A portrait of Martin Luther, a central figure of the Protestant Reformation. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a black cap and a black garment. The background is a solid teal color. The portrait is rendered in a style that combines realistic features with a slightly abstract, painterly texture.

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Theme – 500 year Reformation

Editorial	
Piet Houtman	3
Real faith works	
Egbert Brink	4
Reformation Day Bhutan	
Mohan Chacko	6
Secret of Christian Leadership	
Vijai Singh Tagore	12
Newsupdate TU Kampen	15
Hamilton Seminary conference	
Michael Zwiep	16
How to commemorate in Europe	
Herman Selderhuis	19
The millennial kingdom in the 21st century	
Rob van Houwelingen	24
In Memoriam Dr. Hur	
Kees Haak	26

LuxMundi | 36

No 2 June 2017

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Cover: Martin Luther, 1532, workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553), oil on wood, 33 x 23 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



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Reformation Minus the Monument



Piet Houtman | Editor in chief

Our church was called 'Reformed' (it still is). Our primary school was also called Reformed. From my childhood I was familiar with the drawing of Martin Luther nailing his ninety-five theses to the door of a church-like building. The teacher told us the story of Luther standing before the Holy Roman emperor saying: 'Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise', and the story etched an indelible image in my mind. In class we watched the Luther movie. The story of John Calvin would follow suit, though it fell short of drama and consequently lacked a film.

Many years later I learned that historians have come to question and deny the very details mentioned, but the legend and its symbolic meaning is imperishable, as is the history as a whole. We would sing the Luther hymn 'A mighty fortress is our God' in church and in school, and every year around October 31 something would be said, at the least, about 'Reformation Day'. All these elements together have built my mental Reformation monument.

I studied Reformed theology, which had a polemic character. The discussion of many topics would take its starting point – often after some introductory Bible references – from an argument against the older, traditional Roman Catholic stance. One could get the impression that this argumentative character is a principle of Reformed theology. Theology seems to start with the Reformation. Sure, there was the Early Church, and Augustine was ours, but they were rather an overture, and Medieval theological and philosophical dialectic was to be rejected or passed by, at least. After all, the word 'reformation' refers to a rejection of an older 'form', which, however, refused to disappear. I picture Luther standing before the emperor, trembling beneath his boldness. In the Reformed tradition the trembling has vanished and the boldness remained, and appropriately so. Since then, we have been tempted into a complacent self-righteousness; the more so as this was considered to reflect a similar attitude in the classic Roman Catholic adversary.

The opposite allurements are also there. The Roman Catholic Church and its tradition breathe the claim of being the original, one and undivided body within the warm lap of the mother church. Needless to say, its theology continues to articulate that claim. From our side as Protestants, we are more than embarrassed by the religious wars of previous centuries. Also, in the Netherlands, the era of 'pillarization' is over, with its prospering Reformed as well as Roman Catholic Church

life, thriving institutions and assertive media. Churches are declining in numbers, secularization is rampant, and there is a breeze of ecumenicity even among those who rejected 20th century ecumenism. Moreover, 'Catholicism' offers spirituality, religious experience, accompanied by art, and the silence and rest of the monastic ambience; in short, the atmosphere of holy serenity which the modern stressed individual in his busy secular world yearns for.

In the meantime, a renewed emphasis on Jesus Christ and mercy are truly attractive. Why take a rigid stand and rule out that we should ever come together in true unity again?

This fifth centennial of the Reformation is not the time for erecting a new Reformation monument. Truly Reformed is to be truly 'catholic', broad, extensive. Not in the sense of embracing as many people as possible – which is a popular tendency in ecumenism. Being Reformed aims at remaining Christian and becoming more and more Christian, both as a church and in private. The bold Reformed Christian can only be the Christian on his knees. We will worship Jesus Christ our Lord, realizing how much he has done for us in his suffering and shameful death, and how glorious he is as the conqueror of death and king in heaven, coming soon. We won't allow anybody or anything to come between him and us. We will listen to this gospel again and again and preach it till the last day.

Arguments may follow according to the people we meet, whether in person or in the media, and in what situation. But argument is not essential and in many situations we'd better avoid it. We simply won't need Mary or any other saint as we pray directly to Jesus and to the Father in his name for everything we need, for the needs of church and world. At the same time, we won't question that Mary is 'highly favoured' (Luke 1: 28). When celebrating the Lord's Supper, we will allow ourselves to be filled by the Divine Spirit with adoration, without bowing for the bread. We will be open to the advantages of being unmarried and of living in a community, or to having a central institution when aiming at addressing the wider world. In short, we won't throw odd glances at Roman Catholicism.

May we be 'reformed', renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4: 16). ■

Real faith works, faith really works



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

For Martin Luther it was the discovery of his life! Such a relief: by faith alone and not by achievements, by your works. This formed the start of the great Reformation in the 16th century. Which is why Luther had great difficulty with the verses by James mentioned below.

Who to believe, Paul or James? Paul says: you cannot save yourself, however hard you try. You are only saved by faith in Christ's great achievement, which completely excludes our own works (Rom 3:21 ff.). In no way at all can you work your salvation yourself. *By faith alone!* James says: come again – faith alone? Faith is not possible without works. What you do is actually very important. You are also saved by your works, not just your faith. *Faith alone is not enough.*

■ With heart and soul

Bear in mind that James is quite possibly the oldest letter of the New Testament. He is not reacting to what Paul said, he precedes Paul. But pay attention especially to the point James wishes to make here. He was dealing with people who thought that faith itself is quite sufficient. As long as you believe...the rest is not that important. People *claim* to believe but it does not result in anything. You do not notice it in daily life. Is that possible?

James does a *faith check* using the law of neighbourly love. A brother or sister is greatly lacking in the bare necessities of life. And one of you who call yourselves Christian makes some pious speech, but when it comes down to it does nothing. You call out: 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' (2: 16). Then your faith is not worth much...is what James is saying. Faith on its own does not exist. That is not living faith. Faith requires a soul, vitality, or it is as dead as a doornail. Real faith affects your heart and soul. That is no different from what Paul says: What counts is '*faith working through love.*' (Gal. 5:6).

■ Work with God

You believe that God is one? The Lord our God is one. That is the creed of Israel (Deut. 6: 4). Only YHWH is God, the only real God, and none other. This is a strong statement! What could be wrong with that? Can you not claim that all is well with your faith if you believe that? This expression was even used as an incantation to exorcise evil spirits.

Yet, believing that God is the One and Only, that in itself, is nothing. The demons do that too. They do not dare deny it. They believe it, and they shudder. They are absolutely petrified. Apparently, they believe out of fear. *But he who believes that God exists, does not necessarily believe in Him.* Real faith wants to work with God, seeks peace with God. The creed 'The Lord our God, the Lord is one' is therefore followed directly by the call to 'love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might...' (Deut. 6:5). Real faith works.

Here, James is certainly not referring to achievements with which to earn your salvation from God. He is not speaking of *works of the law*: achieving and scoring with God. James is referring to *works of faith*: what living faith in God brings about. Exactly the same expression was used by Paul in 1 Thess. 1:3 '*remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*'

■ A lived-through faith

In connection with this, the father of all believers, Abraham, now comes into the picture. Both James and Paul refer back to Abraham to discover what believing implies. James makes a distinction from the start. Abraham is a *friend of God*, implying not just a rational relationship (knowing that God exists), but a *warm relationship* (association with God).

Simply observe what faith really brought about in Abraham's life. James is not showing us a random snapshot, he is examining Abraham's life as a whole. His whole life long Abraham had to practise looking away from himself, directing himself towards what God had promised. That was not just rationally taking in what God had said. His faith was a *lived through reality*. It touched his whole person, it involved his entire household and all his possessions. With all the troubles, doubts, struggles and temptations that come with it. A working faith. True to life. Real.

Just try to imagine what was required of Abraham. Sacrifice your son, your own blood. He would have lost his

James 2:21 - 24

'Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" —and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.'

Sacrifice of Isaac
[painting by Caravaggio,
1603]



whole future, letting everything go. Totally incomprehensible. Except for clinging to God's promise that his son had a future, even through death! With Abraham, faith and works go hand in hand. His works and his faith are *one*. Abraham's faith was made complete by his deeds. By obeying, against his reason and feelings, true faith was revealed. As a result, his faith thrived. It blossomed. Now it became gradually clear how much Abraham trusted in God. In Abraham's life his faith and his deeds are so interwoven that one cannot separate them.

■ **Abc and Xyz**

It can seem as if James is contradicting Paul when he says: 'You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone' (2:24). Except that with James it is not about Abraham having – in any way whatsoever – earned his position as friend of God. His intention is rather to make clear how alive Abraham's faith was. For this reason he takes his starting point, not in Gen. 15, when a son was promised him for the first time, as Paul does. That is the *abc* of faith. Abraham believed and it was counted to him for righteousness, as the correct attitude before God. But James tells us the story further, even up to Gen. 22, where Abraham has to sacrifice Isaac!

*Paul is speaking of the **abc** of faith.* You can only be saved by faith in Christ, and that not based on your own works. You cannot earn peace with God through your works. James would certainly not deny that. But he is coming from another

angle. *James is talking about the **xyz** of faith.* He shows that the story of faith is not done. Believing is not just a rational confirmation of certain truths. Faith touches on your whole being.

James does not stand opposite Paul, but next to him. Abraham was not justified because he accomplished great achievements – to think that he was shows that one is not familiar with the life of Abraham, with its weak moments, mistrust, and even gross lies. Abraham was justified because he believed in God (Gen. 15), and entrusted himself to him (*abc*). James literally falls back on that. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness (v23). *Through faith alone: that is not at all the same as by faith only.*

By faith alone, that is a living and active faith. Real faith is never passive: it is always on the move. This faith was revealed in Abraham's actions (*xyz*). What it brought about (worked) was the proof of how real his faith was. Not without temptation, not perfect, but real. For this reason he was rightfully called the friend of God. Because of his intimate, deeply personal association.■

The Reformation – Its relevance for churches in India today



Dr Mohan Chacko is Principal Emeritus of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Dehra Dun, India.

Why do we need to celebrate Reformation Day, as the Reformation happened in Europe, almost 500 years ago! Why should we, living in India in the 21st century, bother to remember this day? I hope to show below that the principles and truths discovered in the Reformation are extremely significant for us in India today. But before we do that, let me mention two important things.

Firstly, all of us who belong to Protestant Churches – whether we are Presbyterians or Baptists or Methodists or Pentecostals – can trace our origin to this movement. In that sense, we have a direct historical connection with what is known as the Reformation. We are all children of the Reformation. But even if you are a Roman Catholic or from the Orthodox tradition, I want to tell you that the Reformation has made an impact on these churches also. They are not the same as they were before the Reformation. We are talking about a movement that has affected all of Christianity.

