 'given' state of being together, must continually be determined by the question: "How is Christ gathering the body of His elect out of and through us?" We cannot 'rest on our laurels', or simply find comfort in the assurance that God will save His elect, but we are called to actively 'cooperate with Christ' in His bringing together believers and their children to form His church. *All believers have the duty to be active in this work of seeking and achieving the unity of the true church of Christ, said Schilder.*

10. Hereby it has also been acknowledged that the will to gather and the deed of gathering the believers into 'one' body form a constitutive 'mark' of the church of the first order. 'The will to ecumenism' is the primary mark of the church; the question as to 'how' and 'when' a church formation is truly ecumenical can be answered only by the declared, revealed, expressed will of God.

11. Since the 'will to gather believers' from all places in every moment of history is the first mark of the church (because in this



Klaas Schilder as professor in Kampen

* Article 27

"We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ..." Article 28 says: "We believe, since this holy assembly and congregation is the assembly of the redeemed and there is no salvation outside of it, that no one ought to withdraw, content to be by himself, no matter what his status or standing may be. But all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church..." Article 29 says: "We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully from the Word of God what is the true church, for all sects which are in the world today claim for themselves the name of church... The true church is to be recognized by the following marks: It practices the pure preaching of the gospel. It maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It exercises church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head. Hereby the true church can certainly be known and no one has the right to separate from it".

Christ's work is carried out in our working together with Him), it is a basic mistake of the first order to attempt to establish 'marks' of the church or 'divisions' of the church, if these criteria either contradict or are abstracted from this first mark. Schilder's phrase, "The will to ecumenism is the primary mark of the church," is a pithy summary of his mature ecclesiology. Churches with the same Scripture and even the same confessional documents, as many Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the world, should be challenged by these words.

■ The challenge of Schilder's ecclesiology

Schilder challenges liberals in World Council of Churches circles (and liberal Roman Catholics) to see God, and Christ, and the church by means of the pure revelation of Scripture. He calls them to abandon their 'Higher Criticism' of the Bible, their 'sociological' approach to church history, and, in general, their attitude of 'radical adjustment to modernity', and return to Scripture as God's inerrant Word. Only then can church unity be a reality.

Schilder challenges evangelicals, on the other side of the theological spectrum, to abandon their 'invisible church' approach to church unity: the idea that all believers make up the 'invisible church', so, as a result, we don't have to worry too much about concrete church unity. Evangelicals, and even Reformed evangelicals, tend to think that we can just carry on with Lausanne Covenants and world evangelism conferences, and so on, and not really worry about church unity. It's not a real priority.

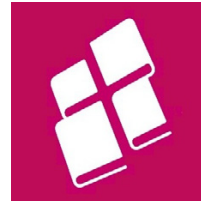
Schilder challenges churches of all stripes, starting with orthodox Presbyterian and Reformed churches on all continents, to forget about past differences and reasons for being separate, and seek true, concrete unity. The lack of church growth in parts of the world at the moment can at least partially be attributed to the lack of ecumenical will on the part of a number of Reformed or Presbyterian federations. For example, many people in Korea look at the many Presbyterian denominations (more than 100!) and see human power struggles and 'little kingdom building.' Believers in these churches tend to accept this state of affairs, and adjust to it. This passivity has led to unhealthy, unneeded splits, following 'leaders', and staying put in the ruts of the past.

Schilder challenges believers everywhere to care about the church, because the Lord Jesus is gathering it, and to cooperate with Him in bringing His church more and more together. We, in all countries, cannot escape this calling! ■

J.M. Batteau

■ Note

1 Here I am making use of my own article *Schilder on the Church*, in the book *Always Obedient: Essays on the Teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder* (J. Geertsema, ed.; Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 1995) p. 67-73.



Theological University Apeldoorn

■ Prof. Hofman retired

An important change took place at the TUA with the retirement of **Prof. Dr T.M. Hofman** as professor in the field of New Testament studies. In June 2014, he held his farewell-address about a relational issue in the gospel of Luke: *The Gospel for the Poor and the People*. The New Testament chair is now being cared for by **Dr M.C. Mulder** and **Dr T.E. van Spanje**, both as part-time lecturers.

■ Dissertations

Since the last update, a number of theological doctorates have been awarded at the TUA.

In March 2014, **M. Golverdingen** conferred a doctoral degree in theology with his historical study *Vernieuwing en Verwarring in de Gereformeerde Gemeenten 1946-1950 [Renewal and Confusion in the Reformed Congregations 1946-1950]*. Supervisor was Prof. H.J. Selderhuis.

