

David's Harp But Not His Psalm

This passage, which is originally entitled "Wel Davids luit, niet Davids lied", has been translated from: K. Schilder, *Om Woord en Kerk* (vol. 1).

...who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David... but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. -Amos 6:5-6

People who only have a song and not the lute, a psalm but not the harp, the content but not the form, pure thoughts but no pure sounds, are poor. They are also responsible for their poverty, for God's people can only be poor if they have refused the riches which God offers them.

Yet there is one thing that is poorer than poverty. That is *death*. Not only are they poor, but *dead* are those that have the lute but not the song, that have the harp but not the psalm, that have the form but not the content, that have pure sounds but not the pure thoughts. Those people are *dead*.

And so the children of Joseph were *poor*, in their ruin, when they, in exile, hung their harps on the willows by the rivers of Babylon. For they missed the harp, the harp of David. Yet the *song*, the psalm of David was born again... If I forget you, O Jerusalem!...

But the ones at ease in Zion, whom Amos addresses, were *dead*. They had not taken over the *entire* inheritance from David. They did take over the lute, the harp, the pure sound, the music, the art from David's inheritance; but they missed his song, his psalm, his sacred thought, his godliness. And then the result was terrible. The harp, the lyre, the music is never without content; they are always based upon *thoughts*. When David's *thoughts* had faded in the hearts of Israel's children, they could no longer pray like David, no longer confess like David, no longer plead for mercy like David, no longer glorify God also through song as David did. David's harp was preserved; the art remained; but instead of David's psalms, this generation idly sang songs; the sacred music gave way to dance

music, the instrument that David had invented fell into the hands of strange, profane souls and the “worldly” songs overpowered David’s sacred art. For David sings and prays and trembles about Israel’s sin and God’s justice. But these harpists and lute players do not trouble themselves over the ruin of Joseph and do not weep about the sin of Israel.

Then in every worldly tune that Amos’ contemporaries played, there was an accusation concerning the sin of those who had given up David’s harp because David’s thoughts had faded in their minds. Similarly, for us, worldly music is still always an accusation. O church, you have given up the music, the art, out of your own hands. You gave David’s harp a vacation because David’s thoughts were dormant in you.

And at the same time, Amos comes to us saying: every Davidic song seeks a beautiful form, a beautiful sound, also in worship- just as David sought. But if the form fascinates and captivates you, where is your *content*?

You, who search for a new form, or you, who stubbornly hold on to the old form, where are the *thoughts* of David in you? Where is your grief concerning Israel’s sin? Only he who knows David’s *thoughts* may reach out for his harp in order to do with the strings what is good in his eyes. Keep your *thoughts* pure and let your heart be like that of the man after God’s own heart; then your *song*, your *art-form* will come up *spontaneously* and will always remain as *fresh* as David’s. Reformation of the lyre begins with the conversion of the heart- to the God of David. Yet this too: even though you should leave David’s harp *unchanged* in its old form, but no longer think David’s thoughts, behold, then also you, who swear by David’s harp, have become a sounding brass and a clanging cymbal.

The authority of major assembly and consistory (2, final)

By: M.R. Vermeer

In the previous article the authority of a major assembly was discussed. In this article we will take a closer look at the question: what distinguishes the authority of a consistory?

Article 37 C.O.

To understand this distinction, it is good to take a closer look at article 37 C.O. (Book of Praise, 1984). During the Liberation of 1944 the Synodicals argued that the 'liberated' people undermined the authority of major assemblies with "sophistic arguments", by merely citing article 74 C.O. ('no lording') and neglecting article 37 C.O.![1]

First of all, however, it should be noted that in an older edition the Church Order (in the Netherlands prior to 1978) article 37 read:

"The classis has the same *right of say* over the consistory as the regional synod has over the classis, and the general synod over the regional synod."[2]

Thus, this article does not begin with the authority of a consistory over the congregation, and does not subsequently 'ascend' up to and including the authority of a synod! This article instead 'merely' states that the major assembly has authority. A consistory meeting is different from a classis or synod meeting, as prof. Greijdanus noted:

"A consistory consists of office-bearers, who receive their office, task, duty, and how they must carry that out, directly from God, although they were elected by the congregation. They receive their mandate, their charge, their task description, their work description not from men, but from God in His Word. Therefore, a consistory meeting is a meeting of men with an own Divine charge, of men which assemble, act and decide according to their personal duty of their office. Their acts are 'official' acts."[3]

Here is a clear distinction from the authority of a major assembly, which has a derived authority!

