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Address for editorial and administrative
matters (subscriptions, change of address):
Lux Mundi / office BBK
P.O. Box 499
8000 AL Zwolle
The Netherlands
Phone: ++31(0)38 4270470
Email: bbk@gbouw.nl
<http://www.bbk.gkv.nl>

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I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me

A tidal wave of men, women, and children is moving inexorably our way, here in Europe: the boat-refugees. We see the desperation on their faces on TV. Unable to find safety in their own countries, ravaged by war, rape, and persecution, they are trying to reach a safe haven in their hundreds of thousands. Some confess the name of Jesus Christ. What should we do?

■ Desperation and death

From January to August of this year, more than 150,000 reached Europe via Turkey and Northern Africa. More than 3,000 men, women, and children drowned tragically in their attempt to reach safety in 2014. And they are dying at a higher rate in 2015. It is numbing. We read the figures, and even see the miserable figures falling into the waves from their flimsy craft, and it doesn't seem to even touch us any more. But it should.

The problem has become a political matter. British Prime Minister David Cameron claims that the vast majority of these asylum seekers are not really refugees, but people 'seeking a better life', that is, economic migrants. But this is not true. More than half of all the asylum seekers are coming from Syria, Eritrea, and Somalia. Syria is a horror show of terror, torture, and sexual exploitation. Eritrea rivals North Korea in its treatment of religious minorities. Somalia is a dismal failed state, dominated by murderous, radical Muslim militias. David Cameron should look more carefully at who these people really are.

■ Christians in response

It is August here in The Netherlands. Over the past few weeks Rev. Reinier Kramer, pastor of the Reformed Church (Liberated) in Spakenburg-South, has been in the news. While on vacation on the Greek island of Kos, he was shocked to witness how the boat-refugees, many from Syria and Afghanistan, were being terribly maltreated by the Greek authorities and intentionally ignored by the tourist industry on the island. He was galvanized into action, and tried personally to help. Now his story and his efforts have led to more Dutch volunteers helping on Kos, joining others who were helping on the island of Lesbos and Malta. Reinier Kramer has helped us see that we as Christians should be much more involved, in one way or another, to help the boat-refugees.

■ Helping where we can

Should we as Christians, together with our other fellow citizens, welcome these refugees into the countries we live in? I notice a hesitation and even hostility on the part of some Christians. Aren't a lot of these people economic migrants (David Cameron's idea)? And aren't a lot of them Muslims and thus potential terrorists? Why can't they stay in their area of the world? And how much is this going to cost us?

We have already looked at Cameron's idea and found it untrue. Second, although many of these refugees may be Muslims, we are to be reminded of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. The thrust of that story is that we ought to be good neighbors to every suffering person we come across, from whatever ethnic or religious background. And shouldn't we be glad we might be able to witness to Muslims about the grace of God in our Lord Jesus, while we are involved in ministries of mercy? Aren't whole potential mission fields coming to our countries?

■ Welcoming strangers

Jesus says, in Matthew 25, that when the Son of Man appears in his glory, at his Second Coming, he will judge the nations. Before him will be gathered all human beings. He will separate them from each other as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will reward all who welcomed him (in the form of 'the least of these my brothers') as a stranger with an inheritance of the eternal kingdom. However, he will punish those with eternal punishment who did not welcome him.

Those who welcomed Jesus' disciples, when they were 'strangers', receive the kingdom; those who did not welcome them go to eternal hell. That is a startling, harrowing warning to each and every one of us living in countries where refugees are knocking on the door. Many of the refugees are professing Christians. Indeed, many may need help in understanding what the gospel truly is. Nevertheless: welcoming Jesus' brothers and sisters, or potential brothers and sisters, when they need welcoming and shelter, is not something we can opt out of. Welcoming them, means welcoming *him*. Rejecting them, means rejecting *him*. ■

Kim Batteau | Editor

'For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers [and sisters], my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.'

(Romans 9: 3-5)

An Israelite with heartache



Dr Rob (P.H.R.) van Houwelingen (1955) has been a minister since 1980; up until 2002 he served four congregations and subsequently became professor of New Testament at the Theological University Kampen. He published several commentaries in the Dutch CNT series. He was chairman of the Board of Yachad from 2010 to 2013.

Paul is suffering from heartache. To the Christian congregation in Rome he writes: *'I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.'*

Whatever is wrong with him? Is he feeling homesick for his mother city of Tarsus in Asia Minor, now that he has once again crossed over to Europe and is staying in Greece? Is he afraid of the Jews, who are constantly driving him away from the synagogues, so that he must fear for his life? No, Paul cannot take it that his own Jewish kinsmen are lagging behind, or even opting out, and do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

How on earth is that possible? This is the question occupying his mind in Romans 9-11.

Israel should be happy with the coming of the Messiah, as one of the many privileges the Israelites may enjoy (cf. Rom. 3:1-2, where Paul still spoke of Jews). That name Israelites speaks volumes: it is a name of honour which brings to memory father Jacob, once renamed by God himself with the name of Israel. In this way Jacob's descendants received a privileged position. Paul can be proud to call himself an Israelite (Rom. 11:1; 2 Cor. 11:22). Of course, he has a bond with Israel!

■ Privileges

In the first part of Romans 9 six privileges of the Israelites are summed up:

1. The sonship (*huiiothesia*): allowed to be child, and therefore heir, of God. Not only does Israel as a people go through the world as an adopted son of God (Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1), but Israelites individually have been adopted as children of the Father, sons and daughters of the Almighty. (2 Cor. 6:18).

2. The glory (*doxa*): God's glorious presence, which accompanied the Israelites on their journey through the desert and dwelled in the tabernacle and the temple because the LORD wished to live there with his people. That glory of God radiates on Israel.
3. The covenants (*diathèkai*): the Eternal desired to connect to, amongst others, the forefather of the Israelites, Abram; to the people of Israel at Sinai; to the royal house of Israel through David. He held out the prospect of a new covenant to Israel. Moreover, all these covenants came with linked promises (Eph. 2:12).
4. The law (*nomothesia*): the Torah had been given to the Israelites at Sinai. Moses wrote the words of God down in a book and read that law book out loud to the whole people. He confirmed the covenant by the sprinkling of blood, after all had pledged to take to heart what the LORD had said (Ex. 24:1-8).
5. The worship (*latreia*): in the cult, the Israelites showed their will to obey their God by adhering to the prescriptions revealed to them in the Torah. This applied both to the worship services in the temple and to the worship in daily life.
6. The promises (*epangeliai*): everything that, in the course of the centuries, had been promised to the Israelites from heaven, culminating in the promised Messiah who would come on behalf of God to deliver the people from all impotence and guilt.

That all belongs to 'them', the Israelites, Paul emphasizes. 'To them' belong also the Patriarchs (*pateres*), Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who

have been given God's promises and who placed their unwavering trust in him. Privilege number seven!

And then the list reaches a climax that encompasses all the preceding privileges: 'from them' (from the Israelites therefore) is Christ originated, the true Israelite. Paul refers especially to the origin of Christ 'according to the flesh', as Christ also 'according to the flesh' descended from David (Rom. 1:3), and as Paul considers himself a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:4-5).

■ Doxology

Paul then continues with a doxology (an expression of praise to God) in verse 5. For the translation and interpretation of this, two options have been suggested:

- An independent doxology, aimed at God the Father. This is the choice of some translations, for example of the GNT, which places a full stop after 'Christ, as a human being, belongs to their race.'
- A continuation of the sentence regarding Christ, with a comma, followed by a doxology aimed at Christ's divinity. The ESV and most of the other English Bible translations choose this option.

The Greek manuscript tradition of the New Testament did not yet use full stops and commas. Therefore, analysis of the text itself has to provide the answer. Option b. does the most justice to the sentence structure, because the grammatical subject of the whole sentence is then Christ (*ho oon* is similar to *hos estin* (Rom. 1:25; 2 Cor. 11:31)). Other doxologies by Paul are also generally part of the preceding sentence or are closely connected to what precedes.

Why then, is the choice sometimes made for possibility a.? The most important argument is that one finds it impossible to imagine that Paul, certainly in this context, would distance himself from Jewish monotheism by giving Jesus the title of 'God'.

The Torah had been given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai [photo Wikimedia Commons]

Greek manuscript of the New Testament



✱ Jesus as Theos

In opposition to the service of idols, the Shema of Israel ('The LORD is our God, the LORD is One') is being complemented by Paul with a typically Christian confession: 'For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth — as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords" — yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.' (1 Cor. 8:5-6). In Philippians 2:9 Paul says that upon Jesus Christ has been bestowed the name that is above every name: the name of God. Just like in Romans 9:5, this refers to the glorified Christ. See further the connections 'our God and Lord' (2 Thess. 1:12; and possibly also James 1:1) or 'our God and Saviour' (Titus. 2:13; and thus also 2 Pet. 1:1), but it is debateable whether these expressions are referring to one or two persons.

Besides these Pauline passages, the Gospel of John mentions the confession of Thomas, who addressed the risen Jesus as 'my Lord and my God!' (John. 20:28). We see this repeated in the prologue (John 1:1 and 18; the meaning of 1 John 5:20 is not unequivocal). And Hebrews 1:8-9 quotes from Psalm 45 in reference to the risen Christ, so that he is called God.

The first Christians were all Jews. They continued to serve the God of Israel, but started honouring the Father and his Son together. This proves that it was not incompatible with Jewish monotheism to call Jesus God. One could call it a 'mutation within Jewish monotheistic tradition' (Larry Hurtado).

