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“PREACH THE WORD” (2 Timothy 4:2)

REFORMED PREACHING AND MODERN EXEMPLARISM

Introduction

About half a century ago there was a survival of Reformed preaching in the Netherlands. More attention was paid then to the history of redemption and Christological preaching.

It came to attention as a Scripturally-based protest against a method of explaining the Bible and preaching which hindered a good understanding and use of Scripture.

The redemptive-historical method, which is required by Scripture itself, stands opposed to the so-called *exemplary method*. What exactly was the exemplary method? Briefly, it was a method of considering the meaning of all kinds of moments in biblical history in such a way that we as believers receive an *example* of how we are or are not to act. Especially persons in Biblical History were considered as examples for later generations.

In the early 1930s already, K. Schilder stimulated an approach to Scripture quite different from the exemplary approach. He wrote, for example, *Here and there we still encounter Lenten sermons in which the figures around Christ receive the primary attention. There is the talk of Judas, Peter, Pilate, Herod, the Sanhedrin, Mary, etc... (their inner conflict, their comfort, their hardening hearts), while the first and foremost question is forgotten, namely what Christ has done, what God has let his Son experience, what the Son has experienced in and through the actions of those figures around him (Schilder, 1930: 204)*. In a speech of 1942, the late Prof. B. Holwerda also mentioned several illustrations of the exemplary method. For instance, Abraham's temptation of Genesis 22, the offering of Isaac, is an example for our struggle of faith. The purpose of Elijah's prayer is that we have to learn to pray in the same way. A sermon on John 20:24-29 concerning Thomas must be a sermon on doubt, and so on (Holwerda, 1983:12; Van 't Veer, 1983:5).

While Schilder and Holwerda protested the exemplary method they did not deny that this method could make true remarks: pointing to certain texts can lead to an explanation of affirmation of what Scripture teaches us in other texts. But the question was and still is whether the exemplary method did full justice to a text by demonstrating the place, significance, the function of that specific text within the complete revelation of salvation in Jesus Christ? Clearly it did not. Too often, not God's work of redemption in Jesus Christ was the focal point, but *men*, pious men, doubting men, Christian men, with all their problems and troubles were in the centre. The Lord Jesus Christ was not being preached as Saviour and Redeemer, but persons in the Bible were being portrayed as examples for us.

Many sermons and meditations of the past half century underline the weakness and impoverished nature of the exemplary method. Look at the following two examples. Jesus Christ's attendance at the wedding feast at Cana was often used for wedding ceremonies in this way: young couples today ought to invite Jesus to their wedding party. He ought to be present at our marriage feasts. His presence ought to influence our behaviour at a convocation of family and friends. Another example is that

of the two men on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:13-25). An exemplary sermon would go something along these lines: our heart must be burning in the same way as the hearts of the men of Emmaus. That is possible when Christ accompanies us on our way. Sometimes two of you may be walking along just like these men. If Jesus came, would you be ashamed of your conversation? For that matter, when you are alone, are you thinking about Jesus? The problem with such an exemplary approach is that the specific moment in the history of salvation and redemption is neglected. The result is a loss of depth and a generalization of the very special and specific point with which the Holy Spirit wants to touch and to move us. Therefore there was actually a plea for the *redemptive-historical* method in the time of Schilder and Holwerda, over against the exemplary approach (Arnold, 1984:82ff.).

Two forms

The old exemplary method actually had two different forms. We can speak of '*mere exemplarism*' and '*synthetic exemplarism*.' The first method totally neglects the history of salvation and redemption because each story is treated as an independent story. The second method acknowledges, at least theoretically, the significance of the redemptive-historical moment, but when it comes to the practical application of the relevant passage of Scripture, it turns again to delivering general examples. It tries to combine two contradictory methods, which is impossible.

An example of mere exemplarism can be taken from a sermon on Mark 6:46b, *He went up on the mountain to pray*. The sermon does not speak about what Christ is doing for us, but what we have to do and how well behaved our life ought to be. The theme of the sermon is 'solitude' and the three heads are: 1. The fact that solitude must be sought; 2. The place where solitude must be sought; 3. The reason why solitude must be sought.