Secondly, Reformation is not just something that happened in the past, it is also an ongoing principle for the Church today. There is a very well-known saying in Latin that means: ‘A Reformed Church is always reforming’. It was not complete with Martin Luther or John Calvin or any of the other Reformers. The basic ideas that emerged from the Reformation grew and developed and brought other ideas to bloom. The celebration of the Reformation calls us not only to be faithful to the traditions of the past, but also to discover how we can unfold and develop those traditions for our life and ministry situations today.

■ What was the Reformation?

Historians have given many different interpretations of what the Reformation was, and what caused it. Some

have said it was a political movement, others have described it as an economic, moral or intellectual movement. There is some truth in all these interpretations. But its major impact was on the life, belief, worship, and practices of the church. And it is from this angle that we are going to look at the Reformation.

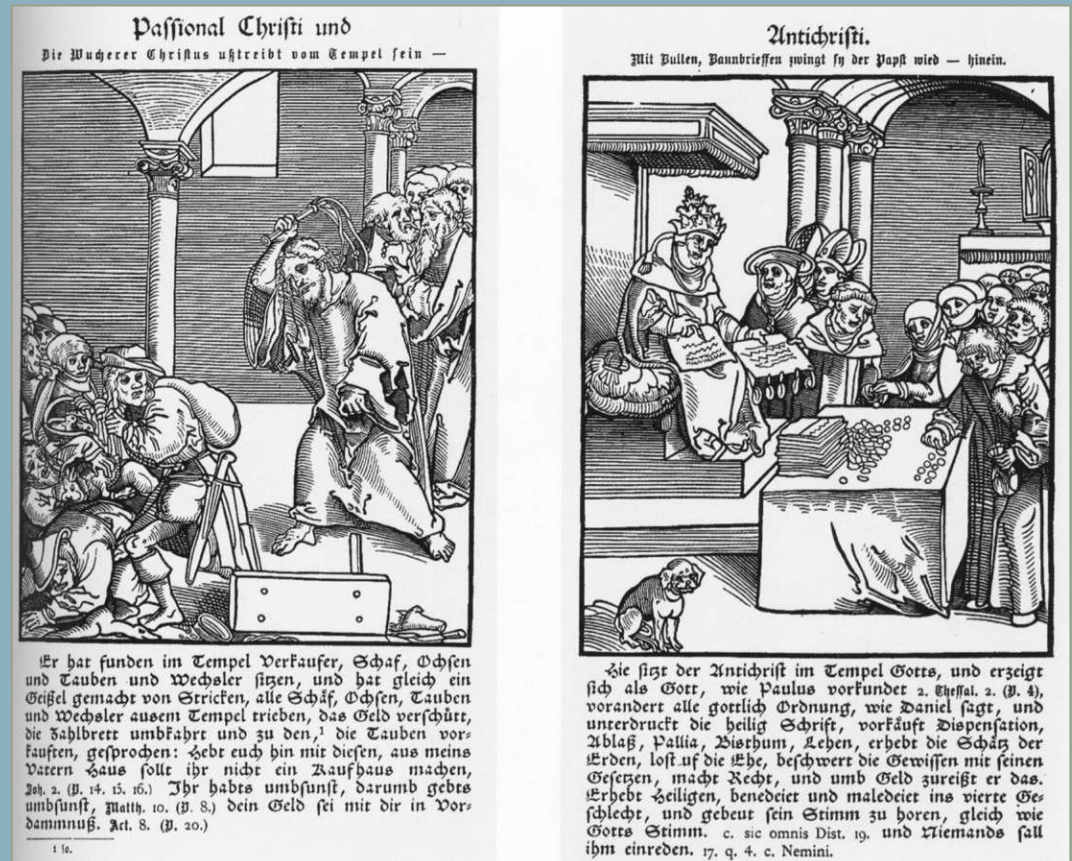
Let us review a bit of history. You may be aware that in the second and third centuries of the Christian era, the Church in the Roman Empire went through severe persecution under various emperors such as Nero and Diocletian. But at the beginning of the fourth century, the situation changed. A Roman Emperor called Constantine was converted to Christianity, and that changed the course of history altogether. From a persecuted faith, Christianity became the dominant religion of the land. Approximately within 500 years of its beginning, it spread to every nook and corner of the empire. Within the next thousand years, the Church became very powerful. Along with power, corruption also increases. The leadership of the Church became immoral. They controlled the lives of the uneducated common people by claiming that the Church in some way held the key to heaven. Most people couldn’t read and write, and if they could, ordinary people were not allowed to read or interpret the Bible. They were dependent on the interpretation of the Church. The church exploited the poor by promoting superstitions and unbiblical teachings. One such case was that of what are called indulgences. Basically it was a scheme to raise money for the Church. The Church promised that when you buy indulgences, the souls of those kept in the purgatory – a place of cleansing through punishment – would be released to heaven. Even the educated theologians always did not oppose such teachings because they were afraid. There were some brave leaders who questioned such corrupt practices. But the church did not spare anyone. They were persecuted, tortured, and even burned alive.

It was in this context that Martin Luther, a German monk, came to the scene. After struggling with questions about his own salvation, he found the answers in the Bible. He discovered in the New Testament that the righteousness of God is a free gift from God, received by faith alone. That discovery changed his whole life and thinking. He opposed the Pope’s teaching on indulgences, and questioned the superstitious practices of the church. On October 31, 1517, he wrote up 95 statements or theses that were publicly displayed on the

Reformation Day celebrated in Bhutan

For the first time in history, the church in Bhutan celebrated the Reformation Day on 31st October and 1 November 2016. A group of about seventy pastors and leaders of this young and persecuted church gathered together in Thimphu to focus on the cardinal themes of the Reformation. False teachings of various kinds have crept in and infected the church in this region. The Reformation slogan, ‘Scripture Alone’ and ‘Grace Alone’ were expounded as a needed corrective in this context. Other themes considered at the Conference included were biblical leadership, worship, and living under persecution. The (shortened) lectures of PTS Faculty Members Dr. Mohan Chacko and Rev. Vijay Tagore follow below.

Pamphlet from a small picture book (*Passional Christi und Antichristi*, Wittenberg, 1521), comparing the passion of Christ driving the money changers out of the temple in Jerusalem with that of the Antichrist, the pope, selling indulgences in exchange for money [woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1521]



door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg (in Germany). That event is traditionally marked as the beginning of the Reformation that eventually led to establishment of various churches, and reformed even the Roman Catholic Church. Luther was joined later on by many great theologians such as Zwingli and Calvin and Melancthon. These are called the Reformers.

What are the essential and abiding Principles of the Reformation?

1. A Return to the Word of God – Sola Scriptura

Without doubt, this has to be the first and most important principle of the Reformation. There is a very common misunderstanding that ‘the sovereignty of God’ or ‘election’ is the foundational principle. But for Luther and for Calvin and all the reformers, the first principle is the Scripture. This was a revolutionary principle – for so long, the Church both claimed authority over the Scripture and diluted the role of Scripture. It claimed authority over Scripture by not allowing people to read Scripture and by insisting on its own interpretation. It diluted the Scripture by adding tradition and human wisdom to it – such as apocryphal books, teachings of the Pope (considered infallible when officially taught). Over against such, Luther asserted the absolute authority of Scripture. ‘My conscience is captive to the Word

of God’ is what he said at the Diet of Worms. And it is this that we find uniformly in all the Reformers. This is reflected in the Reformation Creeds. For example, the Belgic Confession affirms: ‘We believe that the holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein ... Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures ... Therefore, we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule.’

The Westminster Confession of Faith states this truth majestically: ‘The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added either by new revelations of the spirit, or traditions of men’ (I, vi). They made the Holy Spirit speaking through Scripture the judge of all things.

It is important to understand that we as Protestants, or as Calvinists, are Reformed, not because we follow Calvin but because we submit to the authority of the Scriptures. We follow Calvin only because and only so far as Calvin follows the Word of God.

Luther at the Diet in Worms [painting Anton von Werner, 1877]



The importance of this principle for our context is undeniable. First of all, attack on the authority of God's Word is rampant in churches and seminaries today. Even evangelical churches do not show sufficient discernment in this. They send their students – their future pastors – to seminaries that oppose and ridicule the Word of God. Secondly, the unique authority of God's Word is diluted by the emphasis given to new revelations through prophecies and tongues in churches as a result of the influence of charismatic movement. People everywhere are seeking the will of God apart from the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture. They are setting aside the infallible Scriptures, and are substituting it with fallible prophecies. Thirdly, once again we are seeing power in the hands of ecclesiastical leaders. Of course, we always recognized this as a problem in Episcopal churches, but it is not much different in many so-called evangelical churches. The celebration of Reformation Day ought to be a call to restore the authority, trustworthiness and sufficiency of the Holy Scripture.

2. Salvation as the Work of God's Sovereign Grace – *Sola Gratia*

'By grace alone' was the cry of the Reformation. This is the most precious truth Luther re-discovered in the Bible. As a monk, Luther tried hard to earn salvation by his own good works and by punishing himself for his sins – until he discovered from the book of Romans the principle: '*the just shall live by faith.*' Luther understood the precious truth that we do not need to earn God's salvation through our good works as God is willing to save us by his grace through the Lord Jesus Christ. And this grace is received through faith in Christ. This doctrine was further developed and stated by Calvin and others. This doctrine was challenged not only by Catholics, but also from within, by the Reformed. Early in the 17th century, Jacob Arminius, a Dutch theologian, questioned certain basic teachings of Calvin in this regard. It is from this controversy that we have one of the finest statements on salvation in the Canons of Dordt. Five challenges against the Calvinist, biblical teach-

ings were answered in this historic work. These doctrines are called the doctrines of grace, and are known to us by the acronym TULIP. *Total Depravity* – that apart from God's saving grace, humans are unable and unwilling to come to God for salvation. *Unconditional Election* – that God chose certain persons purely by his grace, and not on the basis of anything foreseen in them. *Limited Atonement* – that Christ atoned only for the elect. *Irresistible Grace* – that God will ultimately save those whom he intends to save. And, *Perseverance of Saints* – the doctrine that teaches that God will keep those whom he chose to save till eternity, less precisely known by the slogan, 'once saved, always saved'.

Calvin taught that God is sovereign in salvation – from the beginning to the end. This has brought a bad name to Calvin – mostly the charge that Calvin's God is a tyrant who shows no respect for human will. This is absolutely incorrect. Certain things need to be kept in mind here. Firstly, Calvin was by no means the first one to teach these doctrines. Augustine and Luther and others before him had taught these things from the Apostle Paul, who in passages like Ephesians 1 had taught the doctrine of election. Calvin simply taught it consistently with logical and biblical clarity. Secondly, Calvin himself placed the sovereignty of God not abstractly but in the context of the work of salvation. Calvin's point is that if God did not act sovereignly in salvation, there would have been no hope for us. And that salvation must bring glory to God. These are not points of Calvinism, but points of the Bible.