Apart from the question whether this is truly unimaginable (see text box: Jesus as *Theos*), in Romans 9-11, Paul is talking about a very special situation. The unbelieving Israelite has no good excuse. Christ is no stranger to them, is he? Humanly speaking, this is about a blood relative. At the same time, he is more than a human, as becomes clear from his position in heaven: he is also God, who is above all and everyone, and is to be praised eternally. The human nature of Christ, in which he is related to the Israelites, is supplemented by Paul with the divine, in which he is, as glorified Son, one with the Father. The human and the divine are, with Christ, joined together (cf. Rom. 1:3-4 and 1 Tim. 3:16 according to the majority text: 'God, who was manifested in the flesh'). You could say that he has a 'dual nationality', both heavenly and worldly.

In this way Paul arrives at an extraordinary doxology, aimed at Christ. The Messiah is not exclusively Jewish. He is, however, from but not of the Israelites. Because of this personal ap-

proach we could consider representing the Greek word pair *epi panto* with 'over all (all people)', instead of 'over all things', as some translations have done. In Romans 10:12 we see something similar: 'For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.' Paul feels connected to his own fellow men, but as the apostle for the nations, he is also thinking of the non-Jews. Christ stands above all people.

■ Separation

Heartache: that is what Paul is suffering from when he thinks of his headstrong fellow men. It hurts him deeply, but has to do with the gospel which he proclaims.

While innumerable non-Jews are converting, as far as the Jews are concerned Paul sees a strong resistance to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It tears him apart: he is both connected to his Jewish fellow men and dedicated to the Lord. Just like Moses, who was prepared to be blotted out of God's book (Ex. 32:32), Paul would be willing to sacrifice himself for the Israelites, if it would benefit them. Even if this means that he would be separated from Christ (literally: 'accursed'; Greek: *anathema einai*; cf. 1 Cor. 12:3; 16:22; Gal. 1:8). In reality a spiritual division was occurring within the people of God's covenant. Paul was standing on the fracture line and was forced to observe, with pain in his heart, that not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel (Rom. 9:6). Yet the apostle also felt joy. God's people from the new covenant will gather around the true Israelite, he who is God, who stands above all and is to be praised in all eternity! Amen. ■

■ Literature

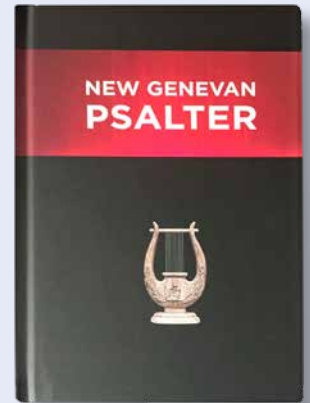
- Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God. The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).
- Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).
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■ Notes

- This article is the substance of a talk held in the form of a Bible Study on the Study Day organized by Yachad and the Theological University Kampen on 4 October 2013.
- Yachad is an organisation of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands that wants to share the confession that Jesus is the Messiah, by supporting the preaching of the Gospel. The target group is twofold: the Reformed-liberated supporters (making them aware of God's unique way with Israel, prayer for the Jewish people, learning from Jewish exegesis) and the Jews, both in Israel and the Netherlands and Flanders (helping Jews who confess that Jesus is the Messiah or Jewish congregations in word and action, offering facilities to pass on the Gospel to their fellow-Jews)

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The church has a unique bond with Israel, because God has not revoked the promises he had made to this people. This deep conviction led the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken, CGK*) to set up¹ a Centre for Israel Studies (*Centrum voor Israël Studies*) at the Christian University of Applied Sciences (*Christelijke Hogeschool*) in Ede, the Netherlands. The goal of this study centre is to promote an encounter with Israel, to draw attention in the church for the consequences of this continuing bond with Israel, and to give expression to a real dialogue with Israel, around an open Bible.



A bond with Israel



Dr Michael Mulder is the director of the Centre for Israel Studies, and Associate Professor of New Testament Studies and Judaica at the Theological University of the Christian Reformed Churches (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken, CGK) at Apeldoorn and the Christian University of Applied Sciences (Christelijke Hogeschool) at Ede, the Netherlands. He is also extraordinary professor of New Testament at North West University in Potchefstroom, South Africa. Together with Rabbi Shlomo Tucker he was the editor of The Presence of the Lost Temple. Report of a Jewish-Christian Dialogue.

■ Report of a Jewish-Christian dialogue

Recently the Centre published a book that reports on a large number of meetings between Christian and Jewish theologians in Jerusalem. These encounters took place during a number of study trips that were organized by the Centre. Ministers and students of theology were brought into contact with rabbis and students of a rabbinical school in Jerusalem, to explore the theme: 'How shall we meet God?'

Primarily, this discussion took place at an academic level. Several portions of Scripture in which the meeting with God has a central place, in particular as this meeting with God found expression in the Temple, formed the thread of these discussions.

For both Jews and Christians the Temple has an important place. In numerous prayers in the synagogues, the Temple has a living presence, even though twenty centuries have passed since it was destroyed. In Christian worship and experience of faith also, the Temple still has an important place: in the Psalms that are sung, and in various New Testament references to the Temple.

To start off with, a lively discussion arose as to how these texts ought to be read. Which different hermeneutic choices are made within the Christian and Jewish traditions when reading these same texts about the Temple? It turned out that the loss of the Temple and its obvious continuing presence are experienced in a quite different way within Jewish and Christian traditions. However, this discussion did not remain confined to an academic intellectual level. That is why the book that reports and reflects on these discussions has become a unique work. Its theme turned out to be a fruitful avenue to progress beyond just the hermeneutical and exegetical questions that come with the texts about the Temple. Existential and spiritual questions were raised concerning the manner in which these Scripture passages are connected with one's own encounter with God. 'Do you have a special place where you meet with God?' 'How do you pray to God, now that the Temple no longer exists?' 'How are you aware of his presence?' From both Jewish and Christian sides there was room to pursue these questions further, and to show each other something of what lives in the hearts when reading these Scripture passages.



■ Non-committal?

It is reasonable to suppose that a Christian who was not present at these meetings might begin to ask critical questions. Doesn't such a discussion become too non-committal? Isn't there a real danger that the core issues that divide us as Christians from the Jewish religion are left undiscussed? At bottom, doesn't such a discussion deny our identity as churches and as Christians? Honesty requires us to acknowledge that these are acute questions. Meetings between Christians and Jews often give rise to a superficial recognition, while further discussion about precisely what is meant exposes far deeper differences. This was also the case, on a number of occasions, during these discussions.

But whoever reads this book will discover that the participants not only acknowledged this to be so, but also emphasized that they were enriched by the experience. This discussion did not lead to a superficial, non-committal manner of speaking about God and to each other. On the contrary, in viewing the meeting with God from another perspective, one's own meeting with him was deepened and enriched. The book contains a number of testimonies from participants who afterwards reflected further on the impact of these discussions. It helped to shape their thinking, and brought them closer to the heart of what meeting with God is really about. They did not experience this as something non-committal. It also became apparent, from both sides, that one's own identity was not pushed aside, simply to make room for these discussions. The intent of this conversation was to learn from the manner in which the other, in his own tradition, listens to the voice of God. Naturally, this required sound preparation. A large measure of openness was asked of the discussion participants, willingness to expose one's own vulnerabilities, and courage to approach the other with respect. Still, in these discussions one's own identity was not given up. Room was created to ask each other about the heart of one's experience of faith. In this way, it did indeed become possible for both sides to learn from one another.

■ Reciprocal testimony

At the Schechter Institute, where these study days were held, it wasn't just texts from the Old Testament that were opened, but also texts from the Midrashim and the New Testament. It was a wonderful moment when a Jewish student questioned one of the Christian speakers further: what does Jesus Christ mean for you personally? How do you meet God in him? In a sensitive but



utterly honest manner, there was room to talk about this. From the letter to the Hebrews, the value of the sacrifice that the High Priest made, in giving his own life for us, was highlighted. It was the first time these rabbis had experienced anything like this. The lines from the Old Testament were extended through to Jesus Christ. Conversely, Christian participants also asked about the manner in which Old Testament worship extends in a certain sense into the life of a Jewish believer today. One of the ministers wrote an article about the practical lessons that he himself drew from the manner in which the meeting with God finds expression in Jewish family life. Now that the Temple no longer exists, all of life becomes worship of God. This New Testament notion takes on a concrete form in the various Jewish rituals and prayers, which for him were an eye-opener. Here was a real-life example of the reciprocity of learning from one another, when the Scriptures are opened.

■ Not rejected

Underlying all these discussions is the conviction that both Jews and Christians indeed read the same words of God, and that Jews also hear in these words the voice of the living God. Here the great difference between pagans, who do not know God, and Jews, who live with the Old Testament Scriptures, becomes apparent. God is present, in a particular manner, in their lives, and Christians can learn new things about life with God. Saying this does not set aside the crucial point of difference between Jews and Christians. To the extent that the Scriptures bring us closer together, these meetings intensify the pain felt over the division about who Jesus Christ is. A number of articles in this book witness to that also. However, with this publication the centre for Israel Studies does highlight the difference between a dialogue with Jews such as reported in these articles on the one hand, and mission

situations among pagans on the other.

It also highlights a distinct difference between the long-held point of view within the CGK, and with the recent decision of the synod of the GKv, which advised that discussions concerning Israel be assigned to the same deputies that take care of missions among pagans.