An example of synthetic exemplarism can be taken from a sermon on Daniel 5:25-28, *Mene, mene, tekel, parsin*. First this sermon speaks about the struggle between God and Satan, between Christ and the devil. However, after the preacher has said some good things from the text, he jumps suddenly to a statement such as, "The highest God is our Judge as well. He will judge us." Then comes another jump, "He will judge us as Reformed Churches; let us not be careless and self-sufficient!" Then follows yet another jump, "What about us, if God's judgment comes to us personally? You may see it or not, my hearer, but the fingers of a man's hand appeared in your life and wrote on the plaster of the wall of your home. Who would not be alarmed? Those in whom God works renewal of life! They say by themselves: numbered and brought to an end!" (Arnold, 1984:82ff.).

Synthetic exemplarism is still very much alive. We discover it in all kinds of Biblicism today, especially in *fundamentalism*, originating in the U.S.A. Of course we cheer on the struggle of the fundamentalists against liberalism, but unfortunately so many fundamentalists have no eye for the progress of God's revelation, and do not see the development of redemptive history. A fundamentalist may preach on a certain text, try to understand that text in its historical framework and background, but then suddenly jump to the situation of the present time.

The present time

Careful attention ought to be directed to the fact that there is a new type of exemplarism, born in recent years and taking off in a different direction from former exemplarism. This new type of exemplarism uses the Bible for all kinds of *revolution*,

and leads to the theology of revolution. This was evident already twenty years ago in the reports of Uppsala, 1966 of the W.C.C. Young people who wanted to disturb the established order and structures of society said: "We follow Jesus the great revolutionary: he overturned the tables of the money-changers and pigeon-sellers (Matthew 21:12) and he spoke so sharply against the highly esteemed Jewish leaders!" This Jesus is their great example for subversive actions and impertinent demonstrations! They point also to the *prophets*. Did not the prophet Amos condemn very sharply the capitalistic man of Samaria? Did not Isaiah and Zephaniah put into the pillory esteemed men and women who filled their houses with blood and fraud? Furthermore, do not the Psalms complain of the oppression of the underdog? Do not the imprecatory Psalms receive renewed impetus, fighting against the oppression of minorities, against colonialists and against rich industrialists? (Schilder, 1974:41).

Of course the interpretations of the new breed of exemplarism are easily refuted. Jesus Christ purified the temple in order to restore it to what it had to be: a house of prayer — a house of God. Christ's actions were not revolution but reformation. Similarly, the prophets of the Old Testament did not lead a class-struggle and did not plead for a policy of division of incomes, but warned the people of all levels, high and low, against apostasy within God's covenant: in social, cultural and political life. As for the Psalms, their references to the poor must be seen in the light of those who are 'miserable' and 'humble' before God, while the arrogant oppressors and persecutors are those who neglect and misjudge the covenant of the LORD. Everything in Scripture must be placed within the framework of God's covenant with his people. There is no mention of this in the mouths of the revolutionary youths who quote the above texts. So clear is all of this to those who follow the redemptive-historical method that this new breed of exemplarism is not taken very seriously.

However the matter is more important and serious than it appears. Today's exemplarism may be superficial but it is in a certain way penetrating. It pays attention to the often neglected Old Testament and causes the modern man to improve, protect and secure life for the future. Therefore this approach to interpreting Scripture which has its roots in an older form of exemplarism and which has become very popular today, ought not to be taken lightly. It has no appreciation for what should be first and foremost in Biblical preaching: the place, significance and function of Biblical persons in the redemptive-history of God's salvation in Christ.

Differences

It can be asked: is there a great difference between modern exemplarism and that which has been delivered in sermons for a long time? Did revolutionary young people derive their method from preaching which they heard as they were growing up? Just think of the *negro spirituals* which are not readily connected with contemporary revolutionary doctrine and practice. Negro spirituals often articulated the black understanding of Jahweh, Moses, Jesus Christ and many other persons of the Bible. They sang about the Jordan River, Elijah's ascension, Daniel's rescue from the lion's den, the rescue of Daniel's friends from the fire, the rescue of Paul and Silas from prison, and many other similar stories of the Bible. Such songs were entitled, "Go Down, Moses," "Deep River," "O Freedom, Freedom Over Me," "Mary Had a Baby," "Were You There?" and "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen." They have been sung already for decades. These spirituals were often applied to situations of slavery and redemption from slavery. This was not the only point in these songs. There was an eye for the redemptive-historical place which certain events have in the Bible. Many negro songs speak also of redemption of sinners by the blood of Jesus Christ.