Jurisdiction

Secondly, it should be noted that this article does not say that the major assembly has a general authority, but that it has *a certain 'right of say'*. Prof. P. Deddens (1891-1958) pointed out that it is remarkable that the Church Order uses the words 'right of say', and not the word 'authority'.^[4] The word 'authority' alludes to the idea of 'power', while 'right of say' brings us in the sphere of the *law*: to make a judicial decision. The current edition of the Church Order thus speaks about "the same jurisdiction". The major assemblies have the (derived, ecclesiastical) authority, the competence, "*to give a lawful verdict*".

The meaning of this article is underlined by the history behind it. At the synod of Middelburg 1581 the question was brought forward whether large churches, as well as small ones, had to be subject to decisions of classes and synods. Likewise, churches or minor assemblies sometimes made decisions while neglecting decisions by major assemblies. It was against *this* practice that synod came with a statement which was similar to the current article 37.

Article 37 thus reinforces the first part of article 31 C.O.: "whatever may be agreed upon, by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding". This article warns against independentism, or as prof. Deddens said:

"[against] an unmotivated withdrawal from the obligations of the federative bond, an unmotivated going against the promise of art. 31, the agreement to consider for settled and binding decisions to which the condition of art. 31 does not apply.

Article 37 reminds us of this promise. This reminder was necessary. If large churches deemed themselves too large to listen to synod's decisions, if minor assemblies make decisions contrary to what a major assembly decided, without bringing grounded objections against these decisions, then the churches have to warn for this. (emphasis in original)"^[5]

This reinforces the first part of art. 31 C.O. - but then in such a manner that the second part of art. 31 C.O. is fully maintained: "unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order".

The authority of a consistory

The authority of a consistory is thus clearly different from the authority of a major

assembly. Rev. Joh. Jansen[6] summarized this distinction as follows:

- As to origin (a consistory has its authority given directly by Christ, while a major assembly has a derived authority);
- As to necessity (a consistory is necessary for the being of an instituted church, a major assembly is not);
- As to essence (a consistory has original and essential authority, a major assembly has derived and 'accidental' authority);
- As to duration (a consistory is continually responsible for the government of the church, a major assembly gathers at a certain moment);
- As to purpose (a consistory has an independent existence, a major assembly exists for the sake of particular churches).

Consequences

This reformed doctrine of church government has, as all sound doctrine, consequences for reformed life. The distinction between the authority of a major assembly and a consistory implies that a major assembly may not intrude in the life of a particular church to do 'what belongs to the consistory' - it is up to the *office-bearers* to spiritually govern the congregation, by the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of discipline (see art. 30 Belgic Confession).

A major assembly thus cannot execute a decision in a particular church itself, but gives her decisions as a 'binding advice', which has to be executed by the consistory (apart from the condition in art. 31 C.O.).

This church polity also has consequences for the dealings of a major assembly when there are difficulties in a particular church. It is a violation of the church of the Lord if a major assembly would intervene unauthorized and would press its own insights:

“And therefore, the classical and synodical assemblies stand under the consistory meetings, and those classis and synod assemblies have a task and duty only insofar the 'mutuus consensus', i.e. the common agreement or arrangement of churches among each other, has decided and expressed in her Church Order. Outside of this, the major assemblies have no right to intervene and act, and they miss all competence and authority - and outside of this their

deeds and decisions are not covered by its authority, which was delegated by the churches. Outside of this, they act unauthorized, illicit, and revolutionary.”[7]

To a church which no longer abides by this fully *reformed* (Scriptural) church polity, or even abuses it to exclude faithful churches or believers, the word of the Lord applies:

“Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you” (Rev. 3:3).

[1] J. Ridderbos, *Kerkscheuring: een woord over de crisis in de Gereformeerde Kerken* (Kampen: Kok, 1944), p. 11.

[2] In Dutch edition of the Church Order around 1944 this was article 36.

[3] S. Greijdanus, *Over gereformeerd kerkrecht* (Kampen: [s.n.], 1943), p. 11.

[4] P. Deddens, *De ratificering der besluiten van meerdere vergaderingen*. (Groningen: [s.n.], 1946), pp. 15-16.