The point of view of the CGK – and the other partners within the centre for Israel Studies – is founded on the conviction that the covenant of God with Israel has not been set aside by the fulfilment of his promises in Jesus Christ. Here, a special promise remains for God's people of old. And the church is not where it should be when it fails to acknowledge the specific position that God, in his act of election, gave to Israel.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul often uses the word 'fellow-' to indicate the special position of Gentiles: they are fellow-recipients of the promise, fellow-members of one body, fellow-heirs with Israel, fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:9; 3:6). That is the depth of the mystery of which the apostle has become a minister.

And that asks of Gentile Christians that they constantly remain aware of the wonder that they may share in this extraordinary gift of election, a gift that Israel had already received before.

On the other hand, of course, this should move both Israel and Gentiles to get to work on the basis of their election, and not to let it degenerate into a feeling of chosenness, one that does not bring them any closer to God.

In Romans 11, we again come across that word 'mystery', indicating that the promises for Israel have not lost their power; rather, in God's time and in God's manner they will be fulfilled (Romans 11:25,26). That must keep Gentile Christians from arrogant pride, as if they now have priority, forgetting that God has not rejected his people (Romans 11:1,25).

This is the attitude that makes the centre for Israel Studies strive for a true meeting between the church and Israel. Whoever wishes to discover more about some of this work is invited to read this book, which has been published in both English and Dutch (*The Presence of the Lost Temple. Report of a Jewish-Christian Dialogue / Hoe zullen we Hem ontmoeten. Joden en christenen in gesprek over het verlies van de tempel. Amsterdam: Amphora 2015*). ■

■ Notes

- 1 in collaboration with the Reformed Union for Missions (Gereformeerde Zendingbond) and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, PKN)

The Church and Israel

Blueprint for a Biblical view

Stichting Yachad is an organization within the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (GKv) that is devoted to promoting the proclamation of the gospel of the Messiah Jesus Christ among Jewish people. It has an internet presence at www.yachad.nl which includes a vision statement entitled *Kerk en Israel: ontwerp voor een Gereformeerde visie* that sets out the Biblical foundations for such an endeavour. An extract from this document, written by EJ Oostland and HJ Siegers, is included below: it deals with what Christ himself had to say about his own people, and the practice that arose after Pentecost in the early Christian church.

8 | Jesus and Israel

When we look at what the New Testament says about Israel, the Jewish people, and the attitude of the Christian church towards them, then the first thing we must say is: Jesus is a Jew, a descendant of David (Luke 2:4), born under the law (Galatians 4:4), who came to proclaim the kingdom of heaven to the children of Israel (Matthew 10:5; see also Matthew 15:16).¹ This is not to say that Jesus came exclusively for his own, the Jewish people. During his earthly sojourn we see him opening the way to other places and other peoples. We think of the country of the Gerasenes (Luke 8:26ff), the land of the Samaritans (John 4), and the way people from surrounding regions flocked to him (Matthew 4:24).

It is clear, though, that the main focus of his work was directed to all of Israel, and whatever happened to those who were not Israelites falls within the scope of the history of Israel. At the same time, Jesus makes it clear that he is the Saviour of the whole world (John 8:12), and that – in the future – many will come from east and west, and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8:11). In this, Jesus draws on the prophecies of the Old Testament; and this is consistent with expectations of the future that prevailed among the people of Israel.

Jesus himself emphasizes that in all of this, faith in him is decisive, for Jews as well as for the nations (John 12:20-36). Everything stands or falls with him. It already becomes clear during his lifetime on earth that a division would arise within the one Jewish people (see Matthew 10:14,15; 11:21-24). The parable of the wicked tenants explicitly tells us that the kingdom of heaven will be taken from some, and given to others, to a people that will give him the fruits owed to him (Matthew 21:33-46).²

9 | The Book of Acts

When we read the book of Acts, we see how this command of Jesus to the apostles is worked out. In Acts 2, Peter speaks to the Jewish people.³ He addresses them as ‘*men of Israel*’ (Acts 2:36), and reminds them of the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:39; see also Joel 3). In Acts 8, the church is scattered throughout Judea and Samaria; Philip, too, travels about in Samaria, proclaiming the Christ there (Acts 8:5). The Samaritans’ acceptance of Christ is seen by the apostles in Jerusalem as a significant development, and in the coming of Peter and John to Samaria this transition is formally acknowledged (Acts 8:14-17).

After Acts 8, the next significant ‘breakthrough’ is the baptism of Cornelius and his household, as described in Acts 10 and 11. It becomes clear to the church in Jerusalem that God is now giving the Gentiles the opportunity to turn to him (Acts 11:18). A division of labour is agreed upon: Paul is to go to the Gentiles, while Peter, John and James will go to ‘the circumcised’ (Galatians 2:9).

It is remarkable that Paul, who after all is the ‘apostle to the Gentiles’, consistently goes to the Jews and their synagogues first, and only after that to the Gentiles. In doing so, he appears to seek out his compatriots, choosing to first bring the gospel to them; only afterwards do the Gentiles come into the picture.

What drives this practice? Is it Christ’s command from Acts 1, which has become a general practice, or does Paul see this sequence as little more than a personal search for his compatriots, joined to him by a bond of blood? Taking into account what Paul says about the gospel as ‘*the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*’ (Romans 1:16; see also 2:9-11), the conclusion is warranted that Paul sees this order as one of principle. The Gospel is from the Jews for the Jews (Acts 13:32-33),⁴ and then also for the Gentiles.

This is a translation from the Dutch language of EJ Oostland and HJ Siegers, *Kerk en Israel: ontwerp voor een Gereformeerde visie*, chapters 8-13, published by Stichting Yachad. The original document is accessible at <http://www.yachad.nl/bijbelse-en-historische-onderbouwing>. This translation by Aart Plug, August 2015.



the natural branches
might once again be
grafted into the stem

10 | Jews and Gentiles

When we survey the book of Acts, we note that there is a shift in the direction of the Gentiles. Where at first this shift was individual and incidental, starting with Cornelius, the Gentiles as a group come into the picture. In fact, Paul even becomes ‘the apostle to the Gentiles’. This transition does not imply that from now on the gospel is proclaimed *only* to the Gentiles. Gentile nations do not take the place of the Jewish people. This becomes clear from Paul’s approach to his task (Romans 1:16; 2:9-11). Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians form two distinct groups, who as a matter of principle are regarded as equal.

This principle of equality becomes clear in Ephesians 2:11-21: while the Gentiles (those who were uncircumcised) were at one time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, they now, in Christ, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. He has made the two worlds one, and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility. Paul speaks of one structure, of which Jesus Christ Himself is the cornerstone. Paul also uses the image of one man (one body), referring to the one church of Christ (2:15,16). In this one church Jews and Gentiles must unite, each recognizing the other’s rightful place. While there may have been equality in principle between Jewish and Gentile Christians, does this mean that in practice the two groups lived together as one? The New Testament sheds little light on this. In Acts 15 we read of a difference of opinion in Antioch about circumcision, specifically about the need for Gentiles to be circumcised (ch 15:1). This dispute is laid before the church in Jerusalem. Here, one part of the assembly appears to believe that Gentile believers ought to be circumcised, and observe the laws of Moses. The outcome of the discussion at this assembly makes it clear that Gentile believers ought not to be brought under the yoke of the law, but should submit to the yoke of the God of Israel.⁵ Specifically: the law of Moses is not to be imposed on the Gentiles; however, it has not been abolished as a rule for godliness *within Israel*. In other words: Gentile Christians do not need to become Jews; conversely, Christians from among the Jews need not give up their Jewishness. The church at Antioch is able to live with this response (ch 15:31). There is no record, however, of how the distinct groups of Jewish and Gentile Christians henceforth lived together⁶.

11 | Paul’s attitude to the Jewish people

God makes no distinction between Jews and other nations (Romans 10:12). He is the God of the Gentiles also. This does not set aside the fact that the Jewish people do occupy a special place. The gospel reached the nations from Jerusalem. Gentile Christians may not lose sight of the special place of the Jewish people. Having an eye for God’s people of old becomes evident in the collection for Jerusalem that Paul organizes (2Corinthians 8,9),⁷ and in his continuing prayer for the salvation of the Jewish people (Romans 10:1).

This continuing attention for the Jewish people, which Paul continues to have and wishes to pass on to the churches, implies that there is one people of God, consisting of Jews and Gentiles. Both groups must have an eye for each other, must accept each other, may not disregard each other. We see here an extension of the people of God. The test for this being received as one of God’s people is the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and faith in him. Anyone from the Gentiles who accepts Jesus as the Messiah is grafted into the one people of God. Anyone from the Jews who rejects Jesus as the Messiah does not belong to the Israel of God (Galatians 6:15,16).⁸

It is especially this last point that must be clearly understood. Paul sometimes speaks very sharply about his compatriots (see Galatians 3:10; 1Thessalonians 2:15,16), but only about those who pride themselves on their Jewishness, on their observance of the laws of Moses, and in so doing reject the Messiah Jesus Christ.

On the contrary, Paul is filled with compassion towards the Jewish people (his kinsmen according to the flesh). To the Jews he even became a Jew, in order to win Jews (1Corinthians 9:20). One of the best-known and most deeply touching passages of Paul about his own people is found in Romans 9-11. Here we see clearly that Paul has not forgotten his own people, and God has not forgotten them either!

Taking into account that Romans 9-11 explicitly speaks of the place of Israel as the people of God, and of the attitude Gentile Christians are to take towards the Jewish people, this passage is still of fundamental importance in any reflection on the relationship between the church and Israel.