However exemplarism was clearly manifest in negro spirituals. This was due to the influence of white preachers. Paul Breman writes in his book, *Spirituals* (p. 31): *It must be the most directly appealing passages of the Scripture, which were related to their own situation, which had been picked up and worked out. The slavery of the Israelites, the promised land, the difficulties in the desert were also to the white people of the frontier areas seizing and understandable subjects, which found expression in countless songs* (Breman, 1959: 31). Keep in mind that this author speaks about white people. But this is connected with the intricate investigation of the origin of negro spirituals. Most of the white preachers were Methodists. That means their influence on the negroes was of a strongly pietistic and Arminian nature, where *men*, with their doubts and struggles, received an unscriptural place. Consequently the negro spirituals were saturated with an exemplaric use of the Scriptures. In fact, often a direct equation was made between the bondage of Israel and the miseries of negro slavery in America. For further study on this point read the book of H.R. Rookmaaker, *Jazz, Blues, Spirituals*, in which he teaches that negro spirituals originate from the newer methodist hymns of John Wesley (Rookmaaker, 1960, passim).

In recent years there has been a marked revival of interest in the negro spirituals by those who use Scripture for revolutionary purposes. So there is definitely a connection between modern exemplarism and what young revolutionaries have been hearing from the pulpits. The connection between the two is quite clear. The struggle against racism often has a revolutionary character. In this struggle the Bible plays an important role. Think of the familiar prophetic text of Isaiah 40 verses 4 and 5: *Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.* These and similar passages receive an important place in the demonstrations of black people. Think of a famous speech of Martin Luther King who interpreted these words of Isaiah as his "dream," his perspective of peace between black and white people and complete equality between them. Here the passage of Isaiah is treated in an exemplaric fashion as the element of liberation is lifted out. In fact, the liberation and redemption of sinners and their gathering as the people of the Lord is taken as an example of the liberation of black people. It is totally disregarded that Isaiah speaks of a liberation from God's judgement; Instead it is made into a liberation from oppression of other people. The redemptive-historical salvation of the Church is transformed into a liberation of groups of men at different points in history. (Van Dam, 1984:10ff.).

Theology of Revolution

The theology of revolution is a very large and broad field of study. This theology wishes to speak about more than the examples of Jesus, Amos and Isaiah. It wishes to comprehend the whole Bible and the whole development of culture and the whole history of all ages in one single group. One could object: this is no longer exemplarism, for exemplarism isolates one fact from its historical Biblical context. Yet it is exemplarism (Schilder, 1974:81). Because now it involves more than just pious men as examples: it is a comparison of the *changes in history*, in which we live together as citizens of the world with social and structural revolution and historical, stimulating powers. The present world is changing very quickly, a world in which everything is going to be unsettled and must be unsettled, as the one condition for a better world. This is accompanied by *spiritual crises* which are obviously very hard on the older generation which is used to familiar patterns. However it is also very hard on the

younger generation, which sees itself standing before a chaos with no way out. In such a situation of despair young and old alike are looking for help.

Therefore just as in earlier days when people tried to struggle with certain problems in their life by finding examples in Scripture of people who were confronted with similar struggles, so today, especially the youth use exactly the same method when confronted by the great emptiness and despair all around them. Today's problems are numerous and they are universal. Therefore in the chaos of transition to a new and unknown world, people appeal to the Bible for help in a way that is similar to previous generations. A modern theologian might say: "Let the people of Israel be our example. According to the Scriptures, Israel was always enroute to something new and better. Israel was called to go out, towards an unknown future, without the familiarity of trustworthy patterns, leaving behind the familiar religious, social and political structures. Israel travelled on to an unknown country." Thus people are urged to believe in a God who is not bound to one place but is mobile and teaches one to be mobile (cf. Wielenga, 1971:163).