[5] P. Deddens, *op. cit.*, p. 14

[6] Joh. Jansen, *Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1976 (herdruk 1^e druk 1923)), p. 167.

[7] S. Greijdanus, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

The authority of major assembly

and consistory (1)

By: M.R. Vermeer

In Reformed churches major assemblies (classis and synod) are convened regularly. Now, the question may arise: what is the authority of a major assembly? And in connection with this: what is the distinction with the authority of a consistory?

A correct, Scriptural answer to these questions is not merely a theoretical exercise, but necessary to remain truly reformed. In the history of the churches, we often see that spiritual decay goes together with deterioration in church polity. The modernism of 1834 went together with a code of regulations (Dutch: 'reglementenbundel') as a church orderly means of coercion. The 'presumptive regeneration' of 1944 was imposed by synodical hierarchy. An "erroneous path", also an erroneous *ecclesiastical* path, can be implemented though synodical or classical "arrogance and pride" (Prov. 8:13) . Thus, it is still of importance!

The authority of a major assembly

The authority of a major assembly is summarized by Rev. Joh. Jansen[1] as follows:

- Not original, but derived (through delegation from the consistories);
- Not general, but limited (only regarding ecclesiastical matters which could not be finished in the minor assemblies);
- Not higher, but less (a delegate has less authority than the delegating body);
- Not compelling, but ministering (a major assembly cannot force a minor assembly to execute the decisions);
- Not ongoing, but temporary (only for as long as the major assembly convenes);
- Not infallible, but conditional and subordinate (to God's Word).

In the church order these aspects clearly come forward, especially in art. 30 ('no

other than ecclesiastical matters and that in an ecclesiastical manner'), art. 32 ('delegates') and art. 74 ('no church shall in any way lord it over other churches').

Derived authority

The authority of the major assembly is thus a *derived* authority; from this it follows that the major assemblies may not rule over the churches unless the churches would transfer this right (of ruling) to the major assemblies. In art. 74 C.O., however, the churches have agreed together *not* to do this: "*No church shall in any way lord it over other churches*".

Consequently, art. 74 C.O. is of fundamental importance for the cooperation in a church federation, as noted by Prof. S. Greijdanus around the time of the Liberation of 1944:

"The one church may be larger than the other, richer in excellent persons and gifts, but that does not give her any right to lord, or power to rule, over another. And what applies to the one church in this respect, also applies to the other, and all others, and therefore to all of them together. 10 x 0 and 20 x 0 is just as much 0 as 1 x 0. Whenever the one church does not have any say over another, and this is true of all of them, then neither do these churches have any say of authority over another church when they come together in a classis meeting or synod." [2]

Thus, all synodical and classical hierarchy is rejected with this article!

Delegation

The major assemblies have a derived authority because they come into existence through delegation from the churches. The classes and synods are thereby, strictly speaking, not a gathering of churches, but of *delegates* from churches. The major assembly can only be called 'churches' in a metaphorical manner, because in her the churches are represented by delegates.

Neither are these major assemblies meetings of office bearers. A good rule is that ministers and elders are sent as delegates, a rule that is also established in the church order (art. 44 C.O.). Yet, these office bearers are present at a classis or

synod by virtue of delegation and not by virtue of their office. The delegates are, of course, accountable as office bearers for their decisions and dealings at the major assemblies.

Derived ecclesiastical authority

Major assemblies therefore have no authority as an office bearer over the churches, but a derived ecclesiastical authority, as Prof. Greijdanus noted:

“From this it follows, that classical and synodical meetings are not the same as consistory meetings. There is a difference in essence or kind between consistories on the one side, and classes and synods on the other side. They are different in nature. In consistory meetings the several consistory members are present due to their office. They belong to those consistories by virtue of their office, and according to their office they are members of their consistories, and they have to speak and act in their consistories according, or by virtue of, their office. Their deeds are office bearer’s acts, with an ‘official authority’. At classis meetings or synods, however, the members are by virtue of delegation. (...) Their deeds at a classis meeting or synod are not ‘office bearers acts’, with ‘official’ authority. They act as representatives of their churches or major assemblies, and insofar with the authority of their churches. But an ecclesiastical authority is not a Divine authority. At regional synods the ecclesiastical cord is, so to speak, further stretched out, and at general synods even more so.”[3]

Hereby prof. Greijdanus made the following call to synod delegates (which of course also applies to delegates to classis):