Let me point out some important lessons for us today. Firstly, we need to make sure that the gospel of sovereign grace is preached in all our churches. In many churches, it is not grace that is preached but salvation by works – pastors preach how one needs to live a good life in order to be saved. Secondly, it is sad that the doctrines of grace are disputed even in Reformed and Presbyterian churches. I want to tell you that we reject these doctrines because they are hard for us to accept, not because they are not clear from the Bible. It hurts our

pride to give all glory to God for our salvation. For the sake of our people and for the sake of Christ, let us not withdraw from proclaiming the gospel of grace – because there is no other gospel available for our salvation. Thirdly, this must confront the preaching of legalism in Christian life. Certainly we must preach the law. But legalism is the teaching that by doing the works of the law we can be saved. Further, legalism is adding other things to the gospel. These could be good works, our traditions, culture, etc. One of the things that the Reformation brought to us is the freedom of the conscience. In matters where the Bible does not prescribe what we should do, a Christian has the freedom to choose. No pastor or church council or cultural traditions or any other authority has the power to take away that Christian freedom.

3. A Worship Regulated by the Scripture

The Reformation brought the church back to the biblical idea of worship. It did not do so completely. But there was a recognition that Christian worship should follow the instructions of the Bible, and the pattern of the New Testament church. The Reformers removed so many superstitious and idolatrous practices that the Roman church had introduced in the worship and life of the Church. Veneration of saints, giving worship to Mary or others, and such practices had become very important in the Catholic Church. One of the main Reformation teachings was the universal priesthood of all believers – the idea that all God's people are priests before God, and have access to God through Christ. The Church does not control this access. Pastors are elders and leaders of the people of God in worship rather than mediators. Instead of rituals and idolatry, the preaching of the Word of God was given highest honour. The preaching of the Word was brought to the centre of worship. The Lord's Table was placed at the level of the people rather than in the altar.

The principle that emerged from the Reformation, particularly from the Calvinistic side, is called the regulative principle. What it means is that God may be worshipped not according to our ideas and imaginations, but only according to his instructions in the Holy Scriptures. God may be worshipped only according to what is commanded in the Bible.

With regard to worship, two things may be said – one is that the Reformation did not go far enough when it comes to worship. The second thing is that the Reformation went too far. Both are perhaps true. We must remember that the Reformation aimed at purifying the Church, not in starting a new Church. Therefore, the Reformers continued without much questioning certain of the worship practices of the Roman Church. The Puritans and others carried this part of the reform more consistently. On the other hand, there was also a tendency to throw away certain things that could have been reformed and used. Removal of symbols and artistic

expressions from worship is one such area. The general feeling against music and hymns (other than the Psalms) is another such.

We are living at a time when the idea of worship is undergoing intense debate. There is a great need for discernment with regard to worship practices. Is importance to be given to the Bible in worship? Preachers should be those approved to be faithful to the Scriptures. Songs should be biblical, and should not contain bad theology. At the same time, worship must be culturally adapted, relevant and practically suitable.

4. A Presbyterian Form of Government

The abuse of ecclesiastical authority in the Roman church led to re-examination of the biblical pattern of leadership and government. The Reformers, especially Calvin, led the way back to a New Testament pattern of worship without insisting that the Bible gives a Church Order that is to be followed universally. Later leaders, particularly those in Scotland, gave expression to the Presbyterian form of government, which can be considered to be more consistent with the Scriptures. There are slight differences between the Scottish Presbyterian and the continental Reformed approaches to church government, but basically there is agreement that the church is to be governed by the elders who are all equal, and their authority is one that is exercised in accordance with the Bible.

The Episcopal form of church government – that is, rule by Bishops who are over Elders – developed in the church fairly early in church history. But it is still a historical adaptation rather than a biblical principle. Through the years, many levels and positions were added according to human wisdom. What the Bible says about how the church is to be governed was often ignored. The result was a hierarchical form of government in the hands of a few bishops. This of course led to large scale corruption.

There was also the problem of copying things from worldly structures – the church being administered like the state, and the mixing of civil and ecclesiastical authority. The latter position was ably represented even in the Westminster Assembly, and was theoretically the position of the Anglican Church where the head of the church is the king or queen.

There are several lessons to be learned from the struggle to reform church government. We need to be warned by the Presbyterian principles of New Testament government. The church is not a democracy, because it is governed by Christ through elders according to the Word of God. In that sense, it is not a popular majority rule. Equally on the other hand, we have no bishops who are over other elders. We believe every elder is an overseer or bishop. Secondly, while we rightly criticize the Episcopal churches for the concentration and abuse of power, we need to be vigilant that these do not slip into our own



Reformation window at St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Ottawa

churches. We are seeing a return to episcopacy and authoritarian leadership in churches today. Many Pentecostal and charismatic churches, which traditionally subscribed to an Independent polity, have turned Episcopalian. Authoritarianism and hierarchy are a danger, even in Presbyterian churches. It has been said that the difference between the Roman church and Protestant churches is that while the Roman Church has only one infallible Pope, we have many infallible popes!

5. A View of the Kingdom of God

This is a view that came into fuller development in Calvinism than in Calvin himself. By emphasizing the sovereignty of God over all of life, Reformed theology took away the distinction between secular and sacred. The whole of life is to be lived in the presence of God and under his sovereignty.

This is evident already in Calvin's Geneva as well as in early Lutheranism. The so-called secular life was seen as a calling from God, and work in these areas was seen as to be done for the glory of God. Marriage and family life were no longer considered inferior to ascetic life and meditation. The ordinary chores of life are to be done in obedience to God and for the glory of God. This has tremendous implications for our times as much as for the Reformation period. Calvin's own Geneva was a shining example of social life – where the poor were cared for and public life was regulated according to the Bible.

In later Calvinism, especially in the Netherlands, we see this applied more consistently. Dr Abraham Kuyper, Dutch theologian and Prime Minister, is well known for his application of the sovereignty of God in all aspects of life. He worked out the implications of this for life in the world. 'There is not a square inch in this world, where Christ does not say "it is mine"' was his famous statement. Industry and agriculture, politics and journalism, education and labour, entertainment and recreation – all must be brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. All of these are parts of the Kingdom of God. The sovereignty of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ demands that we reclaim these areas – large sections of which are controlled by Satan – to the lordship of Christ. This was the Reformed vision of the Kingdom of God..

It must be clarified immediately that the Reformed vision of the kingdom is different from both the Roman Catholic idea as well as the Anabaptist vision. Kuyper did not say that these areas must be brought under the lordship of the *Church*. Indeed, that was what the Roman Catholics were doing. The sovereignty of Christ is not the same as the sovereignty of the Church. The Church is but one sphere of God's Kingdom – central and important, but still only one sphere. Education, for example, should not be brought under the Church. It is not the job of the Church to run schools. Instead, Kuyper advocated Christian schools, Christian political parties, Christian labour unions, etc.

A mighty fortress
is our God [Luther
song, photo
ericcostanzo.me]



The Calvinistic vision is different from the Anabaptist vision as well. This group has influenced many churches. The Mennonites, the Amish, and pacifist churches follow this stream. In these, the main principle is one of withdrawal from the public sphere into the internal life. There is also a sense of passivity – withdrawal from public life, not joining the armed forces, etc. In effect, this leads to an *abandonment* of the sovereignty of God and the kingship of Christ. The world in the sense of society or kingdom is seen as unredeemable. Mission is just rescuing souls from this kingdom instead of attacking and redeeming the kingdom, bringing it under Christ. The Reformed vision is to conquer the world for Christ – so long as ‘conquering’ is not understood in the worldly way through worldly means.

It is a sad thing that even today, we in India have not understood this vision of the Kingdom or formulated a strategy of witness in our pluralist societies. This spirit of withdrawal from the world or internalization of the faith is far too strong in our churches. There are some churches where even primary participation in politics – such as standing for election – is considered a sin. Where is the biblical justification for this? We should not be parties to making religion a private affair of the heart. We vote and complain about what is going on in our country, but where is our participation in public life? Or, can Christians serve and witness only through social service? But even where our churches are strong, we do not see a Christian vision of the Kingdom. Instead, we see an attempt by churches to dominate by issuing dictates – which candidate one should vote for, what kinds of dress code should be allowed, etc. These are not the duties of the Church. They are Kingdom responsibilities.

There are historical reasons for these. For one thing, much of Presbyterian mission work in India was done by missionaries and churches in the West that lacked such a vision of the kingdom. Secondly, even if they had such a vision, rightly or wrongly they felt that the first and foremost thing was to ‘save souls’. As a result, our believers never learned to apply the gospel and the sovereignty of Christ to society at large. They were only told that the most important thing is to save others, and be submissive to whichever government is ruling. Calvinism was never consistently and fully applied in India. It is my prayer that on this year’s Reformation Day, we will seek to understand the continuing significance of the Protestant Reformation for our life and witness in the 21st century. ■

■ Note

This is a summary of the Reformation Day address at the 500 year Reformation commemoration in Kalimpong, India, October 31, 2016.

The Secret of Christian Leadership



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■ Introduction

Numerous books have been written on the principles of good leadership; most offer suggestions on improving external behaviour, or how to achieve goals and control others. Very few look at or discuss heart issues or sins common in leadership today, particularly in church (Christian) leadership.

The history of church demonstrates living examples of particular sins within church leadership that are also present within the leadership of the South-Asian church today. Instead of selfless love, Christ-like humility, servanthood and sacrifice, in general the leadership in the South-Asian church is characterized by pride (power as a means to fame), dictatorship (power as a means to avoid accountability), exploitation (power as a means to abuse others), and corruption (power as a means to dishonest gain). It is heart-breaking to see that Christian leadership in South-Asian churches and Christian institutions has come to be about *control, money, status, and power-struggle*.

The first celebration of the Protestant Reformation in Bhutan is an appropriate time to reflect upon the Biblical model of Christian leadership. It is the need of the hour since the overarching theme of our conference is *servant leadership*. The Reformation was also faced with corrupt, abusive, even unconverted leaders holding important positions in the Church. And though unlike other doctrines no explicit theology of Christian leadership was developed by the reformers, the principle of *sola scriptura* has much relevance to Christian leadership in Bhutan and India. It is the Bible alone that must determine the principles of Church leadership, not cultural or popular ideas of the world. In this talk, I

want to focus on Jesus' teaching on Christian leadership in John 13 since he is our model *rabbi* (teacher/leader) that we must look up to and learn from.

Jesus' idea of leadership is completely different, even unexpected. Jesus indicates it quite clearly in Matthew 20:25-27: '*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.*'²⁶ *It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,*²⁷ *and whoever would be first among you must be your slave ...'* Jesus had a totally different understanding of leadership, unlike how the people of his time or the world taught. These were not very popular lessons on leadership; rather they were strange even to his disciples. But these are the most essential lessons on Christian leadership that Jesus wanted his disciples to understand and learn. And I believe these lessons are what the South-Asian Christian leadership needs to learn today.

■ Context

You probably have heard numerous sermons on Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples (John 13:6-15). We may find many important exegetical themes to preach on from here, but we will draw two simple lessons on Christian leadership from this text that Christ himself imparted to his disciples, the soon-to-be leaders of his Church. I believe these lessons are the foundations of a God-honouring, Christ-like leadership that we all must seek to learn and practise each day to be effective leaders.