Harvey Cox

Harvey Cox is typical of the radical new American theologians. He wrote *The Secular City, Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*, 1965. Four years later he wrote *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy*. Harvey Cox called the first book more Apollonian and the second more Dionysian. In the first book he wrote: *The starting point for any theology of the church today must be a theology of social change. . . The Symbol of the secular city provides the starting point. . . Secularization denotes the removal of juvenile dependence from every level of a society; urbanization designates the fashioning of new patterns of human reciprocity* (Cox, 1969:91ff.). In the second book Harvey Cox does not revoke his earlier work: *This book is intended as a companion piece to the earlier work, not as a recantation. Politically, for example, I have become considerably more radical. . .* (Cox 1970 VII). It is remarkable that Cox often quoted Martin Luther King in his books; there is certainly a relationship between Cox and Negro spirituals. He writes that God liberates captured people from economic and political slavery. He did not liberate them into a certain form of inward tolerance or spiritual liberation. It is not enough to say: "Inward, in my soul, I am free." Instead liberation opens for them the way to a new political and economic existence in the world. For instance, the exodus of Moses' day when the Israelites were freed from their slavery to Pharaoh and led out of Egypt is a *blue print*, an *example*, for every kind of exodus thereafter. The whole treatise of Biblical data must be substructured by the vision of the mobile God who demands mobility of his people, to break off by revolution the old structures, and to realize a new society in a world made by man — the secular city.

It has been said that Harvey Cox professed a form of conversion during the 1980s in his book, *Religion in the Secular City*. Now he says that the technopolis is the hope of the future failed. Now he denounces modern theology. It appears to be a conversion but that is not really so. His new religion is called 'post-modernist.' He draws attention to the cultural dimensions of theology and how man's beliefs are to translate into *action*. But in spite of his talk of post-modernism, he is still a modernist, only the emphasis is on action. The theology of Harvey Cox is really an extension of liberation theology (cf. Marsden, 1984:3ff.).

Dorothee Sölle

There has been a remarkable development in modern theology over the last few decades. Those who started off as liberals, raising the slogans of the French Revolution, not so surprisingly arrived at *communism*. Many theologians such as Harvey Cox travelled via liberal theology to the “Entmythologisierung” of Rudolf Bultmann who said *God presents himself in the encounter with our neighbour*. They travelled via the ‘God is dead’ theology of J.A.T. Robinson who said, *God is the predicate of love, he is to be known in the neighbour and the neighbour is to be known in God*. They travelled via the ideas of Paul van Buren who said, *Only those pronouncements of the Bible are credible, which could be verified in the practice of co-humanity*. They travelled via the theology of revolution and liberation to what is essentially nothing other than a politicized neo-Marxist philosophy, critical of society. When Harvey Cox now says that only action counts, his intention is to base his post-modern theology not on the Scriptures but on the poor, and thus, not the poor of the church but the poor of the world. The poor must be at the centre of attention and the theology which focuses on them will be characterized by sacralism and radicalism (cf. Deddens/Drost, 1989:44ff.).

It is remarkable that the expression of Harvey Cox, *Only action counts*, was also used by revolutionary Dorothee Sölle, in her 1968 book, *Gottesdienst als Aktion*. She dared to say things like, *God is not dead, but God is red, and we meet God in our neighbour*. As for preaching Dorothee Sölle is of the opinion that ministers must not preach to people but inform them. Information must be given as to the deeper background of what ails this society. There must be an analysis of the real state of this society. There must be a protest against existing relationships, and a plan of action to change those relationships thoroughly, to change the present structures of society.

As far as her confession is concerned, I point to chapter IV of this book concerning *Current streams in modern liturgy*.

Feminism

Obviously it does not come as a big surprise that *feminism* should pick up on exemplary meditations. In a meditation about the song of Mary, Dorothee Sölle shows how this is an example for the modern woman. Mary herself is an example in these women:

It has been written that Mary said: He has shown strength with his arm,
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree.
We say it now in this way:
We shall expropriate our owners and laugh at those who claim to know the female being.

The leadership of male over female will come to an end!
It has been written that Mary said: He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.
He has remembered his servant Israel,
In remembrance of his mercy.

We say it now in this way:
Women will travel to the moon and will make decisions in parliament,
Their desire of self-determination will be satisfied,
The hunger for power will be nourished,

Every ground of their anxiety will disappear,
They will not be exploited any longer!

This is an example of how feminism uses Scripture in an exemplary fashion. Feminists insist that critical women are to read the books of Exodus and those that follow with their own eyes. Then they will be conscious of the disobedience of women to authorities and that Moses liberated his people from Egypt. Moses' sister exhorted Pharaoh's daughter to adopt Moses as her own child. Pharaoh's daughter was disobedient to him. Mirjam went in front of the revolution according to Numbers 12. These creative and disobedient women are stimulating examples, as well as Deborah, Hulda and many other women of the Old and New Testament (cf. Arnold, 1984:84).