“This should not be forgotten by synod delegates. They should even more meticulously give heed to the life and well-being of the churches, not to follow and push through one’s own will and desire, but to realize that they are present by virtue of a cascaded delegation and not by virtue of their being an office-bearer, as by own authority. Synodical arrogance, which acts with rebuke and reprimand towards churches which request information or bring forward considerations has no place here. Synods have no original, own authority which is independent from, and superior to the churches; but only a derived, delegated jurisdiction. The original authority in this has been given to

the churches.”[4]

Hierarchical spirit

A hierarchical spirit can manifest itself in several manners in church life, a few examples are:

- A classis or synod has planned ‘continuing sessions’ with an expanding agenda. Such a classis or synod behaves as if it were a consistory meeting with its own independent authority
- A delegate at classis or synod proposes to deal with a matter which has not come from the churches to be put on the agenda. Such a delegate acts as if he has a general ‘official authority’ at the major assembly.
- A major assembly which operates in a local church with difficulties ‘to set matters straight’, against the will of consistory. Such a course of action is lording over another church.

A hierarchical spirit can also be present in a more hidden way, for example through committee members, deputies or advisers claiming a prominent role in church life. The danger here is that ‘self-continuation’ of major assemblies enters through the back door. It also does not encourage delegates at classis or synod to thoroughly study the items on the agenda themselves.

In a following article, the authority of a consistory in distinction from a major assembly will be discussed.

[1] Joh. Jansen, *Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1976 (reprint 1st ed. 1923)), pp. 165-166.

[2] S. Greijdanus, *Over gereformeerd kerkrecht* (Kampen: [s.n.], 1943), p. 1. The booklet ‘Over gereformeerd kerkrecht’ (English: ‘About Reformed Church Polity’) was intended by Greijdanus to function as the last chapter of a manuscript called ‘Church Political Studies’; this manuscript, however, has not been published and has been added to the archive of Greijdanus no sooner than 1997 [see D. Deddens, ‘Het manuscript ‘Kerkrechtelijke studiën’. Greijdanus over gereformeerd kerkrecht’, in: G. Harinck et al., *Leven en werk van prof. dr. Seakle*

Greijdanus (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1998), p. 233]. This booklet thus provides the more or less ‘conclusive’ thoughts of Greijdanus regarding church polity.

[3] Greijdanus, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[4] *Ibid.*

Article 31 in a crisis?

By: M.R. Vermeer

A church member or consistory may be convinced that a decision of a major assembly (e.g. a classis) goes against God’s Word or the Church Order. We then arrive at an article in the Church Order with a special history in the Reformed Churches: article 31, which says that a decision “shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order”.

Relevance for today

This article is especially relevant for today since in De Gereformeerde Kerken (The Reformed Churches) the consistory of DGK Mariënberg appealed to the next major assembly (classis South-West), whereupon the General Synod was set at an earlier date than originally planned. In the meantime, this synod has judged, according to a ‘statement’ it published, that this consistory shows “a spirit of independentism”. It has not been made clear what this independentism entails, except that this consistory refused “to consider decisions as settled and binding and to execute them” and subsequently “continually appealed to the Church Order and Church Polity”.

Thus, here we have a consistory which is supposedly ‘independentist’ while it appeals “to the Church Order and Church Polity” – quite a strange combination.

What else could and should this consistory have done if it was convinced that a decision went against God's Word or the Church Order? Or is article 31 in a crisis?

As well: what kind of situation arises when a consistory appeals to a major assembly? Is article 31 C.O. still a beneficial instrument to break through an ecclesiastical crisis?

Not binding

A consistory which is convinced that a decision goes against God's Word or the Church Order should immediately reject this decision. In the days of the Liberation of 1944 (in the Netherlands) the 'synodicals' turned the 'unless' of article 31 into an 'until', which implies that a decision is binding until a major assembly judges that it was unscriptural or went against the Church Order. In article 31, however, there clearly is an 'unless', which was pointed out extensively by reformed ministers:

"No, the liberated say, if a consistory - and also a church member - after serious inquiry *itself* considers proven that a decision is not scriptural, it should immediately hold such a decision as not-settled-and-binding. Of course in such a manner that it immediately appeals to the major assemblies with this evidence." [1]