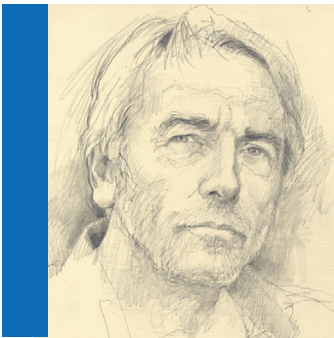
In October 2014, **Geert van Dijk** was awarded a doctorate for his biographical, as well as theological analytical, study on an influential Reformed schoolmaster in the 20th century, *Het concrete is het wezenlijke: Het denken van A. Janse van Biggekerke (1890-1960) over Gods verbond met mensen [What is real is what is of the essence: Considerations of A. Janse of Biggekerke (1890-1960) regarding God's covenant with men]*. Supervisor was Prof. J.W. Maris.

In March 2015, **Daniel Timmerman** expects to receive his doctorate by defending his church-historical study titled *Heinrich Bullinger on Prophecy and the prophetic office (1523-1538)*. This study shows that Bullinger's focus on the ministerial office and its authority in interpreting the Scriptures is accompanied by a consistent emphasis on the authority of Scripture. Supervisor is Prof. H.J. Selderhuis.

A few considerations on the gospel calibre or gospel quality of the Old Testament, with a special focus to Joel and Zephaniah. In these prophecies we hear a lot of God's anger over sin and disobedience, over pride and indifference. We hear of the Day of the LORD, the day God will do justice to his holiness and righteousness, the day that he will set an end to all unrighteousness, the day that he will finalize the salvation of his people. It will be the day that every knee will bow for God and his Messiah, everybody – including God's enemies – will recognize that the people who trusted God's word and the followers of Christ were right. Those who refused to believe will be put to shame forever.

The riches of the Old Testament

Revelation Zephaniah 3:1–5, 14–17



*Rutger ter Beek (b. 1952) is minister of the Reformed Church in Leusden, the Netherlands. In Old Testament studies he has specialized in prophets and psalms. As Hebraist he has been participating in the recently completed project **Psalmen voor Nu** (Psalms for Now), making new lyrics of all 150 psalms to new (pop music) tunes.*

Drawing by Evert Ploeg (Amsterdam) 2014

■ Is the gospel of Christ in the Old Testament?

Reading these two prophetic books we can be blinded by the abundance of God's judgment. Joel and Zephaniah both announce the coming judgment of Judah and Jerusalem and of the nations. They do so with great poetic skills and tremendous prophetic zeal. Reading of so much devastation, blood, darkness, fire, desert, and drought could make us thirsty for the New Testament gospel. And we wonder: is the God of Joel and Zephaniah really the Father of Jesus Christ? Are we sure that we are safe by this raging and roaring God? Is the gospel of redemption and renewal present in the Old Testament? This question I should like to face. Sometimes we have heard (even from Reformed theologians): God's revelation in the Old Testament is poor, and his revelation in the New Testament is rich, because Jesus Christ is there. Or: the Old Testament revelation is shadow, compared to the bright sunlight of the New Testament revelation. Or: the Old Testament revelation is limited, and the New Testament revelation is full.

We have to face the risk that taking such a position can bring disappointment for a Christian, even a Reformed Christian, reading the Old Testament. There is so much darkness, there is so much poverty, there is so much still to come, but not yet there – that there is the seduction to leave the Old Testament unread. As shepherds we prefer to bring our sheep directly to the green valley of the New Testament. That is far better than searching for days for a few dry blades of grass in the vast desert of the Old Testament, is not it?

■ Joel

Let us address the question with the help of a few key passages in the prophecy of Joel first. Joel has to warn the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. He suggests that God may miss something in the service of his people. His instruction (1:14): *'Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD'*. Later in 2:15–17

he defines this location 'the house of the LORD' as 'between the vestibule and the altar'. That is – we could say – inside the house, in the hall of God's house. Joel summons the whole people to crowd into God's hall! And as soon as the LORD begins to speak in Joel's prophecy, he declares (2:1): *'Blow a trumpet in Zion, sound an alarm on my holy mountain.'*