As we begin, it is essential to understand the context (background) to this passage. This event took place on the Thursday evening of the Passion Week. Jesus and his 12 disciples are gathered in an upper room for the last supper before his death. It was, most likely, the Passover meal. The next day is the day of Jesus' crucifixion, the Lamb of God to be slain for our sins (1 Cor 5:7b).

The disciples are reclining around a table. Bread and wine are set before them. It seems that they are already eating and are having a discourse. This is the last opportunity for Jesus to teach his disciples before his death. So he shares something very important for their lives that is going to mould their future leadership in church. Two things stand out as special here – firstly, Jesus shows his disciples here the full measure of his love by serving them; secondly, he also takes this opportunity to teach them two fundamental lessons on leadership since they are soon to take over his church.

John 13:6-15

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."



Jesus washing the feet of the disciples [stained-glass window (detail) by Wouter Crabeth]

■ Christ needs to serve us first

The first thing about Christian leadership is that before we serve Christ, we need to be served by him first (verse 8). We cannot serve Christ effectively unless *he serves us first and continually thereafter*. What does Jesus mean here? What is he trying to teach his disciples? Jesus is saying that one is not ready to serve Christ unless he or she has been washed from their sin by his blood – one has believed in the gospel and has accepted Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour. I think this is the most important, yet often the neglected truth in Christian leadership today.

What does it mean that Christ needs to serve us first? How does he serve us? It means Christ has to first come into my life as my Lord and Saviour. It means that I have to be born of the Spirit (John 3). It means making him the Lord of every aspect of my life. It means that unless I share and take part in Christ's salvation, I am not fit and ready to serve him. That's what Christ tells Peter here: that unless Christ washes Peter, he has no share with Christ (v 8). Peter needed a cleansing from his sins that Christ offers on the cross (cf. Mark 10:45). He has served us by paying the penalty for our sins on the cross and redeeming from its curse (Gal 3:13). In fact, this Passover meal here signifies that cleaning (1 Cor 5:7b). Before Peter could become a pillar of the church, he needed to share in Christ's free gift of salvation. This is what anyone, seeking to serve Christ, needs to ask themselves – have I understood and believed in the gospel? Have I put my faith in Jesus Christ alone? Have I accepted Christ as my Lord and Saviour?

In fact, Christ's perfect obedience to the Law, his penal death on the cross as a substitute, his resurrection from the dead, his ascension, his second coming, are all works of his service to us.

Now this may sound simplistic, even naïve to ask anyone desiring to serve Christ in his Church. It is generally assumed that when one expresses the desire to be in Christian leadership, one has already put his faith in Christ. But that is not always true! Church history witnesses several Christian leaders who were not born again. There are many today who serve Christ without actually having any experience of regeneration. In fact, it is possible that one can be in ministry and appear to be successful without actually having Christ as his Lord and Saviour – without actually becoming a Christian.

My own experience testifies to this sad reality! I went to Sunday School as a child, memorized Scripture, attended the youth group, shared about Jesus with unbelievers, gave my tithes faithfully, and yet I had not personally experienced Christ's saving power in my life until long after. People looked at my outward actions and thought I was a good Christian, but I knew deep down in my heart that I wasn't. I fooled myself for many years thinking I could serve Christ without actually believing in him.

■ Christ needs to serve us continually

But this service of Christ to us does not stop with the initial experience of regeneration or conversion. He continually seeks to serve us day by day. This is what Jesus means here in v 10 when he tells Peter that he had already had a bath and was clean (i.e. had been regenerated and confessed Christ as his Lord and Saviour). What Peter needed was an ongoing cleansing from Jesus the rest of his life – an ongoing reminder of what Jesus had done for him, and the work of Christ's Spirit in his life thereafter.

So how does it happen? It happens when he serves us through his Word and the sacraments. He speaks to us and transforms us through the Scriptures. He serves us by never leaving or forsaking us according to his promises (cf. Matt 28:20b; John 14:18). He serves us through the Holy Spirit in sanctification. He serves us through the sacraments by assuring us of his love and never failing grace. He serves us by interceding on our behalf before the Father (cf. John 17; Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34; 1 John 2:1). He has not only given us a bath (cleansing from our sins), but continues to cleanse us from our impurities and the indwelling sin each day through various means of grace. He serves us even today, each day. And unless we allow him to serve us (cleanse us), he says we have no part with him.

He is willing to cleanse us each day, but like Peter, we too keep saying to him, 'Lord, you shall never wash my feet' (i.e. *you will never serve me*). How do we resist Jesus from serving us each day even after having had a bath from Him? We do it:

- when we do not have time to read his Word to let him speak to us.
- when we do not spend time in prayer with him and have fellowship with him.



Reformation
conference in Bhutan

- when we get too busy serving him (involved in various ministries of church) and have no time for Jesus to serve us (cf. Luke 10:41-42).

It is like saying, 'Lord you don't have to serve me'. The truth is that Jesus is more interested in our relationship with him than our service to him. When we allow Christ to serve us each day, our relationship with him improves. We get to know him better and grow in faith and Christian maturity. Ask yourself, have you truly accepted Christ as your Lord and Saviour as you think of serving him? If your answer to the first question is 'yes', then ask yourself whether you are allowing him to continually serve you every day? Think seriously about these questions because they matter the most in Christian leadership.

■ Servant leadership

The second important lesson about Christian leadership is that Christian leadership is about servant leadership (i.e. Christ calls us to follow his example of humility). Why would Jesus wash his disciples' feet? What was he trying to teach them here? What was it that the disciples did not understand at that time that Jesus says 'You will understand it later?' Suddenly, in the middle of the supper, Jesus gets up and begins to wash his disciples' feet, wiping them with the towel. This was an unbelievable (even odd!) act, for the disciples to see their master performing such a menial job. It was strange, not because washing feet was an uncommon practice in Palestine those days, rather it was generally done by non-Jewish slaves. The disciples were shocked because Jesus, their Messiah, the Son of God, their Lord, their Master, their long-awaited King from David's line, was washing their feet. It was something they had never seen a person of high position do for those under him. It was a demeaning task in their view and appeared to be an insult to their Master. Jesus should not serve them, rather he should be served by them. Thus, it was totally confusing for Peter and the other disciples.

The disciples looked at Jesus as their leader and master, the future king of Israel, who would deliver them from the tyranny of the Romans. They are hoping that Jesus would soon establish his earthly, political kingdom in Israel, and that they would also have important positions to rule along with him.

Such an action does not befit a future king! So Peter objects to this because Jesus is doing something very counter-cultural here, contrary to what Peter and other disciples expect from him. They don't understand the value system of Jesus' kingdom (cf. v 7). Unfortunately, many Christian leaders today also do not understand this. Often we see the struggle and competition for glory, power, riches, and status among Christian leaders that breaks Jesus' heart.

Peter and the disciples had not understood yet that Jesus came not to rule the world like other earthly rulers and kings with tyrannical dominion, and boastful display of power and glory. He already had these things in eternity with the Father even before he assumed humanity (John 17:5). He was already glorious and yet chose to be a servant-king. He left it all to serve us (Phil 2:6-8). In fact, Jesus was fully aware of his power, glory, and authority even right at that moment (John 13:3).

Generally, it is easier for a person of low rank to have an attitude of humility, than a person of high ranking to be humble and serve others like a servant. Jesus does it and calls his disciples to be the same. Jesus wanted them to understand that if they want to be great in the kingdom of God, they have to learn to be servants of all. They have to become lowly and humble like Jesus. He wanted them to understand that the secret of being great is in becoming humble.

This the same message that Christian leadership in our churches need to hear, understand, and apply in their lives each day. Servant leadership is the most lacking thing within South-Asian Christianity at present. We see it in churches under one-man control without elders. We see that in Christian institutions run without financial accountability. We see that in Christian leaders not willing to retire and leave their positions in old age. The list can go on!

■ Jesus is asking for an attitude of humility

How do we apply the principle of feet-washing today? Should we all literally practice it in our homes and churches? I doubt whether that was Jesus' intention. What Jesus is actually asking us to do is to have a servanthood mindset as Christian



Theological University Kampen

leaders. It is not about an action, but about an attitude of humility. One may pretend to be humble outwardly and yet be proud inwardly. Jesus expects a change in our mind and heart that would show outwardly in our actions. What Jesus is asking us is, firstly, not to take pride in who we are and what we do, or how better we are than others, or how much we have achieved for the Lord, looking down upon others because they don't have the same zeal as us in serving the Lord. What Jesus is asking us here is to be patient with others when they sin, to show kindness to those who don't deserve it and are unkind to us, to be mindful of the needs of others when we have more than enough to meet our own, to take first step in forgiving others and in seeking forgiveness, to provide opportunities for those who would never have them otherwise, to step down from our high and comfortable positions and status to identify with the simple, the weak and the poor. This is what Christian leadership is all about! It is not, primarily, about becoming a famous preacher or planting many churches or writing numerous books or being everyone's favourite. It is primarily about the two principles that Christ taught to his disciples just before his death – firstly, to be served by Christ first in order to serve him; secondly, to be servant leaders, following Christ's example of humility.

I would like to conclude here with Philippians 2:1-11, which provides an excellent summary of what it means to be a servant leader like our servant King Jesus. *'So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'* Amen! ■

News Update

■ Herman Bavinck Lecture 2017

On May 29, Hans Boersma, professor at Regent College, Vancouver, held a lecture on 'Blessing and glory: Abraham Kuyper on the "beatific vision"'. Neo-Calvinism is known for its candid acceptance of the goodness of the created order and the conviction that there is nothing in creation that is not under the sovereign governance of Jesus Christ. In this lecture Hans Boersma shows us a different Kuyper – a Kuyper with a deep mystic interest. This Kuyper followed in the footsteps of the great church tradition by taking the 'beatific vision', seeing God in his celestial glory, as the ultimate destination of the Christian pilgrimage. We take a look at Kuyper's theology of the beatific vision, and in particular at the distinction that he makes between blessing and glory. The most important conclusion: our ultimate future lies nowhere else than in God himself. The lecture can be watched on <http://en.tukampen.nl/>

■ Dutch-Hungarian Conference

On June 22, a panel of six highly esteemed speakers from the Netherlands and Hungary got together at the Theological University in Kampen for the Conference: 'A Shared Heritage: Hungarian-Dutch Reformed Relations through the Centuries. Commemorating 500 years Reformation'. The programme is organized in collaboration with Refo500.