For this an appeal could be made to the Church Polity of the Doleantie (1886), of which prof. F.L. Rutgers (1836-1917) was an important defender. Over and against Rutgers it was disputed whether a consistory ultimately itself could decide whether a decision was according to God's Word. According to Rutgers, this was definitely the case:

"According to Rutgers this was, however, the *core* of the matter and thus the *main point* of his argument. If a consistory says towards a major assembly: your decision is not according to God's Word - which of course should be *proven* - then there will almost always rise a difference of opinion between such a major assembly, which took the decisions under the conviction that it was according to God's Word, and the consistory, which pertinently denies this. The parties then stand sharply against each other. And in such a situation, according to Rutgers, the consistory should *itself* decide. Thus, in

holding for settled-and-binding the consistory speaks the final word.” [2]

Thus a consistory which itself finds that a decision goes against God’s Word or the Church Order can and should do nothing but hold this for not-settled-and-binding and appeal to the major assembly.

Interim situation

A consistory which appeals to a major assembly cannot be forced to execute the disputed decision. An interim situation exists during the appeal procedure, on which a synod committee in the past commented:

“That Word binds, even in the conscience, but also makes free from all human lording over each other. No ecclesiastical assembly can step between Christ and the members of His church, no ecclesiastical decision can ever force these members to leave the road of God’s Word and the Reformed C.O. But an ecclesiastical decision, which is deemed to be wrong, neither forces a member of Christ’s church to leave the federation ‘for the sake of order’. He may continue to walk on the way of the Word and the C.O. He may make himself free, and know himself to be free, from sinful decisions. And in the meantime, he may present the evidence of the injustice to the ecclesiastical assemblies. In this manner, art. 31 points the road to preserve the unity and the federation, under the authority of God’s Word, which establishes and recovers fellowship.” [3]

In such a situation the ‘ethics and technique’ of being concerned (as it was called by this committee) is of importance. For this no rules are provided in the Church Order, which is no code of regulations after all! These rules are provided in the Holy Scripture, and then (as this committee rightly remarked) “not by a separate instruction, but in the entire Scripture, which provides an abundance for every good work” (see e.g. Galatians 5). We can add to this, to prevent misunderstandings: a Scriptural ‘ethics and technique’ should be followed by all parties!

Based on this ‘ethics’, a minister will not immediately ignore his (temporary) suspension and act against it, but will go the ecclesiastical route. Based on this ‘ethics’ it is also incorrect to reproach a consistory as having an ‘unwilling attitude’ because it does *not* ignore a classical ‘mediation trajectory’, but goes an

ecclesiastical route.

Not yet definitive

In such an interim situation the situation is not yet definitive. Prof. Kamphuis has pointed this out with regards to the suspension of a minister without approval of the neighbouring consistory (see art. 71 C.O.). We will not discuss this situation here, but the remarks by prof. Kamphuis are also of importance in case a consistory appeals to the next court of appeal:

“No, if a consistory is bound by God’s Word to say ‘no’ to the judgment of a neighbouring church, or possibly the classis, he will appeal to the classis, or possibly the regional synod. In this situation there is, according to its judgment, a far-reaching case of injustice, of unrighteousness. An appeal is – fortunately! – still possible. At the same time, this implies that in this appeal to the broader sphere of churches, which assemble in this major assembly, also the bond with these churches, with which one is in conflict, has been maintained. Because the decision of the major assembly can serve to bring all the churches, which have been divided, again together in obedience to God’s revealed will.

The appeal and the possibility of appeal to the major assembly thus always implies that the situation in a smaller sphere is not yet definitive. Also when we keep in mind the difference between decisions of a major assembly in general and the judgment of a neighbouring church as deemed necessary in art. 71 C.O., yet it can be maintained that an appeal marks an ‘interim situation’”. [4]

Applied to the specific situation at Mariënberg this implies, among others, that it is incorrect that classis North-East connected far-reaching consequences (*viz.* placing DGK Mariënberg outside the federation and acknowledging a schismatic group) to (an own interpretation of) the acting of a consistory, while this consistory stayed faithfully within the federation and appealed to the next major assembly.

In the judgment (in Greek: *krima*, crisis) which begins at the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17), article 31 C.O. is a preserving salt – now that the salt has lost its flavor, how will you season it?

[1] C. Veenhof, *Om de Unica Catholica* - Een beschouwing over de positie van de bezwaarden onder en over de synodocratie (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1949), p. 316.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 317.