We had better not overlook this emphasis. In the midst of the alarming signs of his anger rising up and his judgment coming near, God assures his people that he still lives in Jerusalem, on his holy mountain. God says: I am here, with you. My faithfulness, my trustworthiness, my patience, my grace, my covenant love and I – I dwell here in Jerusalem in your midst. The day of my judgment may come close, but I am closer. My faithfulness is closer to you than my anger. Ring my bell. Knock on my door. Blow a horn – I hear you. When the Judeans do so, He promises that He will restore Israel for all the misery they suffered. That is how – He says (2:27) – *'you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else.'*

This comes to a climax in the famous promise of the outpouring of God's spirit on all the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. As soon as the great and awesome day of the LORD looms, there will be a people, a living building, that answers the door to everyone who calls on the name of the LORD (2:32). In the midst of the turmoil of God's earth-filling judgment there will be a Zion, a Spirit-filled people that can help anyone who requires God's help. Do we recognize our situation of today? Since the beginning of the outpouring of God's Spirit on the disciples of Christ on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, our world has been the scene of the revelation of God's wrath (Rom. 1:18–28). But in the midst of this, in this stream of anger, there is a mount, a rock, a refuge, where one can find salvation (Rom. 9:30–10:13): the place where Jesus is LORD, the body of Christ, Zion in the flesh baptized in the Spirit.

'The LORD dwells in Zion'. It is Joel's final word (3:21);

cf. 3:17 and 2:27). It is the riches of the Old Testament gospel from the days of David until the exile of the Jews. It is God himself. It is this message that Jesus Christ has sent into the world to invite sinners to his Father's house, to avoid any misunderstanding that God's anger against unrighteousness means that he hates sinners.

■ 'Righteous within you' (Zephaniah 3)

Let us turn to Zephaniah. This prophet gives his message in the time of king Josiah. This king initiated a restoration of the true service of God. He was even conquering parts of the former Northern kingdom to re-establish the service of the LORD there, too. Nevertheless, Zephaniah has to expose the capital Jerusalem as a proud and shameless city (3:11), with an indifferent heart, thinking: *'the LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill'* (1:12). The dirt of rebellion and violence covers the streets of Jerusalem up to the threshold of God's house (3:1). But now the miracle: the LORD is righteous within her (3:5). Amidst the dirt of rebellion and violence his righteousness never ceased to function perfectly. What a comfort this is: dirty our world may be, infected by sin our church may be, yet God or Jesus never will be infected by the dirt of our sins.

This is a wondrous thing. God's justice will not only be fatal for every rebellion and for every sin. There is another effect – purification: *'I will make the speech of the peoples a pure speech'* (3:9). The peoples of the nations will serve God. It is the same in Jerusalem and Judah: those who had kept their faith in the LORD, though this had exhausted them, become just and honest (3:13). This makes the time ripe to sing for joy: *'The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst'* (3:15). That means evil nevermore: *'The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty one who will save'* (3:17). God's being with Israel changes her so thoroughly that she becomes the bride that pleases him in every respect. The miracle happens. History begins all over again. God falls in love again; he is back in the days that all he made was good. God expresses this happiness in silence; and his joy in loud singing. God looking at his bride, singing loudly for joy!

■ Superior to all unjust powers

What a strong gospel this is, what a great perspective! Imagine a dirty playground. Set a perfectly clean child in it. What will happen? Right. This kid will in no time be completely dirty. But Zephaniah preaches: imagine this dirty world, and the perfectly clean God, his perfect



Joel [fresco Michelangelo (1509) Cappella Sistina, Vatican]

Son, and the Holy Spirit living in the midst of it. What will happen? Exactly! God remains clean, Jesus remains perfect, and the Spirit remains holy, but this world will become pure. Our dirt does not make God dirty. God's righteousness, Jesus' obedience and humility, and the Spirit's holiness 'infect' the world and us. Think of Jesus when he was in Judah and Galilee. When Jesus comes near an ill person, illness flees, and this person is healthy. When Jesus touches a deceased person, this person comes to life. When Jesus approaches a person inhabited by an evil spirit, this spirit goes away and the person is free. When Jesus is imprisoned in death, it does not work; death has to let him go. You know the examples; do you see the pattern? It is an Old Testament pattern. It is the righteous God whom Zephaniah pictures in the middle of unrighteousness.

Who will deliver us from death (Rom.7:24)? Romans 8: the Spirit of God dwells in us. This means: 'if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you'. What a relief for us weak and humble Christians! When God lives in me, and sin lives in me – I know what will happen: sin will be eradicated and I will live, because the holy and righteous God dwells in me. We know this: sin cannot undo God's love; God's love is able to undo sin, death, and evil. This will make us so beautiful that God will sing for joy.