Christian Rock

Sometimes, instead of using special persons in the Bible as examples, certain expressions or images are extrapolated in an exemplaric fashion. This is done for instance by young rock and roll performers who call themselves Christian.

One example is the group U2, formed in the late seventies in Dublin, Ireland. They pretend to have a Christian message in their songs. The main song of their latest album is:

I believe in the Kingdom Come
Then all the colours will bleed into one
But yes I'm still running
You broke the bonds
You loosed the chains
You carried the cross
And my shame
You know I believe it
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.

One member of the group said, "To me truth is between there and there. So I look for images, not lines." Another one added, "God forbid if we ever found what we were looking for. What a horrible experience that would be!"

This is not Biblical Christianity, but the false modern concept (promoted by liberal theologians that truth is always evolving and never constant. It sounds humble, but is in reality a very haughty stand over against God who 'has spoken to us by a Son' (Hebrews 1:2) and completed His revelation to His people. If we cannot find it today, we never will indeed! Despite all its Biblical imagery and poignant appeals, U2 does not bring the joyous message of salvation in Jesus Christ as it has been revealed in the Scriptures. True faith is a sure knowledge and a firm confidence that the Word of God is trustworthy and that Christ has indeed died for us on the cross. This jubilant certainty which must characterize Christian music is not found with U2 (Stam, 1987:22).

New and Old

The new breed of exemplarism is gaining popularity all over the world. It is often defiant and revolutionary: God and men marching together; God is in movement and man is in movement and the Church is in movement; here is the meaning of "God with us." There is an inflammatory and an even poetic-prophetic element to this exemplarism. It may seem to be completely different from the exemplarism of half a century ago, but that is not so. Indeed, they are totally different with respect to acknowledging the Scriptures as the Word of God, nevertheless in their methodology they are similar. Biblical persons and events are only examples. They are separated

from their redemptive-historical context and isolated from the continuing revelation of God's covenant. Just look at the consequences. Those who are faithful to the Scriptures and those who are very critical can both reject infant baptism with the same fragmented appeal to Mark 16:16. Both can appeal to Matthew 25:40,45 the one to help men in need and the other to help rebels. On both sides there is an arbitrary and improper use of the Scriptures.

Proof or Appeal?

Both kinds of exemplarism occur not only in Europe and America, but also in South Africa. One finds there the pietistic-methodistic exemplarism, but also the exemplarism of the theology of liberation in order to justify a revolutionary movement.

Both kinds of exemplarism appeal in very arbitrary and selective fashion to Scripture. Apartheid is allegedly proven by Genesis 9:25 *Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be held to his brothers*, and by Joshua 9:27: *But Joshua made the inhabitants of Gideon that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD*. But on the other hand the advocates of the theology of liberation will use the Exodus story to teach that God is at the side of the oppressed people and he punishes the oppressor with military violence. Both kinds of exemplarism arbitrarily take a passage from Scripture, removing it completely from its context and using it as an example to make their point (Deist, 1982 A; cf. Arnold, 1984:85).

But what is now the proper response to both forms of exemplarism? Deist replies that one has to discern between *proof* of Scripture and *appeal* on Scripture. Proof of Scripture points to the Bible as being the truth. To support dogma one delivers some verses of the Bible as proof texts. This kind of use of the Bible can be found in the Heidelberg Catechism according to Deist. But an appeal on Scripture is totally different. An appeal does not look to Scripture for authoritative proof, but as a reference point: one makes a declaration on his own responsibility, and in doing so, looks to Scripture to find those who came to the same conclusion in former days in their own circumstances. The proof of Scripture points to an imperfect faith, a faith which does not stand on what one believes. It needs authority from outside. But an appeal on Scripture has its starting point based on one's own responsibility. One makes up his own mind in his circumstances, and then points afterwards to Jesus, Paul, Peter, or whoever wrestled in their circumstances and in their culture to do God's will (Deist, 1982:286).