*The Christian congregation
Kol ba' Midbar in Jerusalem
[photo Yachad]*

12 | Romans 9 – 11

Paul's heart goes out to those of his own people. His brothers and sisters, those with whom Paul has a common ancestry, are privileged: God has bound himself to them; they are God's children. From their race is Christ (Romans 9:1-3). This descent, however, does not mean that all Jews are children of God (ch 9:5), only those who have given ear to the gospel (ch 10: 16,17).

Here, Paul speaks of Israel in two ways: Israel according to the flesh, and Israel in a spiritual sense (ch 9:8). These two are not congruent! This implies, in other words, that there is a (large) part of Israel that has hardened itself, that has not heeded the gospel of Christ. They have not believed; and it is just this faith in Jesus that is crucial, for Gentiles as well as for Jews (ch 9:30-33; ch 10:11,12; ch 11:7,8). Is there hope, then, for Israel? And if so, how and when is their conversion to be expected? God has not rejected His people (ch 11:1,2); a small remnant is left that God has elected in his grace (ch 11:6). This small part, this remnant, makes it impossible to speak of 'replacement', as if the people of Israel would have been replaced by one (or many) Gentile people(s). God remains faithful to his chosen people. And it is just this faithfulness that gives Paul reason for hope; to have a special hope, even, for the conversion of the Jews. Gentiles, who enter ahead of the Jewish people, are intended to provoke jealousy among them (ch 11:11). After all, it would be too much to bear, for those who have the rights of firstborn, that Gentiles (*goyim*) acknowledge the message of the Jew Jesus as the Word of God, and let him become their Redeemer!

On the other hand, Gentiles may not exalt themselves above Jews. Paul shows that clearly in what he says about the tree and its branches (ch 11:15-24). It is thanks to the fall of the Jews that the gospel has gone to the Gentiles (ch 11:11). That alone should make the Gentiles humble. There is one more thing: where God has not spared the natural branches (some of the people of Israel), he will also not spare the wild ones (the Gentiles), if unbelief and pride should take the place of faith (ch 11:20,21).

At the same time Paul, in this figure of speech, expresses the hope that the natural branches might once again be grafted into the stem. God has the power to do that; more than that, it is a perfectly natural thing for natural branches to be grafted back into their own tree (ch 11:24; note the 'how much more').

Does Romans 11 have anything to say about the future of Israel? What can we expect? In other words: does this 'provoking to jealousy' have any effect? It is important to note that Paul here speaks of a divine mystery (ch 11:24). This expression tells us that what is happening here is beyond our comprehension. A part of Israel has hardened itself, in order that a fullness of Gentiles might come in (ch 11:25). And in this way all Israel will be saved (ch 11:26). In other words, the hardening of one part has the salvation of the other part as its consequence. And yet, this means that 'all Israel' will be saved. God will not let his people go; on the contrary, he remains faithful to his people and his promises. The expression 'all Israel' is an expression of fullness (in the language of Paul: a whole tree, full of branches). There is one important point in the interpretation of this passage:

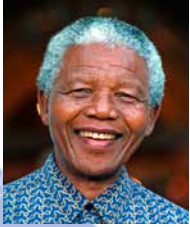
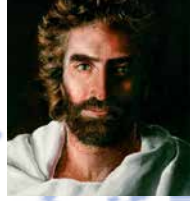
* God remains faithful to his chosen people

what does 'all Israel' (ch 11:26) mean? Various interpretations are possible. In the light of this passage, the most likely one is this: 'all Israel' is the faithful remnant of the Jewish people. In this view, the part represents the whole, regardless of the number that are saved. The quantity itself is not what Paul here has in mind.

We need to be cautious at this point, for the text does not allow a compelling choice. The figure of speech that Paul uses here (the one tree) might point to faithful Israel together with the Gentiles who have come to faith. In that case, the emphasis would lie on the unity of believers.

At the same time, we should note that in other places Paul never uses the word 'Israel' to denote the whole of God's people, inclusive of believing Gentiles. Of course, it is always possible that here he does use it to mean God's people, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, but that seems less likely.

Whether there is still to be a large-scale conversion among Jews remains an open question. The conversion of the whole Jewish people does not seem likely, but why should the conversion of many not be possible? The prophecy of Jeremiah (which Paul quotes in ch 11:26) gives reason for hope. It is much more important that here the (Gentile) church is addressed: do not forget where you came from (do not be proud), and do not forget your calling (to make Jews jealous).



* From all nations

It is especially the image of the one tree with its many branches that impresses on us the bond of unity that exists (must exist) among the one people of God, among Jewish and Gentile Christians. Between the church today and our Jewish ancestors in the faith. There needs to be a continuing awareness that our faith is anchored in the Old Testament, and that the Christ came from the people of the Jews. This awareness must drive us to an attitude of sorrow when we cannot share with the (unbelieving) Jews our joy in Christ, to prayer that they may turn to Christ, and to thoughtful reflection on the question of how we may make Israel jealous of the salvation in Christ. As wild branches, we may not forget the natural (Israelite) branches.

13 | The Book of Revelation and millennialism

Are there other parts of the New Testament that tell us anything about the place and the future of Israel? Here, our eye falls especially on the book of Revelation.

Revelation 7 speaks about the 144,000 who have been sealed, from each of the tribes of Israel. This number, however, does not refer to the Jews, or to Jewish Christians, but to the full number of all believers from all nations. True, they are described as being 'from every tribe of the sons of Israel' (ch 7:4), but this refers to the people of God, a continuation of the Israel of old. The whole gathering of the redeemed is portrayed here as the tribes of Israel.

The 144,000 spoken of in Revelation 14 are the same as those described in chapter 7. This tells us that the full number of God's elect forms the new Israel of God. Neither of these passages in Revelation contains any indications that a special place is reserved for the natural people of Israel.

Some expositors identify the woman of Revelation 12 as being the people of Israel. After all, the son that is born to her, Jesus Christ the

Messiah, is descended from Israel. The 'period in the wilderness' is then understood to be the diaspora of the people of Israel after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and the definition of this period (1260 days) is regarded as a veiled foreshadowing of the wholesale religious conversion of Israel.

Chapter 12, however, deals with the persecution that threatens the whole Christian church. No occasion is provided here for the reader to zoom in on the position of Israel (as one special group) or on a statement concerning its future. Besides, it is doubtful whether the attractive and positive portrayal of the woman in this chapter is likely to fit with the nation of Israel, which for the greater part had rejected the Messiah, and was often partly responsible for the persecution of the Christian church.

Revelation 20 faces us with the question whether the Messiah's reign is to take place on earth, and just what we might expect this thousand-year reign to be like. This is an important question, because the adherents of millennialism envisage an important role for Israel in the period that precedes Christ's final return.

* God is now bringing to fulfilment his purpose from the beginning

What is generally known as 'millennialism' is in fact a variety of related but different streams of thought. Here, we will not explore all kinds of details that distinguish 'premillennialism', 'postmillennialism' and 'dispensationalism'. What is important is that all the various forms of millennialism assert that a thousand-year kingdom will dawn (Revelation 20:2) when Christ returns and begins his reign. During this period, Satan will be bound.

This reign of Christ is often believed to coincide with the 'taking up of the church' into heaven (1Thessalonians 4:16). And the thousand

years of Revelation 20 is then connected with what Paul says: ‘all Israel will be saved’ (Romans 11:26). In this way, Israel will become a blessing for the whole world. Christ will be enthroned in Jerusalem, and he will reign from there; this is also when the third temple is to be built. Millennialists, most notably those of the dispensationalist stream, assert that the present-day church is an intermediate and transient form; when all is said and done, it is Israel that God is most concerned about. The millennium, then, is an intermediate period; the second coming of Christ, preceded by the end-time judgments, is still to follow.

* the full number of God’s elect forms the new Israel of God

The manner in which we read Revelation 20 is quite important. Millennialists read chapters 19 and 20 chronologically. There is much to be said, however, for the view that Revelation describes the time of the end in a number of different representations, which may be portrayed successively, but actually take place simultaneously. In addition, the events described in Revelation 20 do not really lead us to think of an earthly kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital. Rather, it makes us think of a vision of heaven. It describes thrones, with souls seated on them (v. 4), and this does not seem to describe an earthly setting.

There are still more arguments that could be raised against the view that Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years, and that during this period ‘all Israel will be saved’. The greatest objection to this view, however, is that it sets up a contrast between (believing) Israel and the church of Christ. This is a distortion of what the Bible says. The New Testament particularly emphasises the unity of the people of God, where there is neither Jew nor Greek.

In conclusion, Revelation 21 describes the new Jerusalem. Does this chapter give us reason to believe that a special place or central position is reserved for the Jewish people in God’s glorious kingdom? From the beginning, it is clear in this chapter that the new Jerusalem

fills the whole earth, that its gates are open to God’s children from all nations (vs. 24,26), and that the people of God does not consist of the members of one (ethnic) people, but of members from a multitude of nations.

The fact that this city is called Jerusalem points back to the Old Testament; in doing so, it becomes clear that God is now bringing to fulfilment his purpose from the beginning, namely that he makes his home among his people.

The fact that the names of the twelve sons of Israel are written on the gates of the city (v.12) indicates that what God is now realizing in this eternal city was always his intention. At the same time, Gentile believers also enter this city, built as it is on the foundation of the twelve apostles (v.14), and in this manner they are incorporated, by faith, into the Israel of God.

Revelation 21, too, gives us no reason to conclude that there is to be a central position for the people of Israel in the kingdom of God, nor for Jewish believers either. Together with Gentiles who have come to faith, they will form the one worldwide church of God. This worldwide church will mean the completion of Israel. It is through what the Gentiles bring in that the Israel of God will come to its final completion.