■ God-with-you: what more do you want?

Let us go back to our initial question: is the gospel of Christ in the Old Testament? We have seen in Joel and Zephaniah that the gospel of Jesus Christ is already there. It had not yet become flesh. But God himself is there. In Joel' and Zephaniah's time, God has a house in Jerusalem; he dwells on his holy mountain, and he sticks to his righteousness. Immanuel! I think we do not honour God when we call this 'poor', 'dark', 'shadowy', or 'limited'. These words do not fit Him. This helps us to discover and uncover the riches of God's revelation in the Old Testament. God does not give poor presents; his revelation is never insufficient. It is less rich perhaps, but still rich. The believers in Joel' and Zephaniah's days knew enough about God to be saved. When we fail to appreciate the riches of God's revelation in the Old Testament, we fail to do full justice to God's revealing himself, to God's being with his people.

May we be so infected by God's righteousness, purity, and holiness in Christ, that we may serve him to save and cleanse our world. ■

R. ter Beek

■ Note

Adapted from the message delivered in the Morning Chapel Service of February 10, 2012, Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Dehra Dun (Uttarakhand, India).

The General Synod of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, 2014 (2)



Rev. Kim Batteau is the minister-emeritus of the Reformed Church in The Hague-Center/Scheveningen and one of the editors of this magazine.

This article concerns the Theological University (seminary) of the Reformed Churches, located in Kampen (the TUK). The Minutes (Acta) of the previous General Synod of Harderwijk, 2011-12, contain the official statutes of the TUK in appendix 6.13. At the Synod of Ede, 2014, the moderamen presented this description of the responsibilities of The TUK, the General Synod, and the churches.

The Theological University in Kampen is the school of the churches. The General Synod is responsible for it. How can objections be made to what is taught in Kampen? Various people asked this question at the Synod of Ede, 2014. We heard it in letters from church councils, in the appeal signed by 1,541 church members, and in letters of admonishment from foreign sister-churches.

■ A new governance model for the TUK

Importantly, the old governance structure of the TUK has been changed. Previously, the Board of Trustees, appointed by the Synod, governed the TUK. However, the Dutch law regarding academic education has now been altered. All universities must have the same governing structure. This is now necessary everywhere, because students would otherwise not be able to receive a recognized diploma, and also not be able to receive student financing. This matter is distinct from the issue as to whether the TUK may receive (partial) financing from the government. Even without such financing, a new governing structure was demanded.



The governing structure now has an Executive Board and a Supervisory Board. On the one hand, there is now more distance between the TUK and the Synod, and thus also between the TUK and the churches. On the other hand, a Board of Trustees has been appointed (having a different function than the previous Board of Trustees) to strengthen the relationship between the TUK and the Synod and churches.

The Executive Board is the legal authority within the TUK. It is responsible for the governance of and policies regarding the University, and also for the supervision of professors and lecturers. This Executive Board is appointed by the Supervisory Board.

The Supervisory Board supervises the governance and policies of the Executive Board, and thus also has the task of maintaining the Reformed character of the lectures and academic research. This Board is appointed by the Synod and reports to the Synod concerning its activities, just as every other appointed committee. The church supervision of the TUK has now been structured in this new way.

The Board of Trustees is a committee of the Supervisory Board. It gives advice regarding the academic level of the TUK, and regarding its Reformed character, that is, its accordance with God's Word and the Reformed confessions. The Board of Trustees (four ministers and two academicians from other universities) are also appointed by the Synod.

■ Supervising lecturers

Whose responsibility is it to see to it that the professors



Theological University
Kampen

and other lecturers or researchers carry out their tasks in harmony with the basis of the TUK: the Word of God and the Reformed confessions? This is above all the task of the Executive Board. The Board of Trustees advises the Executive Board about this.

The Executive Board has private talks with the lecturers and researchers. If there is a reason for doing so, the Board can ask lecturers and researchers for an account of their work. If necessary, the Executive Board can go so far as to dismiss a lecturer or researcher.

If it concerns someone appointed by the Synod, the Executive Board can propose to the next Synod to have him dismissed. The decision rests with the Synod.

Lecturers and researchers who have not been appointed by the Synod, but by the Executive Board, can be dismissed by the Executive Board (all ordinary professors and the lectures with a permanent appointment for at least 60% FTE are appointed, and can be dismissed, by the Synod; the others, by the Executive Board).