For many centuries Hungarian and Dutch Protestants have nurtured religious and ecclesial relations with each other, supported each other internationally, and strived for freedom of religion. The liberation of Hungarian pastors by Michiel de Ruyter is just one example of this. After World War I and in 1956 many Hungarian children and families were received into the Netherlands as refugees. Many Hungarians studied theology in the Netherlands and were inspired by Dutch theologians such as Johannes Cocceius and Abraham Kuyper. Up to the present time many Hungarian and Dutch Reformed congregations have a sisterchurch relationship. One of the questions discussed is how Hungary and the Netherlands, inspired by their shared Protestant heritage, can contribute to 21st century Europe, with respect to the current challenges of the continent such as security, sustainability, and a value-based European society. Speakers: Prof. Dr Roel Kuiper – Rector, Theological University Kampen; Dr Péter Hoppál – Minister of State for Culture of the Ministry of Human Capacities of Hungary; Mr András Kocsis – Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Hungary in the Netherlands; Prof. Dr George Harinck – Professor of History of Neo-Calvinism; Prof. Dr Károly Fekete – Bishop, Hungarian Reformed Church; Jeff Fountain – Director, Schuman Centre for European Studies

■ TU Magazine

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Surveying the significance of the Reformation

Impression of the Hamilton seminary conference



Michael Zwiép is a member of the Vineland Free Reformed Church in Vineland, Ontario (affiliated with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland) and contributor to Christian Renewal.

Theme

The Seventh Annual Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary Conference January 12 to 14 drew 150 participants for an assembly commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It featured five addresses documenting the return of the church to the rule of Scripture, as well as biographical discourses on a number of key Reformers, including Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli and William Farel.

The assembly began with a public address by Dr Ted Van Raalte, Professor of Ecclesiology at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary with the theme, 'By Grace Alone: How and Why the Reformation Occurred'. Van Raalte began by providing a survey and analysis of the 16th century reforms initiated by Luther and systemized by Calvin. He succinctly defined the Reformation as a 16th century movement for the reform of abuses in the Roman church ending in the establishment of the Reformed and Protestant churches. Van Raalte reiterated the motive of the Reformers in rejecting the ecclesiastical establishment of the Roman church: 'The object of the Reformation was not to return to the past, but to the rule of faith and practice of the Scriptures. The model and form of the church the Reformers sought to manifest was not a particular existing church found in history, but the norms and standards for the church of all ages found in Holy Scripture. Scripture is the touchstone and foundation of the church.' He noted the Reformational ideal of continual reform was not to adapt to changing cultural practices, but to constantly conform to the principles of Scripture. The reason reform was required in the medieval church was due to the abuses of the Roman church, including the consolidation of power in the Papacy and promotion of unbiblical doctrines and practices, including the monetary sale of indulgences, teaching of transubstantiation, requirement of private confession to a priest, affirmation of the immaculate conception of Mary, veneration of relics and saints, chantries and intercession for the dead and belief in purgatory. Despite these abuses, Van Raalte stressed the Reformation was not an inevitable development. Members of the medieval church sought comfort and security in the daily ritual of religious practice and tradition. Despite the liturgical restrictions of public worship, travelling monks were free to preach and exposit the Bible. In instances

where the sanctioned doctrine and practice of the Roman church was opposed, harsh discipline was carried out. Van Raalte noted the plight of the persecuted followers of the early Reformers, including Peter Waldo, John Wycliffe, John Hus and Girolamo Savonarola.

■ Sovereign grace

The reason the Reformers succeeded in reviving the assembly of the body of Christ was by sovereign grace: 'Where the Word of God has been observed in the history of the church there is evidence of the grace of God.' Van Raalte outlined twelve means of grace in the restoration of the church, including the translation of Scripture into popular languages, preaching, primacy of the pulpit over the altar, practice of prayer, pedagogical instruction and preparation of catechisms and confessions, unaccompanied Psalm singing, professions of faith, pastoral visits, advent of the printing press, publication of theological pamphlets and treatises, public disputations, and dramatic portrayal of the gospel in morality plays.

He stressed the importance of preaching and the public proclamation of the Word during the Reformation, noting the prolific catalogues of sermons by Luther, Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), citing a new volume, *The Pastoral Ministry and Worship in Calvin's Geneva*, by Princeton scholar, Elsie Anne McKee, documenting the liturgy and order of Reformational worship. The preaching of the gospel and desire of the Reformers to equip every saint to discern and test the spirits in the office of all believers wrought meaningful and enduring change.

Dr Van Raalte cited the conviction of church historian Euan Cameron, and argued the actual doctrines of grace proclaimed by the Reformers were the very motives for establishing the Reformation: 'The message preached by the Reformers seemed both more plausible and more Biblical than the message purveyed by their opponents.'

Van Raalte directed attention to a citation by Cameron of German church historian, Bernd Moeller, in a survey of sermons composed by twenty-six Reformers: 'In spite of the diversity of peoples and places, a consensus emerged. The preachers presented the basic common denominator of the early Reformation message in a ser-



[photo Mark ten Haaf]

Hamilton conference

ies of fundamental primary themes. The primacy of the Bible, the supreme importance of belief in Christ for the forgiveness of sins, the church as the communion of all who believe, the sufferings of the church in the context of the last days, were all expounded in broadly similar fashion.'

He concluded his address citing Romans 8:29, arguing that the Reformation ultimately succeeded through the predestined, unmerited favour of God on His saints, 'friended by grace, loved from before the world and to its end.'

Following the address, the seminary, in partnership with the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College in Hamilton, unveiled a commemorative project calling for submissions of poetry, storytelling and academic papers, as well as commissioning new works of music and drama, honouring the legacy of the Reformation.

Panel discussion
Hamilton conference

■ Principles of the Reformation

Rev. Bill Boekestein, Pastor of Immanuel Fellowship Church in

Kalamazoo, Michigan, spoke on the theme, 'Zwingli on Sola Scriptura: The Clarity and Certainty of Scripture'. He documented the exegetical insights of the Swiss Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli. In his appeal to the authority of Scripture, Zwingli stressed the connective character, certainty, and clarity of the Word of God. Rev. Boekestein concluded his address by providing a critical assessment of the hermeneutical approach of Zwingli within the historical context of the 16th century.

Dr Jason Van Vliet, Professor of Dogmatology in Hamilton, addressed the theme, 'Calvin on Sola Fide: Justified only by an Assured Faith?' He reiterated the definition of faith proposed by Calvin: 'Faith is a firm and certain knowledge of the benevolence of God founded on the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, revealed in the mind and sealed upon the hearts of the saints through the Holy Spirit.' He surveyed the doctrine of assurance in light of the five foundational principles of the Reformation – Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, Solus Christus and Soli Deo Gloria.

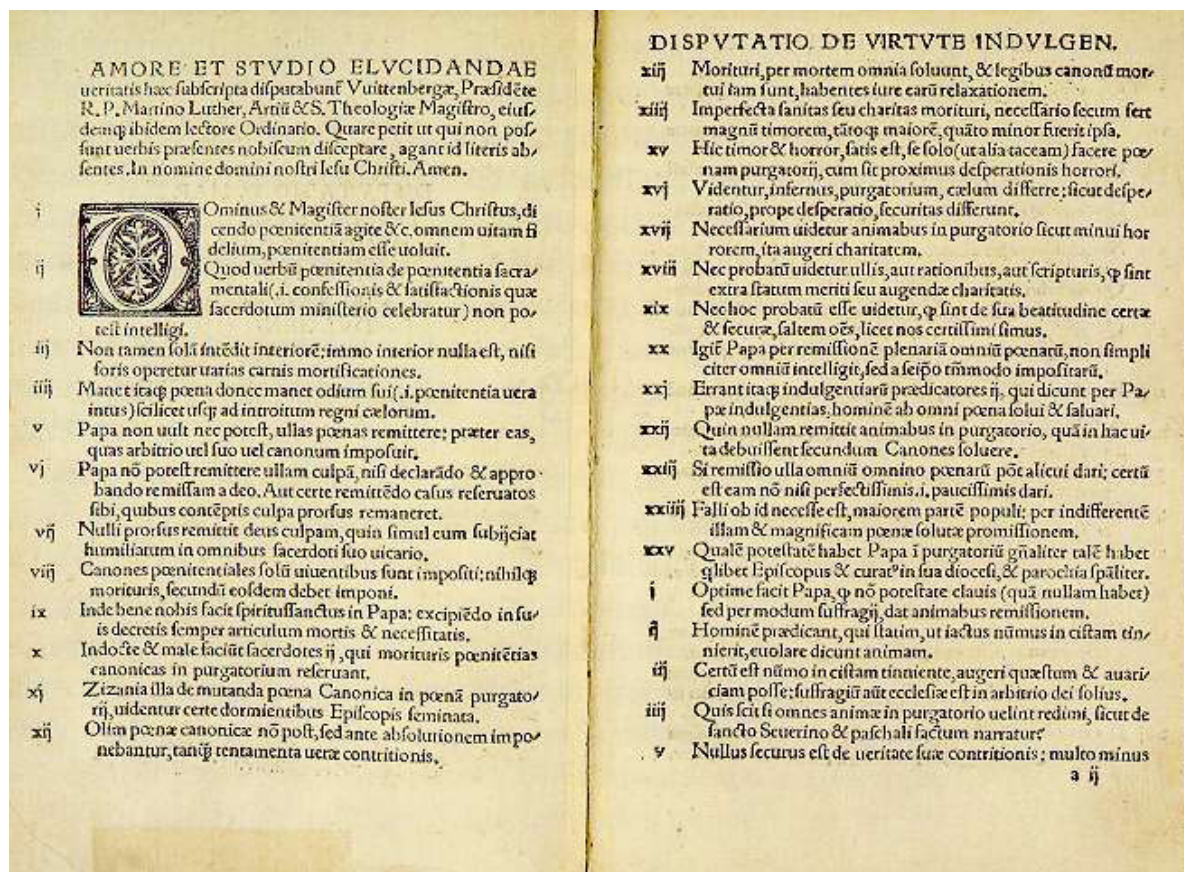
In a general panel discussion moderated by Dr Arjan de Visser, Professor of Ministry and Mission at the Hamilton seminary, Rev. Boekestein, Dr Van Dixhoorn, Dr Zuidema and Dr Van Vliet addressed the challenge of navigating ecclesiastical change in the contemporary church in the light of Reformational principles.

■ Gate to heaven

Dr Chad Van Dixhoorn from the Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington D.C., addressed the theme, 'Luther on Solo Christo: The Absolute Sufficiency of the Saviour for Sinners'. In a biographical survey, Van Dixhoorn documented the formative years of the Reformer, noting the promotion of Luther from student to friar to theological lecturer, drawing attention



[photo Mark ten Haaf]



The 95 theses

to the spiritual trials of the Augustinian monk. Luther fought depression with devotion, his rigorous study of the Psalms, as well as the letters of the Apostle Paul to the Romans and Galatians, leading to a renewed understanding of the Gospel. As a maturing scholar of Scripture, Luther was contrite in his conviction of the holiness of God, yet his conscience was consumed by uncertainty.

Van Dixhoorn argued that the Reformer came to an initial understanding of the doctrine of grace as he lectured through Romans in his role as theological instructor at Wittenberg, citing the confession of Luther: 'Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by his faith". Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.' In his growing conviction of the sufficiency of Christ and the Scriptural truth that the righteousness of God was not the righteous judgment of God against sinners but a righteousness provided for sinners in Christ, Luther was led to issue a complaint against the religious practice of penance and indulgences.