[3] *Acta GS Spakenburg 1958-1959*, bijlage VII and *Acta GS Arnhem 1981*, art. 73.1.

[4] J. Kamphuis, *Verkenningen III* - Kerk en kerkrecht (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1966), p. 150.

Helping to Build His Church

In this article, an introduction is given to the book of Haggai. It has previously appeared in the magazine "Shield and Sword" and has been taken over with permission from the author.[1]

We do not know much about Haggai as a person, other than that he was a prophet. It is not known who his father was, where he came from or where he lived. The name 'Haggai' means: 'he that is born on a festal day'. Just as the prophets Zechariah and Malachi, Haggai prophesied after the tribe of Judah was freed from captivity in Babylon.

The Jewish people had begun to rebuild the temple in the year 537 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua. However, after some time the work was

halted due to opposition by the inhabitants of the land, the Samaritans. They achieved this through Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who gave a command to stop the building and *'by force of arms made them cease'* (Ezra 4:23).

This situation lasted for about fifteen years. The rebuilding remained at a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius, the king of Persia (Ezra 4:24). Then Haggai and Zechariah prophesied in the name of the God of Israel (Ezra 5:1). This was in the year 520 B.C. Zerubbabel and Joshua, who were still leaders of the people, listened and began to encourage the people to resume the building again. After four years, the temple was completed.

The book of the prophet Haggai contains four prophecies. Haggai prophesied all four of these in the year 520. The first on the first day of the sixth month (a feast day, the New Moon), often celebrated on the 29th of August, the second on the twenty-first day of the seventh month (the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles), often set on the 17th of October, the third and fourth on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, often set on the 18th of December.

First Prophecy

In the first prophecy the prophet calls the leaders and the people in the name of the Lord to resume the building of the temple. Due to pressure of the circumstances this had been halted. There were the continual plots of the hostile Samaritans (Ezra 4 and 5). There were also their own concerns, there was poor harvest (Haggai 1:6, 10 and 11), and there was still so much to do for their own homes that, or so they thought, they did not get around to giving much thought for the house of the Lord.

However, the motives of the people are swept off the table by the prophet. It is striking that Haggai does not name their enemies, but places the guilt with the Jews themselves for neglecting to rebuild the temple. The harvest was so poor,

precisely because the temple was not being rebuilt. The people had to be reminded that life can only be blessed from out of the temple, the House of the LORD.

The leaders of the people listened to the warning of the LORD, and again began to build the temple.

Also in our age our lives must stand in the light of building the church. That is more important than building our own luxurious life. What matters is *how* we build. In connection to this I quote the following by Prof. B. Holwerda:

'What is the only thing we can do today? What shall we chase after? The apostate church grasps for honor and power, riches and wealth, influence and prestige; and she denies her Husband and sells herself to everyone. However, the true church and the true members, they are not noticed in the world; they do not receive power or honor. Quietly and simply they go about their way. Yet they pursue righteousness, doing the will of Christ. And when the splendor of the harlot goes up in flames, the Bride of Christ appears without blemish or wrinkle, in the shining garment of good works.'

Therefore, there is only one important thing today. We no longer must dream of a position of power or prestige. This can be attained only by committing adultery. Sometimes you still find that among us: we have to do something! Build an organization for this or that. Attempt to make an influence and win over the world for Christ. Let us not drink a drink of illusions: we will not win over the world; the antichrist conquers the world. The apostate church which is not faithful to Christ and to her own children will have influence; but the true church is always plundered, slaughtered. What only is important? Not that our businessmen make profit, but that they do the will of Christ in their place. Not that our workers attain a higher standard of living, but that they are zealous in good works. If only God's will has dominion in our families and in all other relationships; then the rest does not matter.'

Today the important question is, whether we are truly church, and whether each one of us as living member manifests in his good works the pattern of the true church.

For they are the future. Of them it is written: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' Only this is important: that they cling to the Lord Jesus in times such as these. The important thing is that the church holds fast to the grace of the Liberation and that this grace receives more access in all of our lives. All that is important consists in this: that we in this anti-Christian world, wherein the universal church commits adultery, that we keep ourselves clean and pure for Christ'. (from: De kerk in het eindgericht, 1950).