The initiative for measures leading to a possible dismissal due to deviance from the confessions is, in general, to be taken by the Executive Board. But if the Executive Board doesn't do this properly, then the Board of Trustees or the Supervisory Board can take action. They cannot initiate such a procedure, but they can call the Executive Board to it. When the Executive Board refuses to listen to such a call, then the issue must be addressed by the coming Synod. The Synod will then make a decision about the case in question.

■ Objecting to a lecturer

Can one, as a church member or church council, make an official objection to what a professor or other lecturer says or writes? Yes. First, one should first have a private talk with the professor or lecturer involved, even when it involves something publically said or written. If that does not lead to agreement, one can then present an objection to the Executive Board. The rule is that one must bring such an objection to the Executive Board within a year of what has been said or written.

The Executive Board is to ask advice of the Board of Trustees, and will then make a decision. If the objection is rejected, the Executive Board will explain this to the person who made the objection. In the extraordinary case that the Executive Board comes to a different conclusion than the Board of Trustees or the Supervisory Board, then the matter will be reported on at the coming Synod.

■ Making an objection against a lecturer

What are the possibilities, if one's objection to a lecturer or researcher is rejected by the Executive Board? Or if no answer to your objections is given? The Executive Board, and also the Supervisory Board with the Board of Trustees, will report about such cases to the coming Synod. These reports are to be public, and are to be published in time for the proper procedures to be followed. All church councils have the opportunity to react to the reports. As a reaction to a report, a church council can ask the Synod to publically

state that an objection to a lecturer has been unjustifiably rejected. A church council can propose to the Synod to firmly urge the Executive Board to take measures against a lecturer or researcher. A Synod can also, if necessary, call the Executive Board or the Supervisory Board to give an account of themselves, if objections are not answered properly. Just as in the case of other reports from committees, "ordinary" members do not have the right to write letters directly to the Synod. They can ask a church council to do that. The Synod is, namely, a gathering of *churches*, and not a meeting of an association of individuals.

When the Synod believes that measures are needed to be taken against a lecturer or researcher, it cannot always do this itself. Someone who has not been appointed by the Synod can not be dismissed by the Synod. The Synod can merely come to the conclusion that the Executive Board has unjustifiably not taken a course of action. In a healthy situation, the Executive Board will then take this action.

■ Direct objections at the Synod?

It is impossible to ask directly of the Synod that it state that a lecturer or researcher has departed from Scripture and confession. The only proper route (after a personal talk with the person involved) is to submit an objection to the Executive Board. Only in this way is it possible for an objection eventually to be considered by the Synod.

■ Academic freedom for a University

Our churches chose many years ago for an academic theological training, with recognition from the government. Klaas Schilder supported the school having the right to grant doctoral degrees. As such, it is appropriate to engage in academic debate with other theologians of other convictions. Often one does not share the same basis, the Reformed confessions. One must use arguments and methods accessible and convincing to the other person. Therefore, also with regard to the level of academic discourse, the language and the arguments in such publications will often be other than that which are used in church publications, written for a broad readership. That is why academic freedom must be given to professors and lecturers. They themselves base themselves on the foundation of Scripture and confession. They bind themselves to this foundation, by subscription. From that basis they enter debate with other theologians in an academically responsible way.

■ Thankful and critical

We ought to be thankful to God for the great riches of a Reformed University. Let's have confidence in our professors and lecturers. At the same time, let us remain critical. Being faithful to God's Word is never automatic. That's why the structure of Executive Board, Supervisory Board, and Board of Trustees has been set up. Objections can be made along the path described. In this way we bear our responsibilities, as churches, praying and giving thanks. ■

J.M. Batteau

Reformed Theology for a global world

The Theological University of Kampen is launching a new English-taught Master's degree programme: Master of Intercultural Reformed Theology (MIRT).

The programme consists of one year of full-time residential studies in Kampen and will start in September 2015.

The MIRT offers international students a unique opportunity to:

- * Become more deeply acquainted with Reformed and neo-Calvinist theology and tradition;
- * Reflect on the relevance of Reformed Theology for today and in their own context;
- * Study in Europe: the cradle of the Reformation;
- * Learn from qualified professors and experts from Kampen and like-minded theological institutions;
- * Enjoy academic cultural exchange and fellowship with international students from around the world.

For further information please contact
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