The Book of Revelation, too, leads us to conclude that Israel, like all other nations, shares in the salvation of Christ, and can only be saved through him. What Scripture tells us about Christ’s return and the events preceding it gives us no reason to confer on Israel ‘according to the flesh’ any kind of special position.

At the same time, the book of Revelation reminds us in a number of places that salvation is from the Jews. Gentile believers must realize that they are being ingrafted into the Israel of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Israel of faith.

At the very moment that Revelation 21 speaks about, the Israel of God will be complete, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, all of whom expect their salvation from Christ alone. ■

■ Notes

- 1 For a broader discussion of this aspect see J. van Bruggen, *Het evangelie van Gods zoon, Persoon en leer van Jezus volgens de vier evangeliën*, p161ff.
- 2 This text is often used as an argument in support of the ‘replacement theory’. That, however, is not the point of the parable. See J. van Bruggen, *Matteüs, Het evangelie volgens Petrus*, p386ff.
- 3 In his address, Peter includes numerous Jews who live in dispersion among the Gentiles (Acts 2:9-11).
- 4 See J. van Bruggen, *Paulus, Pionier voor de Messias van Israël*, p231.
- 5 Van Bruggen, *Paulus, Pionier voor de Messias van Israël*, p60.
- 6 It does not appear that this matter played a significant role in the church of Jerusalem, since there were no (or very few) Gentile Christians there.
- 7 In Romans 15:27 Paul even goes so far as to say that Gentile believers owe a special debt to the saints in Jerusalem.
- 8 Galatians 6:15,16: “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation”.



Looking Back at the National Assembly 2013 of the Netherlands Reformed Churches¹

Practical Matters

This National Assembly (NA) of the Netherlands Reformed Churches (*Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, NRC*) has not had to deal with shocking matters, but has focused above all on the practical, ongoing life and activities of the NRC churches. There was one more principal, theological issue still to be dealt with: at the end of this year (2015) we hope to discuss the issue of whether homosexuals who live together can bear the offices of elder and deacon.

In the meantime, the NA has supported the intensification of cooperation with other churches, especially the Reformed Churches (Liberated). The NA president Rev. W. Smouter, noted in the last session that there has never been such cooperative movement at the local level as there is now, and that this is in line with Christ's prayer for unity. It will be a continuing challenge to make national arrangements which do justice to this growing, encouraging development. What follows is an overview of the NA's activities up to March 28, 2015:

1 | Organization

NA procedure

We have left the stacks-of-paper-for-meetings era, and are now fully digitally and paper-free online with respect to our dealing with reports and the activity of the NA.

Our NA does not meet often or for long, but has come together once or twice each year since 2013. The church of Nunspeet will be the 'calling church' for the NA of 2016.

Israel and our federation

The church of Urk believes that there is little interest in our churches for Israel and the Middle East. They proposed to appoint a committee to study the issue. Others at the NA suggested joining the existing Centre for Israel Studies. However, neither idea got sufficient support.

Archives and documentation

There is now cooperation for storing the archives with the Reformed Churches (Liberated) Centre for Archives and Documentation, and we will see if more participation is possible.

2 | Church Doctrine

Study of church offices

The committee investigating church offices presented a report critical of the way the NRC Agreement on Church Cooperation (ACC) speaks about church offices, signalling no mention of the congregation's calling or the 'office' of believers. The NA decided to see how the ACC can be expanded with a vision of what it means to be a congregation in our age, and in this to seek as much connection as possible with the new Church Order of the Reformed Churches (Liberated). This is to take place in the context of the church unity talks with the RCN(L), in which we hope and expect that our church orders may be brought more in tune with one another.

Church office and homosexuality

During the previous NA of Houten, in 2010, discussion took place about the in-principle-decision of the church of Utrecht that brothers and sisters who live in a homosexual relationship of love and faithfulness may be nominated to the offices of elder and deacon. A committee was appointed to see what the Word of God says about this. The RCN(L) did not accept our request to join us in a joint study committee, so a 'sounding board' group was formed, in which members of the RCN(L) and the Christian Reformed churches in The Netherlands (CRC) took part on a personal basis.

This committee is still at work, but presented an interim report with an inventory: a survey conducted among the churches, conversations with homosexual church members, and contact with organizations for homosexual brothers and sisters. *[In the meantime this committee has come with its recommendations in a final report: the majority of the committee recommend to allow homosexual brothers and sisters, living in a relationship of love and faithfulness, to serve as elders and deacons, while the minority do not recommend this. These two contrasting recommendations will be discussed and voted upon in the Fall. K.B.]*

3 | Church order

The ACC and missionary work

A committee reported about how new missionary, church-planting initiatives can be stimu-



[photo Sjaak Verboom]

Rev. W. Smouter, President of the Assembly

lated. The result is a change of the ACC on a number of points, including the establishment of the function of missionary church worker, involved in church-planting, as well as a new article about the missionary task of every church council and congregation: 'to witness to Christ, in word and deed, and to support missionary work at home and abroad with prayer, gifts, and involvement.'

5 | Church services

Our churches participated (modestly) in the interchurch Foundation for Church Songs, which put together and published the new 'Songbook: Singing and Praying at Home and in Church' (2013). Our committee involved recommended using the new Songbook, along with other sources, since with the appearance of the beamer, many diverse sources, traditional and from the evangelical movement, can be used for singing in church.

6 | Pastorate and fostering church life

Categorical pastorate

We will be working together with the Spiritual Care of Military Personnel of the RCN(L) and the CRC.



Pastorate among deaf people

We are now participating in the Interchurch Pastorate for the Deaf, and have appointed Mrs. Elselie de Jong for a limited task in this important work.

Central Reporting Location about Sexual Abuse

We are working together with the RCN(L) and the CRC here. We want to have an official 'confidant' in all our congregations, to deal with such abuse.

Youth work

Our Netherlands Reformed Youth Work gives support to local youth work, in the form of training, supervision, and advice. This support is very important for our congregations, especially the smaller ones.

Website homosexuality

Many congregations have to deal with the question of how to be involved with homosexual church members. That's why the NRC and the RCN(L) have a joint website (www.homoind-kerk.nl) where a lot of material is available. The 'editors' of the website have as their point of departure the conviction that the Word of God connects sexual relations to the relation of man and woman within marriage. There is room on the website for various points of view, as long as God's Word is accepted as source and norm.

7 | Diaconate

Our local congregations have had to deal with the results of the financial crisis in The Netherlands since 2008. Our Central Diaconal Committee, and especially the 'Diaconal Support Centre' of the RCN(L) have been helpful. The NRC, the RCN(L), and the CRC have a joint Platform for Diaconal Cooperation, as a think-tank for practical application of a joint vision.

8 | Missionary congregation

The report of the Missionary Support Center showed how, in particular, our missionary advisor, Pieter Kleingeld, has been active helping to make our NRC congregations more conscious of their missionary call, and to give shape to this call. There is a growing cooperation with the RCN(L) in this area, especially in supporting missionary groups in local congregations. A report came also from a work-group in South Africa which has a plan to help the four NRC missionary organizations to work more intensively together.

9 | Workers in the church

Theological education leading to the ministry

The Netherlands Reformed Ministry Education board of directors was given the task of participating in talks about forming a joint, broad, theological academic institution for the training of ministers. The CRC and the RCN(L) are involved. Dr Jaap Dekker was appointed to the chair of special professor of Bible Research and Identity in the Netherlands Reformed perspective at the Theological University (seminary) in Apeldoorn.

Competence for preaching for non-ministers

A regulation was formulated so that it will be easier for non-ministers to preach in the churches. The examination for obtaining this competence will be nationally regulated.

Church exams of candidates to the ministry

Until now such exams were regulated at the regional level. Now a new system has been introduced so that there is a national organization, the National Committee for Church Exams, which has a role in this process.

10 | Interchurch activities

Contacts at home

The Committee for contact and official discussions with other churches reported that the relation to the RCN(L) was central in the past period. From a long period of stagnation and negative feeling, the situation has changed, nationally and locally, in a positive direction. There is rapid growth of local cooperation and official church unity talks. There is a growing consensus about Bible interpretation and application. The Committee recommended the proposal coming from the region Amsterdam-Alkmaar of achieving a reunion of the two federations as of October 31, 2016, and this proposal was accepted by the NA by a great majority. A very significant and hopeful development!

Contacts abroad

In the past decades there have been growing contacts with churches in France, Hungary, Canada, the U.S.A., Australia, Japan, and Korea. A special and long-time relation is that with the Free Churches of East Sumba, Indonesia.

■ Notes

- 1 This article is a summary of the report 'Terugblik op de LV Zeewolde 2013' (which is continuing), about the National Assembly of the Netherlands Reformed Churches (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, NGK) in Zeewolde, written by W. Smouter, President of the Assembly, and B. Versteeg, secretary. The report is summarized by Kim Batteau.

Few would deny that confessional Reformed churches today face enormous challenges. What confronts the church today is not simply a secular culture, whose roots are of course centuries old, but a militant secular culture, seemingly intent on silencing the church and pushing her to the margins of society. The proud march of secularity under the banners of tolerance and inclusion fills the street, and those who refuse to walk in lockstep are not simply categorized as primitive, but opposed as villainous.