Second Prophecy

The second prophecy contains an encouragement with an eye to the question that the Jews who still remembered the first temple asked, namely, whether the LORD would be pleased to dwell in this temple with His people. The first temple was indeed much more beautiful. Upon this the Lord answers: *'Be strong and work, for I am with you'*.

The glory of the second temple would even be greater than the first one. Christ was physically present in this temple during His walk on earth. However, the perspective reaches beyond the second temple, which was also a building of stone. The Lord now wants to see the temple of living stones being built in this world according to His purpose, in accordance with His Word. And He will make this spiritual temple grow into God's priestly kingdom in heavenly glory. That is the coming salvation of the Lord.

We are encouraged through this as well. Perhaps we may sometimes ask ourselves what is to become of the true church in the Netherlands now that the church has become so small. Let us then think of the words of the Lord Jesus: *'For*

where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20).

Rev. Joh. Francke wrote a devotional about this text from which I quote:

'to lawfully meet as church, as long as those two or three gather on a lawful basis.

Thus Christ does not say: there must be at least two or three, otherwise I will not be there in their midst, but He said: 'if only two or three gather in My name...'. In other words: that gathering does not depend on numbers. For example, there can be a thousand people gathered in a church building but without a lawful basis; at the same time a small number (two or three) in a living room though on a lawful church basis. And then it is not an unanswered question where Christ is present with His salvation. (...)

Yes, in the eyes of man, the church can become an obsolete thing: two or three. But these two or three are encouraged by the Head of the Church: if only they remain in the pure Word, Christ is in their midst. And that is everything!

*No, Christ does not seek small numbers. He seeks the great multitude that no one can number! But He does not despise the small number which remains and gathers them in in a certain time here and there, locally and nationwide. Therefore, we may not shudder when we, who remain faithful to Christ's Word, remain at two or three! Christ will fully comfort those two or three who gather in His name. Is that not enough and wonderful?' (from: *Leven tot in eeuwigheid*, 1973).*

Third Prophecy

In the third prophecy, the people are told that they are impure due to the negligence in building the temple, and that therefore everything was defiled. However, now that they have again begun to work they are blessed again, but not on the basis of their faithfulness but only on the basis of God's favor.

This also has something to say to us: Church sin is contagious and it works through all of life. Let us be watchful that we are not negligent in the upbuilding of the church. In this connection I once again quote from Rev. Joh. Francke's devotional on Matt. 18:20:

'The church may and can be ensured of Christ's central presence when in all things she only binds herself to God's Word. She must be completely lawful in her foundation and the church must continually examine herself in this.'

This Word of Christ is therefore not meant for personal conversations, conventicles and conferences, but it is meant for His church. And when one does not bind himself to the preaching, church discipline, prayer and to the communion of saints to God's Word, it is self-deception to say: 'Jesus is in our midst!'

Whoever does not unite together and remain united on lawful grounds, does not have Christ in their midst. And to lack this central presence in the church or any other place is the greatest disaster that can be imagined. Whoever loses Christ, loses everything! One can very well shout: 'See, here is the Christ! Look, there is the Christ' but He does not let Himself be pushed or forced to go anywhere. He only comes with His holy presence there where His people, His children gather in accordance to His Word and His rule of law.

Today a terrible game is being played with the Word of the Savior. It is often intended very well and it is seriously meant, yet it is not about good intentions, well-meant or not, but about Scriptural unity with Christ. Whoever calls themselves, let them examine their own gathering!

In the church, the central presence of Jesus Christ makes her faithful as well as strong, strong to withstand Satan, to expel the world from the church and to crucify his own flesh.

*No, the number does not determine the strength of the church, neither of having a lot of money nor having an agreement among members about their spiritual unity. It is only Christ with His Word and Spirit that determines what is church. And it has been the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom to that 'little flock' (from: *Leven tot in eeuwigheid*, 1973).*

Fourth Prophecy

Just as had happened in the second prophecy (Haggai 2:7-10), in the fourth prophecy an eschatological perspective is sketched (Hebrews 12:26 f.). Through God's divine judgments in the Old and New Testaments the temple of the LORD is built, until the day of the second coming of Christ, for God uses judgment and catastrophes to build the church in this world. Then God's temple will be completed. In this way world history must serve church history. And God requires us to help build His Church. And so the glory of God's completed temple will come. God Himself will dwell among His people.

'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will no longer be any death...' (Rev. 21:4a).

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