Dr Van Dixhoorn pointed to four key hallmark texts by Luther in his dispute against Rome, revealing the growing spiritual and theological maturity of the Reformer, including the 95

DISPVATIO DE VIRTUTE INDVLGEN.

xiij Morituri, per mortem omnia soluant, & legibus canonū mortui tam sunt, habentes iure carū relaxationem.

xiiij Imperfecta sanitas seu charitas morituri, necessario secum fert magnū timorem, citiusq; maiore, quāto minor fuerit ipsa.

xv Hic timor & horror, satis est, se solo (ut alia taceam) facere poenam purgatorij, cum sit proximus desperationis horror.

xvi Videntur, infernus, purgatorium, celum differre; sicut desperatio, prope desperatio, securitas differunt.

xvij Necessarium uidetur animabus in purgatorio sicut minui horrorem, ita augeri charitatem.

xviii Nec probantur uidetur ullis, aut rationibus, aut scripturis, q̄ sint extra statum meriti seu augendæ charitatis.

xix Nec hoc probantur esse uidetur, q̄ sint de sua beatitudine certæ & securæ, saltem oēs, licet nos certissimi simus.

xx Igit̄ Papa per remissionē plenariā omnium poenarū, non simpliciter omnium intelligit, sed a seipso t̄mōdo impositarū.

xxi Errant itaq; indulgentiarū predicatorēs ij, qui dicunt per Papæ indulgentias, hominē ab omni poena solui & saluari.

xxii Quin nullam remittit animabus in purgatorio, quā in hac uitā debuissent secundum Canones soluere.

xxiii Si remissio ulla omnium omnino poenarū pōt alicui dari; certū est eam nō nisi perfectissimis, i. paucissimis dari.

xxiiii Falli ob id necesse est, maiorem partē populi per indifferentē illam & magnificam poenæ solutæ promissionem.

xxv Quale potestātē habet Papa i purgatorio ḡnalter talē habet q̄libet Episcopus & curat̄ in sua diocesi, & parochia sp̄lter.

i Optime facit Papa, q̄ nō potestātē clauis (quā nullam habet) sed per modum suffragij, dat animabus remissionem.

ii Hominē prædicant, qui statim, ut factus nūmus in cistam t̄nuerit, euolare dicunt animam.

iii Certū est nūmo in cistam t̄nuerit, augeri quæstum & auariciam posse; suffragij autē ecclesiæ est in arbitrio dei solius.

iiii Quis scit si omnes animæ in purgatorio uelint redimī, sicut de sancto Severino & paschali factum narratur?

v Nullus securus est de ueritate suæ contritiōis; multo minus

How to commemorate the Reformation in Post-Christian Europe?



Herman Selderhuis (1961) professor of Church History at the Theological University Apeldoorn (The Netherlands) and director of Refo500, the international platform on projects related to the 16th Century. He wrote his PhD on Mariage and Divorce in the Thought of Martin Bucer (published 1997) and is the author and editor of several books, including *John Calvin – A Pilgrim's Life* (2009) and *Martin Luther – A Spiritual Biography* (2017). Among his other functions are president of the Reformation Research Consortium (RefoRC), president of the International Calvin Congress, and Curator of Research at the John A Lasco Library (Emden, Germany).

■ Why commemorate?

The Reformation was one of the most influential events in the history of the world and of the Christian church. Without it the present global society would look completely different. That is a clear reason to commemorate its 500th anniversary. But how should we do this? Is it a reason to celebrate, and if so, why? These questions have been problematical right from the beginning, back to the first centenary in 1617. The desire to celebrate Martin Luther's rediscovery of the gospel conjointly was thwarted, and Lutherans and Calvinist each had their own commemoration events. Even the reasons why to commemorate are diverse and problematic. It could be done out of purely historic interest. The present identity of Europe has been decisively shaped by the religious developments set in motion by Martin Luther. The search for the causes, origins, actors and consequences of this movement that essentially shaped a new Europe and influenced developments globally up to the present time is a self-evident motive for studying 1517.

Theologically, some will seize the commemoration to show once again that the Reformation was right and even that the pope is the Antichrist. Others will make it an ecumenical milestone to reunite Roman Catholics and Protestants into one church.

Politically, it may be used to promote the national inheritance of protestant countries as well as the position of protestant minorities. It may be an occasion to blame the Reformation for dividing Europe as well as an opportunity to strengthen the idea of a unified Europe.

Additionally, there will be an economic motive. Luther heritage cities will attract tourists, tour operators will benefit, and merchandise will yield additional profit. Managers who currently run the universities will send in their professors as writers and presenters to gather funding and to put their institution in the spotlight to increase enrolment.

A commemoration will only be fruitful if these abovementioned motives are combined, and if those working out of these motives work in cooperation with each other, irrespective of whether one is religious or not, and whether one is a Lutheran or a Catholic, or even a Calvinist.

■ Complications and additional aspects

But how to commemorate? Each of these approaches

has its problematic sides. When studying the Reformation out of historical interest, why focus on 1517 and Martin Luther as the initiator of the historical upheaval? He may show up as the monk who rocked the church, irritated pope and emperor, got married, drank beer, preached, became overweight, and died – in short, he may remain a figure of the past.

In the theological approach, there is a tendency to celebrate Luther as the great Reformer and idealize him as an apostle of freedom, rebel against Rome, father of tolerance, inventor of grace and so on. But Luther is as much a fascinating personality as a problematic one. If Luther was the rediscoverer of grace, how could he write as offensively as he did in his polemics about Jews, Catholics, Baptists, and anyone else with whom he did not agree?

He can hardly be linked in a positive way to political, social or religious tolerance. This applies to the Reformation era in general. Religious wars were fought between Reformed and Catholic states before some position of tolerance was reached.

Again, when it comes to Luther as an evangelist of freedom, this is to be restricted mainly to a freedom from sin and guilt, and not to freedom in a political sense. Had it been for Luther, the Netherlands, for example, would still be occupied by Spain, and Dutch Protestantism would most likely have been eradicated by the Inquisition long ago. Luther was against any resistance to political authorities. The 'right of revolt' was laid out later only by Calvin.

When it comes to theology, Luther can be problematic as well. For example, his stance in the debate on the Lord's Supper led him to conclusions concerning the person of Christ that were regarded by many of his contemporary reformers as completely irrational. At the same time, he was so persistent in it that he held off any attempt to find peace with Zwingli and his team.

We should take into account that the Reformation occasioned a split in the church, created a potential cause for religious wars and other animosities and, as a result, caused personal tragedies in the lives of many men and women in the 16th century and thereafter. It may be easy for a determined Protestant to say with satisfaction: 'Where would we be without the Reformation?', but some might answer: 'The world would have been far better off.'

*The gospel started
in Wittenberg*
[painting Ferdinand
Pauwels, 1872]



■ 'Reformations' in the plural

Focusing on Luther alone would make the whole commemoration vulnerable. Sure, the gospel started in Wittenberg. But all you need is a newspaper giving three quotations of Luther on Jews, women and Turks to depict him as an intolerant fundamentalist, just the sort of person to keep away from. A far broader perspective is needed. The many beside him, the many against him, and the Reformation movement as a whole should be taken in view.

The plural 'Reformations' has become viable in research. Lu-

■ A post-Christian Europe

But how to commemorate in a post-Christian Europe? We may consider that Europe is not as secularized as it seems. Three out of four Europeans say they are religious persons. In southern countries of Europe the Christian faith and life is alive and visible. In Eastern Europe churches are growing. The fall of the Berlin wall started with weekly prayer meetings in Leipzig. The present pope enjoys great popularity.

Even so, the situation has changed dramatically. This is clearly seen in public life on Sundays, the many church buildings where worship has ceased, and the growing number of mosques. Being a church member has become an option, being a Christian has become an option, and people attend worship services as consumers. Many Christians are at a loss when it comes to what it means to be a Christian.

This is connected with the image of the church. The Roman Catholic Church is incredibly damaged by the scandal of sexual abuse. Protestant churches have changed their views on marriage and sexuality. Many theologians deny the most essential doctrines of the Christian faith. Members and non-members feel that the church has grown away from its core business and given up the position of a mother caring and guiding her children.

At the same time, religion has returned – if ever it was away. With the rise of Islam, a new debate on religion has become vibrant, and it plays an important part in politics and society. The term 'post-Christian' had better be avoided as it suggests that the Christian faith is irrevocably something of the past.

ther's act of reformation was the cause of other confessional reformations such as the Catholic Reformation – which was accompanied by a sometimes aggressive counter-reformation – and the Anabaptist reformation.

Additionally, other spheres of life were involved. The 16th century saw a reformation not only of church, theology and spirituality, but also of understanding culture, of concepts of scholarship and academics, of education and politics. And through all of this there is a great variety as to national and regional developments.

These aspects, options and complications have to be considered when dealing with the issue of commemorating 500 years of Reformation in post-Christian Europe. Such a consideration can make this commemoration attractive, relevant and even fascinating.

In these respects, the situation of European Christianity and especially of the Christian church is quite similar to the situation in the early 16th century. What Luther saw was a theology and a church that had moved away from its source,

its foundation and its message. The pre-Reformation laity experienced the church as distant, bureaucratic, obsessed with power and money, and the clergy as dumb and ethically lax. This is just how many in Europe experience the church today. There are other similarities in the situation as well: economic instability, a distrust in politics and politicians, disorientation of many young people, marital and familial issues. We should not assume that people in those days believed in accordance with the theological views of the church, but certainly they were religious.

Commemorating 500 years of Reformation in a so-called post-Christian, secularized and at the same time religious Europe thus does make sense, but only if there is the awareness of what the Reformation was all about.