Return Trip to Kampen

Some Personal Reflections



Bill DeJong, pastor of Blessings Christian Church in Hamilton, Ontario; and a PhD candidate at McMaster Divinity College, weblog 14 July 2015

How does the church relate to an increasingly militant culture of secularity? The question preoccupies the Reformed churches in the Netherlands (GKNv) and is the impetus for changes in the theology, worship, and practices of the Dutch churches. These changes concern a small minority in the Dutch churches and a vast majority within their Canadian and Australian “sister” churches.

One colleague has asked me for my assessment of the “Dutch churches” and I will happily provide it, but not without some disclaimers. First, I am not privy to all the discussions that have occurred between the representatives from our respective committees for ecumenicity, and am not conversant with all the areas of concern. Secondly, my time in the Netherlands was short, my conversations with Dutch leaders few, and my exposure to Dutch churches was limited (I did not attend worship services in highly secularized Amsterdam or Utrecht). Lastly, I comment as an outsider, and outsiders are not always fully sensitive to the dynamics of a culture. On the other hand, I attended church twice every Sunday and experienced worship in multiple places, including Kampen (Eudokia), Dronten, Wezep, Assen-Zuid, and Zwolle (Plantage), and spent a month at the Theological University in Kampen, the institutional heart of the Dutch churches, where I conversed with both students and professors.

Plantagekerk RCN Zwolle-Centrum [photo www.reliwiki.nl]



■ Worship

My overall assessment of the worship of Dutch churches is very positive, and here’s why: (a) In all of the worship services I attended the *votum* was sung, though the melodies varied. Reformed worship prizes congregational participation and the arguments for a sung liturgy are strong, and so I applaud this improvement; (b) The basic elements of the Reformed liturgy were untouched and the services progressed from confrontation with sin towards proclamation of the gospel towards (when Lord’s Supper was celebrated) communion with Christ; (c) The songs were appropriately mixed and included psalms (often to Genevan melodies), hymns, and contemporary praise songs, and though the pipe organ was the dominant musical instrument (and Dutch churches have such wonderful organs and organists), worship services sometimes featured other instruments, including acoustic guitar. It’s great to sing God’s praises with a variety of instruments and genres because it underscores the catholicity of the

* Dutch preachers have become so adept at relating to people in the pew

church and the diversity of musical tastes and talents; (d) Though children in every instance were excused for the sermon, they were welcomed back prior to the benediction. The corporate blessings of Jesus are for children and not just adults! (e) In every service I attended, Scripture was read by a lay person (in every instance, a woman). I really like the notion of including lay members at particular moments in the liturgy, not least women.

Small criticism: I prefer a more predictable and liturgical worship. Some of the worship services I attended included presentations (from youth leaders) or introductions (of elders) that seemed to interfere with the flow of worship, if not worship itself. I prefer a worship service without ‘commercials.’



*Reformed Church
in the city*

■ Preaching

The Dutch churches get very high grades for their preaching. I especially enjoyed hearing sermons by Dr Burger, Ds Jos Douma (Zwolle) and Ds Slotman (Zwolle). Dr Burger preached an exceptional sermon from Ezekiel that was expository, pastoral, and winsome for believers and seekers alike. I heard Ds Douma preach a number of times and found his thoughtful Christocentric sermons connected to an attentive and appreciative congregation. I marveled at Ds Slotman's ability to interact with the congregation through his doctrinal catechism preaching in a way that wasn't cheesy or pedantic. I'm told that it's largely the influence of Dr Kees de Ruijter, the now retired homiletics professor, that Dutch preachers have become so adept at relating to people in the pew. In nearly every service, power point was used in the sermons and, though I have some quibbles about it, its use was tasteful and helpful. In each instance, the worship services were full of attentive members, young and old.

Small criticism: I wonder if the pendulum has swung too much *towards* the listener and *away* from the text. While I really appreciated the accessibility of the Dutch preachers, I would have preferred a little more exposition.

■ University

The Theological University in Kampen is staffed by an extraordinarily competent faculty of theologically erudite and culturally informed scholars. In some ways, it is a dream team of teachers and those who study there will be exposed to the best of Reformed scholarship. I personally appreciated the friendliness of the faculty and found them without exception to be humble and thoughtful, desiring the best for their students and the churches.

The professors in Kampen read widely and eagerly harvest insights from those beyond the narrow confines of Reformed confessional orthodoxy, perhaps more so than those who teach at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. I was heartened to see familiarity and engagement with radical orthodoxy (John Milbank, Graham Ward, Catharine Pickstock *et al*), for instance, the British evangelical Oliver O'Donovan,

and the American ethicist Stanley Hauerwas, all of whom have tremendous insights for theologians in secular contexts. Theological education is not what it used to be in the Netherlands. The historic faculties of theology in Utrecht, for example, and Leiden, have essentially been shut down. The faculty of the seminary for the PKN (the united Protestant church) in Amsterdam, at the behest of the government, works with other churches (and even other religions) in shared education in shared space.

The future of the theological university in Kampen is questionable, and pressure from the government, the source of significant funding, will likely require the university to relocate and merge with other theological universities to avoid duplication and excess spending. While I was there, Dr Roel Kuiper was installed as rector to replace the retiring Dr Mees te Velde. Though a philosopher by trade and neither a minister nor a theologian, Dr Kuiper brings a wealth of experience, leadership, and influence to the table. For years a member of the First Chamber in the Dutch government, Dr Kuiper is a dignified and wise individual, and has the capacity to offer meaningful leadership for the institution in coming years. Though it will be extraordinarily sad to see the Theological University leave Kampen, an historic city for Reformed theological education, there may be advantages in a merger with, for instance, the theological university in Apeldoorn. Here you would have complementary visions for Reformed theological education under one roof, and a place for cross-fertilization between scholars of different Reformed theological inclinations. Iron sharpens iron.

Prior to visiting Kampen, I had wondered whether the university was becoming too detached from the church and too much of an academic institution (rather than an ecclesiastical school). What I discovered, however, is that the professors are generally invested in the church, and that even some who are not ordained (e.g. Dr Koert van Bekkum) have obtained a license to preach, in part to retain a connection to ministry in the church. I also wonder about the model of government funding for the theological university. Though the Dutch government does not interfere with the teaching at the university or its internal governance, there is still a sense that the government is forcing the school to go down a road it otherwise would not choose. I still believe that the best way for a school to be free of government influence is to be free of government funding.

■ Culture (and Hermeneutics)

I really don't know that Dutch culture is more secular than Canadian culture. There is little in Amsterdam that you wouldn't see in Toronto. I do think that the confrontation between church members and culture is far more pronounced in the Netherlands. In Canada, many Canadian Reformed churches are rural and even the city churches tend to be in the suburbs. We don't have churches in Toronto or Montreal or Vancouver, and Canadian Reformed church communities tend to be isolated from the culture, sometimes with a fortress mentality.

* the Dutch see the divine plan of salvation as a trajectory

Music group in the Kloosterkerk in Amersfoort [photo www.refdag.nl]



It is undoubtedly true that the Dutch operate with a different hermeneutic, and it's not all bad. Drawing on N.T. Wright, Oliver O'Donovan, and others, the Dutch see the divine plan of salvation as a *trajectory* that extends beyond Scripture. There's of course nothing objectionable about this, and the Dutch Reformed especially have always been sensitive to the *progress* of redemptive history. Certain human institutions, some divinely prescribed or permitted, are discarded over time as God's people mature, and so Christians today favour neither slavery nor polygamy. Theologians will correctly allege that though there are no explicit commands to dismantle the ancient institution of slavery, its abolition is clearly envisioned by the trajectory of Scripture.

Where does the trajectory point today? In the drama of God's activity in the world we have moved beyond the script, the canon of Scripture, and must improvise. Again, there's nothing objectionable about this. Very little about our lives is explicitly prescribed, and so with minds renewed by the Spirit of Christ we use Scripture as a kind of illuminating compass to be oriented in this dark world.

On the other hand, the Dutch believe that the trajectory of God's redemptive plan calls us today to open the ecclesiastic-

al offices to women. Just as slavery was ended by theologians identifying in the gospel the recipe for its demise, so the traditional prohibition against women's ordination is opposed by theologians today who identify in Scripture a trajectory in which full equality between men and women is celebrated and ought to be increasingly secured and protected. Though this is true, I'm not convinced it means the endorsement of women's ordination.

■ Thoughts for consideration

I humbly offer to my gracious Dutch brothers and sisters some thoughts for consideration:

(a) The secular egalitarian error is to equate equality with sameness. Ontological equality between men and women neither assumes nor requires sameness in function. The Christian model of equality is not a parade in which people march in lockstep, but a dance in which equal partners happily embrace different roles, one leading and the other following. No one looks at a dance and says, "how oppressive that the man led and how unfortunate that the woman couldn't." For whatever reason, even in the most secular cultures, married men drive the car when couples go out and few women identify in this cultural institution a hint of oppression. Differentness in calling and constitution does not entail ontological inequality.

(b) The liturgical priority of Adam (man) is apparent from the Genesis narrative. In the prototypical sanctuary of the Garden of Eden, Adam is called to lead, to teach, and to build, and Eve is called to follow, to help, and to beautify. (Note, for example, how he is given a set of instructions even before the creation of Eve). There isn't a hint of inferiority or subjugation or oppression in these prelapsarian arrangements. Moreover, the liturgical priority of men is observed *without exception* in the old covenant priesthood.

(c) Paul appeals to the liturgical priority of men in his prohibitions of women teaching in 1 Timothy 2. Perhaps in Ephesus the Christian believers saw the same trajectory theologians see today when they endorse women's ordination, and Paul had to say, "No, this is a creational arrangement." Adam was formed first, to be the liturgical leader, and then Eve, and

Kids time in RCN Middelburg [photo Wim Staat, PZC]



Dr Tom Wright, a retired Anglican bishop and professor in New Testament at St Andrew's University in Scotland, is, as far as I am concerned, one of the most thought-provoking of current theologians. He is interesting, not just for New Testament scholars, but for other theologians as well. This comes about because in his work the question of Paul's worldview and that of his contemporaries plays such a significant role – and likewise in his conception of 'worldview' the larger question of the grand narrative of the Bible as a whole.

Response to Dr Gerhard Visscher re Tom Wright's view of 'the righteousness of Christ'¹

Adam was not deceived, but Eve was. Adam had shirked his responsibility in the original sin, and that sin ought not to be replicated. To allege that Paul's prohibition of women teaching was designed to conform to prevailing cultural sensibilities seems entirely unconvincing. There are multiple occasions when Paul has no inhibitions in offending the height of Greco-Roman culture, not least in summoning the worship of Jesus, and not Caesar.

(d) Most theological disputes involve pitting one set of texts against another. Here the Canadian Reformed must remember that there is more in the Bible than simply 1 Timothy 2. There are multiple instances in Scripture of women teaching men, women judging men, and women prophesying to men, and thus an unordained ministry or service of women should be encouraged in Canadian Reformed churches. Relatedly, I sometimes wonder whether the Greek terms *episkopos* and *presbyter* apply only to ordained ministers of the Word and sacrament, as some Reformed theologians have argued. If so, most of what the New Testament says about elders actually applies to ministers and the debate about this issue changes. Either way, I would favour seeing women appointed to special and recognizable, though unordained, roles in the ministry of the church. Presently there are women very involved in discipleship, leading Bible study, and teaching catechism classes, and so it's not a big step to give them formal recognition. Lastly, women often make great theologians, perhaps because of their difference from men!

I thoroughly enjoyed my time among the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, learned a tremendous amount from my peers, and pray that my new friendships are enduring. I really hope that Canadian Reformed churches keep ties with the Dutch churches, and I hope we are receptive to each other's correction! ■



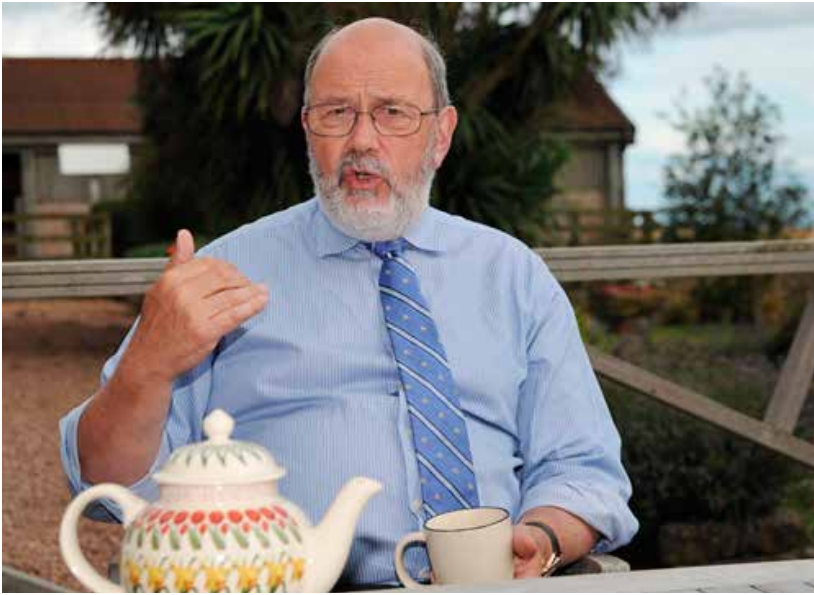
Dr Hans (J.M.) Burger is lecturer in Systematic Theology at the Theological University Kampen, the Netherlands [photo Maarten Boersema].

This concept of worldview has been inspired in part by the Reformed tradition in the Netherlands, by the heirs of Dooyeweerd and by Herman Ridderbos. The Biblical-theological, redemptive-historical approach that follows on from it stands in close alignment to the neo-Calvinist tradition.² The appreciation for Wright that Visscher expresses in his article I thus fully share.

I am eager to add another point of appreciation to that. B Holwerda (1909-1952), professor of Old Testament at Kampen, once wrote that the history of redemption ought not to illustrate dogma, but be the *foundation* of it³. The stories in the Bible ought not to be just an added illustration to the exposition of a static system of dogma; rather, the history of salvation must itself carry Biblical dogma, and dogma must arise from the stories of the history of salvation. Wright's work, with its attention for the whole story of the history of redemption as we find it in the Bible, is extraordinarily helpful to transform the agenda implied in Holwerda's comment into theological action.

■ Multiple layers

Theologically, it is important to have an eye for the multiple layers that Wright identifies in the Bible narrative. The first layer is the story of creation, and the question how creation is restored. The second layer is the story of Adam and of humanity, and the question how humanity is restored, so that creation might be able to flourish again. The third layer is that of Abraham and his seed, and the covenant established with Abraham. By way of Abraham and his descendants, God wants to bless the whole world, by restoring mankind. In this, however, Abraham's descendants apparently did not succeed. So how was the blessing of Abraham to reach all the nations of the earth? Next, there is the layer of Israel, which fails to fulfil its role, and loses its way in the exile. Restoration is promised to Israel, that is to say: another king needs to ascend David's throne; God must come to live with His people again; Israel must be restored as the peaceable kingdom of God. How will this great promise ever be realized? For when that happens,



Tom Wright
[photo TUKampen.nl]

the covenant with Abraham will also be realized; then humanity will be restored, and creation will be restored as well⁴. Wright shows that it is the apostles' claim that in Jesus Christ all of these narrative lines come to a resolution.

In this way, he corrects an individualistic non-missionary understanding of the Gospel, an understanding that has little interest in creation itself, or in any environmental or social justice concerns. This is an important correction, and – with the exception of the missionary aspect – for the Dutch Reformed tradition of Bavinck and Kuyper it is also a very familiar one: there is no domain of life of which Christ does not say: it is Mine, no part of creation that is not touched by the redemption of mankind.

■ Justification

Unless we do justice to the broad scope of the history of redemption, it is impossible to fairly evaluate Tom Wright's view of justification. One can see its influence in Wright's exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5. Reading against the background of the Reformation, we tend to understand 2 Corinthians 5 and 6 somewhat separately. Wright shows that the marvellous exchange described in 2 Corinthians 5:21 is embedded in a much larger dynamic: office bearers like Paul themselves become the embodiment of the righteousness of God, the One who brings His covenant with Abraham to its fulfilment, and who extends a call to reconciliation with Him and with each other. The restoration of the relationship between Paul and the church in Corinth (2 Corinthians 6) is directly connected with this marvellous exchange, described in v. 21⁵.

Wright is the kind of author who, in order to emphasize his point, will sometimes overstate it. For instance, in one of his earlier works, he says that justification is not so much a matter of individual salvation (soteriology), but of belonging to the church and the covenant (ecclesiology). Visscher is in good company when he raises this as a point of criticism. And rightly so, if that is really what Wright has in mind. However, since the publication of *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, I believe that we can safely leave this point of criticism aside. For in this

book, Wright argues that it is not his intention to subordinate soteriology to ecclesiology⁶. It would be more accurate to say that at this point Wright has created a false dilemma, an unfruitful position from which he has since withdrawn. As I understand it, Wright's intention is to correct a non-missionary individualism, and to ask attention for the role of the elect: to proclaim the great works of God, and to be instruments of God in spreading the blessing of His covenant. Justification is not just about individuals: individuals become part of a fellowship, and this fellowship has a mission, to become for others an embodiment of the righteousness of God.

■ The righteousness of Christ

I am ambivalent towards the position Wright takes with regard to the 'righteousness of Christ'. Wright opposes the 'ontologizing' of the 'righteousness of Christ', as if that were an entity that stands on its own⁷.

On the one hand, I think that Wright has a valid point here: where Reformed theology has begun to speak of the quasi-substantial benefits of salvation (such as righteousness) that Christ has obtained, nowhere does the New Testament suggest that 'the benefits of salvation' could ever be viewed independently from the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nor does the New Testament speak impersonally of 'acquiring the benefits of salvation', but always uses the personal image of the redemption of people from slavery. It is understandable, therefore, that Wright argues that it is not in the line of Paul to speak of 'the righteousness of Christ'.

On the other hand, this is also where Wright overstates his case. He denies that the righteousness of Christ can be given to us 'like a capacious cloak which the believer can put on'⁸. This appears to me to be in direct conflict with what we read in Galatians 3:27, where that is exactly what Paul does say: we may put on Christ, and then he points to our justification and adoption as children of God. Just as Visscher describes it, Wright emphasizes that God as judge cannot give his own righteousness to guilty human beings. But Wright fails to see that the Reformation doctrine of justification does not make this claim: God is not only the Father who pronounces justice, he is also the Son Who has become one of us, and who has given Himself as our righteousness and holiness (1 Corinthians 1:30). Christ, the Son of God, has been given to us to be our righteousness, new and alien to us.

In Wright's view, it is nonsense to speak of an 'imputed holiness', and that is what we would have to do if we were to speak of an 'imputed righteousness'. This is where I believe Wright is mistaken; think of 1 Corinthians 1:30. Christ has indeed to be given to us as our new, alien righteousness, and just as much as our new, a new righteousness, alien to us. Even if it isn't Pauline to speak of the 'righteousness of Christ', it is certainly Pauline to say that Christ has been given to us as our righteousness.