■ What the Reformation was all about

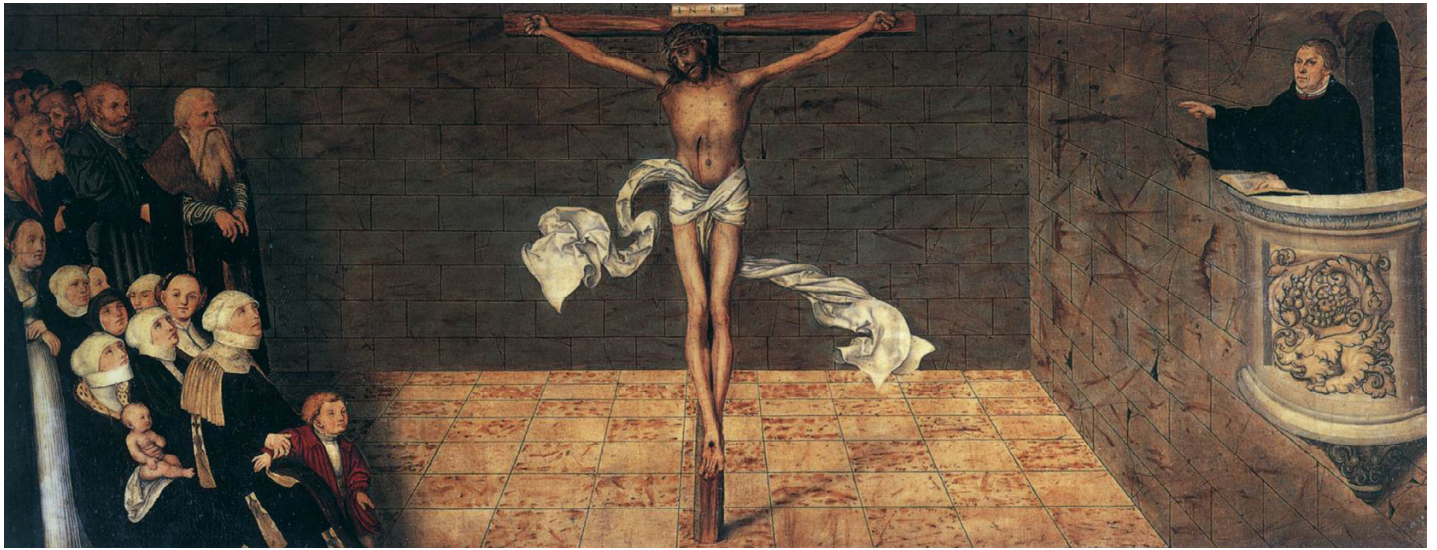
In 2011, the former pope Benedict visited Germany and the town of Erfurt where Luther had been a catholic monk. It was expected that he would say some kind words about Luther and would open up some ecumenical perspective, maybe by lifting the ban on the Reformer. Instead, he called attention to Luther's message as dealing with the central theological question: the relation between the righteous God and sinful man. According to him this question should again be asked today. There was some irritation as if the pope, considered as one of

the last respected strongholds of Christianity, was needed to remind Protestants what they stood for. But among the wider audience the message of Luther had rather turned into: 'Be merry, drink beer and get married, for free grace will let you.' But what happens if we turn to what Luther wanted, preached, lived and died for, as pope Benedict invited Protestants to do? Recent Reformation research has greatly profited from the sociological approach. For long, it had mainly been the field of historians of theology. They tended to focus on theological questions and debate and did not always pay attention to political, social and intellectual contexts. They needed to accept that what the 16th century theologians preached was not always what 16th century believers believed, let alone practised. For some time, the theological component of the Reformation was overshadowed in research by so many other components. Recently, a more balanced view has developed: the Reformation is a process in which many factors play a role. The theological factor is not the only one, yet it is the decisive one.

Luther's primary goal was not a reformation of society, not a revolution in natural sciences, not a restructuring of political and social life in Europe, not a re-evaluation of marriage, family and education. Luther's goal was not even a reformation of the church. Certainly, he was much concerned about the state of the clergy and the abuse of power of the church,

*Augustinian monastery
in Erfurt*





*Martin Luther preaching
in the parish church
of Wittenberg*
[painting Cranach,
Lucas the Elder]

and in the church. But his main – and for him existential – concern was the relation between God and man. And more specifically, the relation between a holy God and a sinful man. Many years from the beginning, in 1545, after Luther had seen what the Reformation had brought about, he wrote that it was as if the gate of paradise was opened to him when he discovered what justification really means, and he mentions this as the key element in the Reformation. He did not mean that all of a sudden he saw that Europe needed a new political system, or that monks and nuns should get married, or that human beings need freedom for self-development. He had found out that man can be saved from God's judgment and from eternal death by the free and undeserved grace of God. It is as simple as that. It is this new insight that he wanted to be discussed.

That message relates to issues of personal and institutional guilt, public justice, reconciliation, righteousness, ethics, which are all issues of today. It is quite remarkable that in many novels, plays and movies the notion of 'guilt' plays a role, whereas it may be asked if that issue is still a central notion in sermons, catechism and Christian education. Also, the issue of ecology is involved, as it can be seen as a secular form of eschatology. The Reformation era was full of eschatological expectations. The church should address Luther's central message to the world, making use of the similarities between the times then and now.

Starting from Luther's theology as the central factor in the Reformation, we should commemorate

1. Luther the preacher, the pastor, the professor and the believer. The Reformation did not start when he married Katharina (1525), or when, at the diet of Speyer, politicians created the term 'protestant' (1529). It started in 1517, when a professor in a small town at – as he said himself – the outskirts of civilization, published a number

of theses on the relation between a righteous God and sinful human beings.

2. Luther and his colleagues. The message of justification by faith alone was for Melanchthon, Bucer and Calvin the basis to work out concepts of sanctification and ecclesiology, and a Christian worldview on education, politics, social life and culture.
3. Luther and 16th century Christianity and the plural 'Reformations'. Rome, Reformation and Anabaptism were united in their conviction that Europe was not Christian at all and was in need of Christianization. They varied in their concepts how to realize this, but they agreed that a reformation was necessary, and they agreed that such a reformation was first of all a theological matter.

■ Conclusion: a complicated relevance

Amidst all the factors that play a role in the 16th century reformations, the heart of the matter was Luther's new theology. Just as Luther and the Reformation demonstrated the power of faith in an unsurpassed way, there would not have been a Reformation nor other reformations without this central issue of justification. If this fundamental item which Luther called *iustitia aliena* is ignored, not only is the Reformation misunderstood, but also the commemoration becomes meaningless.

Present-day Europe cannot be understood without knowledge of this theological dimension. Just as much, it must be said that the Europe of tomorrow cannot do without this theological dimension either. Many of the most important problems of today can be traced back to religious positions and convictions. I myself am convinced that, in the coming years, religion will become more and more important, on a national level, a European level, but just as much globally. Taking this into account, I want to conclude with just a quick look at some

major similarities between Europe in the early 16th century and Europe in the early 21st century, as these are such that the way they were dealt with then, might – to formulate it carefully – be of some relevance for today.

- a. A first similarity may best be characterized by the German word *Orientierungslosigkeit* ['lack of direction']. Many of the basic certainties are either lost or questioned, and many, mainly young people, are at a loss as to values (sexuality is a main one) and future.
- b. Just as in the 16th century, the question of religious tolerance is an issue. Although it was then between two Christian confessions and it is now within a multi-religious society, the political and social impact is just the same.
- c. Both eras face the possibilities, challenges and dangers of a media revolution. The spread of the printing press combined with the increased opportunities for people to buy and read books is quite similar to the developments we see in digital data and social media.
- d. Economic issues vary from corruption and greed in the top of organizations to a growth of debts and poverty.
- e. A merit-driven society, in which many strive and only a few succeed, can be noticed both then and now. The difference is that then we had saints who gained enough merit to enter heaven, and now we have the blessed soccer players, movie stars and CEOs that gained or gathered enough to live in heaven on earth.
- f. The church-state relations are becoming increasingly an issue in Europe. The issue is evidently related to changes in society and in the position of power of the church. Yet, the question as to the responsibilities the state has for the church, and the independence of the church towards new legislation etc., was also an issue that the Reformation placed on the agenda.
- g. That sin and salvation were matters that people were preoccupied with in the 16th century is well known, but they are just as important today, although in a different sense and setting. Salvation has become 'this-worldly', which is even true of the feel-good message propagated by Christian preachers. And although 'sin' is no longer connected to death, let alone eternal death, sin and guilt are the major problems for which people seek help from psychiatrists and therapists.
- h. The quest for spirituality and spiritual stability is also an interesting similarity. Tour operators and monasteries have discovered a niche in the market for spiritual tourism and the need to escape stress and the hectic life. Whereas – just as then – the church in its preaching does not seem to accord with the answers people are looking for, many do seek the church as a space to find inner stability and to reload. It is the space of the church that touches people, not so much the message of the church.

The Reformers did not see Europe as Christian. They did see that all Europeans were baptized but only a small minority of them lived up to their baptism. They did see many churches but also many empty spots in church. They complained about Europeans not being Christian in the real sense at all. Calvin saw Europe afflicted and near to collapse. Maybe he would make the same comment about Europe today.

Maybe the Reformers would conclude that the church today is also in great trouble again. The Enlightenment has fundamentally changed the way the major Protestant churches saw the Bible and the gospel. Luther's statement on the church is still applicable: 'Churches are there only for the purpose that the Lord Jesus will speak to us by his holy Word, and we speak to him by prayer and singing.' But is what's being said and done in present day protestant church buildings still in line with Luther's view?

The commemoration of the Reformation should impress the public with an image of where Europe has come from and where it should be going. They can see the *merits* of the Reformation – may they be convinced of its *message*. ■

■ Note

This is a summary of a lecture held at Gordon College, Boston/Wenham on November 10, 2014. Summary made by Piet Houtman by arrangement with the author.

The millennial kingdom in the twenty-first century



Dr Rob (P.H.R.) van Houwelingen (1955) is professor of New Testament at the Theological University Kampen.

Many Christians expect a millennial kingdom. Their expectation of the future is based mainly on a specific interpretation of Revelation 20. According to this explanation Jesus Christ will – after his first return to earth – restrain the devil and found a worldwide Realm of Peace that will last for a thousand years. After that, the devil will be released for a short while and a period will commence which is often referred to as ‘the great tribulation’. That period comes to an end at the second coming of Jesus Christ. The expectation of such a millennium kingdom is called chiliasm, after the Greek word *chilioi*, which means ‘thousand’. Another term for it is ‘millennialism’, derived from ‘millennium’. Within the chiliast movement different end-time scenarios have been worked out.

However, the Book of Revelation is not intended for devising end-time scenarios. It offers a prophetic radiography of the whole world history, of how the church stands in society. There will always be Christians in tribulation who are in need of encouragement. For this reason, the Church father Augustine, for example, considered the millennial kingdom to be the period between the Ascension up to the return of Jesus Christ. It is not future: we are living in the middle of it right now – in the middle of the tribulation, but also under the rule of the Victor. For can the devil stop the spreading of the gospel among the nations of the world? In that sense he has been ‘chained’.

While this interpretation of Revelation 20 gained wide support, people often forget that Augustine himself still lived in the first millennium, and was therefore able simply to read the thousand years literally. For Bible readers from the twenty-first century that is, of course, more difficult, so much more because the text does in fact concern the future: after the powers of evil have been destroyed (Rev. 19:19-21) and preceding the resurrection. What future, and for whom?

Strictly speaking, Revelation 20 does not speak of a kingdom, but of ‘reigning with the Messiah’ during a thousand year period, while the devil is securely locked away in that same period. Verses 4 and 5 show that this privilege is for the beheaded martyrs. They had chosen violent death above renouncing their religious principles; beheading suggests a trial. That they testified of

Jesus and spoke about God, and had not participated in the Emperor cult, had been judged a heinous sin.

In John’s vision, these Christian martyrs come to life again (as Jesus Christ was once dead and came to life again: Rev. 2:8b). They had had to wait a short while until their number was complete, as well as that of their ‘fellow servants’ who had not been killed by violence. This concerns, in particular, the Christians who had to pay for their testimony with their life, who call out for revenge – a cry for justice; from heaven they are promised divine judgment in the future (Rev. 6:9-11; cf. 16:5-6).