■ Our identity in Christ

It should be clear, then, that I share Visscher's first point of criticism. Wright's doctrine of justification is problematic in that in it, the obedience of Christ does not function as the source of the positive identity we receive in Christ. Not only do we receive the forgiveness of sins, not only do we become part of God's covenant people, we also receive a new, positive status: we are declared righteous, people who no longer have anything to fear from the judgement of God (compare the transition from Romans 3:19 to 3:22-26).

This is not just a matter of a 'new perspective'. Here, Wright also restates an old Anglican position, one that is different from that of Lord's Day 23 of the Heidelberg Catechism, as Visscher (rightly) concludes.

Wright has a forensic understanding of justification: in the righteous judgement of God a new status is created: righteous, belonging to God's people.

The problem, however, is that Wright's Christology is too limited. To a greater degree than Wright sees it, Christ is also, in a positive sense, the source of our identity: only in Christ, and

thanks to His life, death and resurrection, we have become guilt-free, obedient, righteous and holy children of God. ■

■ Notes

- 1 See the article in *Lux Mundi* 2015 no 2 (June). This translation from the Dutch language by Aart Plug, July 2015.
- 2 See the interview with Wright <<https://www.tukampen.nl/nieuwsbericht-tu-kampen-nl/nederlandse-theologiedoortastend-stelt-n-t-tom-wright>>
- 3 B Holwerda, 'De heilshistorie in de prediking', in ...*Begonnen hebbende van Mozes...* (Terneuzen 1953), 88, 94.
- 4 See N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2013), chapter 7.
- 5 Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 879-885.
- 6 Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 776.
- 7 Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 947, 950, 955.
- 8 Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 947.

Response to Dr Hans Burger by Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher

I thank the editors for the opportunity to respond briefly to my colleague. On the one hand, I am thankful that Dr Burger agrees that in the midst of many positive things about the writings of Tom Wright, there is much to be desired when it comes to his understanding of justification. The formulations of the Reformed confessions are still to be preferred over those of Wright. I only have two further comments.



Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher is the New Testament Professor and Principal of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Canada.

While I too appreciate the similarities between Wright and such persons as Dooyeweerd, Ridderbos, and Holwerda, I am not persuaded that following in such lines necessitates Wright's exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:21. Wright's interpretation which maintains that the 'we' of 5:21 is a reference to the officebearers rather than to believers, appears to be a reading preferred by Wright because it fits in better with his own inadequate concepts of righteousness and justification. I refer the reader to the excellent discussion of this text in chapter four of Brian Vickers' book, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Crossway, 2006). Vickers appreciates both the context in which Paul is defending his apostolic office and the classic view that Paul is at the same time speaking here about the righteousness of every believer through union with the Christ who sacrificially became sin for us.

My colleague suggests that Wright has corrected his tendency to place justification in the area of ecclesiology rather than in soteriology and refers to a single comment of Wright (note 6, p.776) to substantiate this view. Regardless of Wright's single claim therein, however, his larger argument in this same chapter, and numerous references throughout the chapter, show that his view remains unchanged (to reference a few, see pages 971, 991, 997, 1028 of *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*). I wish it were otherwise, but it is not. Wright continues to reject the teaching that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to those who are in Christ, ends up with a confused and weak soteriology, and holds to a view of justification which is no less confused as it sounds more like ecclesiology since it is no longer about "how one becomes a Christian" but about how one recognizes who has the status of covenant membership and belongs to the people of God. Again, the two are related. Justification, in the classic sense, has everything to do with the church, but the two are not one and the same. The difficulty is that Wright takes what is peripheral or consequential to justification and makes it central. Along with many others (see, e.g., Simon Gathercole's review at www.reformation21.org), I am afraid that Wright's view on this significant point continues to be a view that is neither the view of the Reformers nor of Holy Scripture. ■

Welcome to four new members of our Editorial Board

A warm welcome to Rev. Bukenya Paul of the Presbyterian Church in Uganda, Rev. Lungawiruol Khawbung of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India, Prof. Haemoo Yoo of the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea, and Rev. David Miller of the Free Church of Scotland! They will be assisting us as we make the transition to a more international editorial board and hopefully a more internationally relevant *Lux Mundi*. They have written the personal introductions to themselves, so we can get a better idea about who they are. Thanks, brothers, for joining our team, and may the Lord bless your participation with us! We're looking forward to your finding and sending to us good contributions from the community of the ICRC sister-churches in your parts of the world!

On behalf of the *Lux Mundi* editors,
Kim Batteau

Rev. Bukenya Paul



Greetings in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ; I am humbled by the invitation to join the Editorial Board of *Lux Mundi*.

I was born in 1973, the fifth born of eight children. In 1981, during an evangelistic mission organized by the Presbyterian Church in Uganda (PCU), my family heard the gospel, and responded in faith, believing Jesus Christ, as Lord and Saviour. We were received into a local PCU congregation, where we started the journey of discipleship. I have grown up in the PCU, serving in various ministries, including missions, worship/music ministry, youth and singles ministry, and with married couples.

In 2002, I married my childhood friend Lydia, and we have been blessed with three children, two boys and one girl.

In 2004, I was ordained as an elder in PCU (Central Presbytery), and I serve as minister with Nkumba Presbyterian Church (PCU). At national level, I serve as a member of the Board of Trustees of PCU, and member of the Governing Council of Westminster Christian Institute Uganda (WCIU), the minister-training institute of PCU.

In 2013, I was elected as Moderator of the General Assembly (GA) of PCU and I hold oversight responsibilities on various GA Committees.

I am a bi-vocational minister, serving as a church pastor and a civil servant.

I hold a bachelor's degree (Literature in English) and work as senior communications officer with the Electoral Commission, the institution responsible for organizing national elections in Uganda. I have postgraduate training in Communications, Public Administration, Project Planning and Management. Since 2000, I have attended several short minister-training courses organized by PCU, and our international partners, including IRTT Course (2002 and 2004). In 2009, I enrolled for the M. Div programme specially designed by WCIU for bi-vocational ministers preparing for full time ministry.

I hope to share with readers about God's work in Uganda, through the Church, and particularly through the PCU. I believe we will be encouraged as we share about how the gospel is impacting our individual lives and communities – indeed, changing the world. ■

Rev. David D Miller



I am a minister in the Free Church of Scotland for 26 years; born in Korea, of missionary parents; brought up in Australia.

I studied theology in Edinburgh and first served on secondment to the Free Church in Southern Africa, in village churches, followed by teaching and administration in Dumisani Theological Institute (Eastern Cape, South Africa).

I am married to a Scottish wife, Meg; with three sons, Andrew (21), Ben (19), and John (16).

Most recently, for 12 years I served in a church plant 20 miles to the south-west of London (England).

I was Moderator of General Assembly 2014; now awaiting a new field of service.

I have had a long interest in missions and evangelism, serving on the ICRC Missions Committee for a number of years. ■

Rev. Lungawiruol Khawbung



I welcome this opportunity to introduce myself as a newly appointed team member of the Magazine 'Lux Mundi'. It is a real honour for me to represent a beginning of a more internationalized phase of the magazine in an effort to strengthen international ecclesiastical ties.

My official name is Lungawiruol Khawbung, which is rather long and difficult for non-Hmar speaking people. So I was nicknamed Lawr. I am married to Lalbiekrem (Bieki) and blessed with two beautiful kids, Sophia (15) and Christiaan (10). As a child, I was raised in a children's home due to the poor economic conditions of my parents, and for the whole of my early life there I received Christian instruction from Rev. Ros Infimate and his team. Moreover, I am pleased to mention that I was raised by God-fearing parents with three brothers and four sisters. By God's grace, all my family members are living in good conditions, with opportunities to serve the LORD in their own capacities.

I was ordained as a Pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian Church North Eastern India in February 2002 at Lamka, Churachandpur, Manipur. Prior to my ordination, I worked as a missionary for about two years (1996-1998) in the north of India in the district of Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand. In December 1998, I joined RPCNEI and began to serve as a missionary in Mridupathar (Bokalia) among the Karbi and Kachari. By decision of the Synod held in 2000, I was transferred to Diphu, the district headquarters, where I was tasked to perform the functions of District Superintendent. In this capacity I was given the responsibility to oversee the life and ministry of 11 congregations under Assam Presbytery (2000-2005). Since then, I have

continued to serve the LORD within RPCNEI in various capacities: Project Superintendent/Manager (2002-2009), Development Secretary (2009-2011), and Programme Director (2011-2014).

I received my theological education at Presbyterian Theological Seminary, in Dehra Dun (1992-1996), and EBTEB Rajpur, Dehra Dun. Later, in 2011, I completed my Postgraduate Diploma in Christian Management at Martin Luther University, Shillong Meghalaya. I am currently pursuing advanced studies in theology at Evangelical Theological Faculty, Leuven, Belgium. Once again, I am honoured to be part of the Lux Mundi editorial team. I hope my humble service will benefit Lux Mundi readers and meet the expectations of those on the Board. ■

Prof. Haemoo Yoo



I belong to the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCK) which is the first East Asian sister-church of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated) (RCN) and one of the founding members of the ICRC. Having studied at the Korea Theological Seminary (KTS) and earned a doctorate at the Theological University in Kampen in 1990, I am lecturing in Dogmatics at KTS. I am married, with four children and three granddaughters. As an editor, I hope, among other things, to be able to inform you about the church life in the region of East Asia about which there has been little information available until now. ■

Jesus said,
“I am the light of the world.”

John 8:12