Millennialism concretely fills in an assumed thousand-year realm with Old-Testament prophecies concerning a kingdom of peace, which, however, fits in better with the New Jerusalem from Revelation 21-22 than with chapter 20, where Israel is not even mentioned. The expectation of a messianic kingdom on earth does have parallels in Jewish Apocalypses, such as 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, but the Book of Revelation is different, because there particular attention is given to the resurrection of Christian martyrs. The Almighty actually stands up for these victims, openly choosing their side and promising to prove their righteousness. They are even allowed to reign with the Messiah.

Thousand years, a symbolic number, indicates a lengthy period, certainly compared to the ten-day tribulation mentioned in the letter to the congregation of Smyrna (Rev. 2:10b). Although we must take into consideration the fact that God’s calendar looks different to ours, because ‘with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.’ (2 Peter 3:8, after Ps. 90:4).

The future resurrection of the martyrs – their souls receive a new body – means that justice will be done to them (as the Common English Bible rightly says in verse 4; cf. Dan.7: 22 in the Septuagint). This is called ‘the first resurrection’ in verses 5 and 6, to be taken as a kind of pre-resurrection, anticipating the general resurrection of the dead that will take place at the final judgment. At the same time, this is a pre-judgment: through their resurrection the martyrs are declared holy.

Further on in the vision, John sees ‘the rest of the dead’: those are the ones that died a natural death and



Cry for justice [The Opening of the Fifth Seal, painting El Greco, 1608-14]

have been buried in the ocean or in the earth. Only then does the general resurrection take place. Only then are all the books (scrolls) opened, including the mysterious book of life, and everyone will be judged by God (Rev. 20:11-15).

As a result of the final judgment, the threat of a 'second death' is mentioned, apparently meaning the fire of hell. But that threat does not exist for martyrs (Rev. 20:6)! And whoever has, as they, overcome evil, will not be hurt by the second death; but all who have been cowardly and faithless will meet their doom (Rev. 2:11b; 20:6; 21:8).

The millennial realm will, therefore, be a period in the future, but not – as chiliasm believes – destined for all believers. There is but one return of Jesus Christ. While it is promised to all sincere Christians that they may expect to reign together with the Messiah (Rev. 5:10b; 22:5b; cf. Dan. 7:21-22), only the Christian martyrs will do so during the thousand-year incarceration of Satan. Perhaps we should see this as a pre-phase of the second coming. Specifically this group of witnessing believers, slaughtered without mercy, will be the first to enjoy the victory by Jesus Christ. Through their public rehabilitation, they form the promising vanguard of all the righteous who follow. ■

■ Literature:

For the interpretation of the Book of Revelation as a whole, see my article: 'Revelation: why, how and when?', *Lux Mundi* 29.3 (2010): 60-62; Jan Willem van Henten, 'The Concept of Martyrdom in Revelation', in: Jörg Frey, James A. Kelhoffer & Franz Tóth, *Die Johannesapokalypse – Kontexte – Konzepte – Rezeption* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 587-618.

For a similar explanation of chapter 20, see: L. van Hartingsveld, *Openbaring, een praktische bijbelverklaring* (Tekst & Toelichting; Kampen: Kok, 1984), 101-102 and 122; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (The International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 351-360; N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 472-476.

My Brazilian PhD candidate Dr Leandro A. de Lima (who already has a PhD in literature science, his thesis providing a literature analysis of Revelation 12-14) is doing research on 'The resurrection of the beheaded and the millennial kingdom in Revelation 20.1-6: a study on the vindication or the martyrs.' Second supervisor is Dr Jan Willem van Henten, Professor of New Testament at the University of Amsterdam.

In Memoriam

Professor Dr Soon-Gil Hur (15.12.1933 – 10.01.2017)

Passionate promotor of Reformed thinking in the Korean churches



Dr Kees (C.J.) Haak was active for 14 years in West Papua (Indonesia) as a pioneer missionary and as lecturer in theology for the GGRI in Bomakia, Indonesia. From 1989 till his retirement in 2014 he was lecturer in missiology at the Theological University in Kampen, the Netherlands; since his retirement he has been visiting professor of missiology (2015-2016) at the Korea Theological Seminary of the Korean Presbyterian Church at Cheonan in South Korea. He is currently active as professor of missiology at the South-East Asian Bible Seminary at Malang, East Java, Indonesia.

■ A great loss

Recently, at the age of 83, Professor Dr Soon-Gil Hur passed away in Busan, South Korea. This is a great loss, not only to his ailing wife and his children, but also for the Kosin Churches in Korea and for the Reformed ecumene around the world. Hur's Confucian parents engaged in passive resistance during the years of Japanese occupation, marked as it was by the pressure of the Shinto religion and Japanese emperor worship. His mother's conversion to the Christian faith – in the face of his father's fierce opposition – and a near-death experience in his teenage years brought Hur to faith, and he joined the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea.

■ To Kampen

The years of the Second World War and the Korean War soon afterwards (1950-1953) were a chaotic time, and not much came of his regular education. It wasn't until he undertook studies at the Korean Theological Seminary in Busan (1954-1959) that his academic gifts and insights began to flourish. While he was there, he became the assistant of the then rector, Dr Yune Sun Park. Dr Park introduced the promising student to the theological positions and insights of Machen and Van Til in America, and to Bavinck, Ridderbos, Greijdanus, and Schilder in the Netherlands. Immediately after sister church relations were established between the Kosin churches in Korea and the GKv in the Netherlands in 1967, a programme of studies for Korean students was instituted at Kampen. Hur, who in the meantime had become a minister, was invited to participate. He agreed to come, but only at the urging of his wife, who had to stay behind in Korea with their children.

■ Equal position

In the Netherlands, Hur learned to appreciate the value of regular home visitation of members of the congregation by the elders. In addition, he especially learned to appreciate the equal position of office bearers, as a counterweight to the hierarchical system (influenced by Confucian thinking) of senior and junior ministers in the Korean churches. Both his masters' thesis and his doctoral dissertation (in 1972, under the supervision of Jakob Kamphuis) dealt with the 'full rights' of each office bearer.

■ To Australia

In 1972, after his return to Korea, Hur became a lecturer in church history at the KTS, continuing in this position until he was unexpectedly called to be a minister of the Free Reformed Church of Armadale, Western Australia. He began his ministry there in 1978. He experienced the growth of this small federation of churches, and during this period was reinforced in the Reformed view of mutual oversight and discipline among office bearers (contrary to the practice and elitist exercise of power in the Kosin churches), the blessing of sermon discussion, the maintenance of the exercise of discipline, and the equality of position among office bearers.

At the same time, he endeavoured to counter the fears held by many church members in Australia concerning the secular society around them, especially in relation to university education, by highlighting the cultural mandate of Christians and the missionary calling of believers in their own surroundings. In addition, he became a prominent advocate for the worldwide Reformed ecumene. He was one of the co-founders of the International Conference of Reformed Churches in 1982, and since that time served as a key liaison between churches in the East and the West

■ Return to Korea

In 1987, Hur returned to Korea, and took up the position of professor of church history and symbolics. In 1994 he became professor of practical theology and homiletics. As rector of the KTS, he devoted himself to campaigning on two fronts: the Reformed Confessions and independent theological training for the churches. As a lecturer in symbolics, Hur taught the Westminster Confession to his students for many years. To his great regret, the Kosin churches had only adopted the Westminster standards as recently as 1969, and as a result these churches had been adrift between pietistic-evangelical and pragmatic-American influences on the one hand, and Confucian spirituality and traditional ritualism on the other. The material that Hur brought together during his years of lecturing was revised and updated, and in 2016 it saw publication as a book about the Westminster Confession. It is very likely that this work will become the standard handbook of symbolics for the KTS.



On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Korea Theological Seminary, Professor Hur delivered a plea to hold fast to the Reformed path of Theological training, and to develop it further.

In Busan, the Theological Seminary was part of Kosin University, established by the Kosin Churches, and consisting of a number of faculties additional to theology, and including a medical faculty and teaching hospital that are highly regarded throughout Korea. It is especially this broader approach of the university, however, that in Hur's view was detrimental to the training for the ministry. He became a passionate advocate of the Korea Theological Seminary, one that was to belong to the churches, but organized separately from the University.

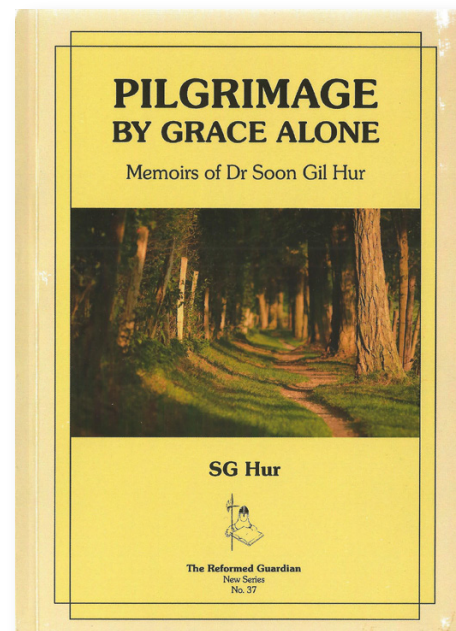
■ Zealous

Hur succeeded in having the KTS, as a training institution for ministers, moved to Cheonan, close to Seoul, in a new complex that opened in 1997. This restored the original face of the Seminary, with greater attention for the distinctive character of Reformed theology. When in October 2016 the Theological Seminary celebrated its 70th anniversary, Hur – in spite of his poor health – presented a forceful plea to separate the Seminary as a legal and organizational entity from Kosin University. In his vision, Kosin University, which by now had become almost completely secularized, ought to be transferred to a private entity, so that the Kosin churches could concentrate on the development of a Reformed Theological Seminary.

Right to the end of his life, Hur's zeal remained undiminished. When early in October 2016 I visited him at his home in Busan, he had just begun, with renewed vigour, to write a book about the Reformed Church Order. It was his hope that the Korean churches would develop, in regard to both doctrine and church polity, into Reformed Presbyterian churches. Then they would be able to confront the challenges presented by the numerous and drastic changes in Korean society, and at the same time make a contribution to Reformed mission and ecumene. This hope, however, was not fulfilled in his lifetime.

■ The Kingdom of God

The fact that he was geographically far distant from his wife when he passed away, concentrating fully on serving the church, probably characterizes his life as a servant of God. He understood that the importance of marriage and family ought to be placed within the framework of the progress of the Kingdom of God. More than once he regretfully acknowledged his lack of attention for his wife and children, and he often felt that in his choices he had sacrificed his calling as a father. We regard him as a father of many students, ministers and missionaries, with a warm heart for the cause of Christ. It is fitting for us to give thanks for the way he used his gifts and energy in the campaign for Reformed thinking in a Korean context. And we pray that his voice will still be heard and valued – even after his death – in the Kosin churches. ■



■ Note

This article was previously published in the Dutch language in *De Gereformeerde Kerkbode van Groningen, Fryslân en Drenthe*, and has been translated and reproduced with the permission of all those involved.

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

John 8:12