Now Deist himself also comes to a selection of the Bible with an appeal on Scripture. He claims to make up his mind on his own responsibility and goes back to a Biblical testimony in order to explain *why one witness of the Bible is here more relevant than another, according to my opinion*. But that is also an arbitrary use of the Bible. By rejecting both forms of exemplarism, Deist introduced a new form. It is an exemplarism also found in the Netherlands and used by someone such as H.M. Kuitert who advocates that an appeal on Scripture is relevant in order to provide a certain point of view with the authority of Scriptures; that happens then not beforehand but afterwards; the theological considerations follow afterwards when positions have already been taken. Here is an exemplaric use of the Bible. It is not the exemplarism of the historical equation mark, such as the exemplarism of pietism-methodism or of the theology of revolution, but a new form. It can be labelled as the exemplarism of the *co-searcher* who intends to go in the line of former biblical searchers and afterward quote persons in the Bible in order to underline what he did on his own responsibility. But also in this method, the one history of salvation has been split into many

stories, which have little or no connections with each other. They are only *models* and one model is more relevant than another (Arnold, 1984:86).

The one response

It should be clear that rejecting old and new exemplarism by replacing them with a third kind is not suitable. There is only one suitable response to exemplarism and that is the response of the Reformed confession of the Scriptures as a unity, as the one revelation of redemption, given in a redemptive-historical way. Already half a century ago, men like K. Schilder, B. Holwerda, M.B. van't Veer, J. Kapteyn and others demonstrated this in their preaching and in their writings.

It was indeed a reformation in preaching. In his dissertation Sidney Greidanus criticized especially the exemplaric method but he also made some remarks on the redemptive-historical method. He had at least four points: generally speaking this method would fall short in application; especially K. Schilder's sermons were objective, schematic and logical treatises; there is a speculative element in these sermons; finally, Holwerda wrongly identified *fact* and *text* (Greidanus, 1970:174 ff.). In the same year of the publication of this dissertation C. Trimp disproved these objections extensively (Trimp, 1970:345 ff.).

Two remarks of H.J. Schilder should be added. In the first place the living redemptive-historical preaching, that is for the congregation. The bread that does not pass away, but that nourishes, unto eternal life, suffers a loss by the emphatic and expressive 'drawing of lines.' Not that the redemptive historical line (or lines) is (are) unimportant. On the contrary, the preacher must try to recognize these carefully and show the congregation the special moment of the history of the event. Of course it can happen that he sometimes uses the term 'line,' but it may not become a 'shibboleth' in order to characterize solid redemptive-historical preaching. It is actually (although in itself an 'image') more a working term than one in the sermon, more a *terminus technicus*, a term of methodology of the subject. The congregation does not live from 'lines' of whatever methodical data, but from the gospel which shows her place on the way of salvation throughout the ages. Therefore she must know where she stands, how far she has pursued her way, how the way of salvation was guided by her LORD from then to now and into the future. But she will scarcely or needlessly or painfully learn that, if she is going to be nourished by drawing of lines and such.

In the second place, closely connected with this: The congregation must see before her eyes *her riches* in the incarnated and now exalted and returning *Saviour*; besides that also her 'poverty' in comparison with the salvation which no eye has seen yet (cf. Lords' Day 22, Heidelberg Catechism, answer 58). The congregation must also become conscious of her present riches in relation with the still preliminary revelation to the fathers and to the people of Israel in the old dispensation. In connection with this the sermon has to point to what the people of God did not have at that time, but now do have. A text like 1 Peter 1:10ff. demands this teaching and also a comprehensive answer like Lord's Day (answer 19) delivers no less than that one text. At the same time the matter of 'not yet' can receive its own necessary accent and working out. But a term like that — such as, for instance, the contrast 'poor — rich' — must not become a *passe partout* and the data not a ruling motive. For this would happen at the cost of the salvation in Christ, which was already present in the Old Testament in the promise of the gospel. So it was there already revealed, given and enjoyed. The text from Peter speaks about that and the later answer of the Catechism points clearly to that as well. This does not even mention yet the emphasis of the apostle Paul on the revelation of and the living from the gospel of the justification by faith, already

from the very beginning (especially Romans 4 and Galatians 3). Besides that, in the Old Testament has been stressed the prefiguration; but prefiguration already presents Messianic wealth so that an over-accentuation of the 'not yet' motive would come in conflict with the clear language of Scriptures. So both of these one-sided emphases must be prevented (Schilder, 1976:170 ff.).

Response

It must be said: true and careful redemptive-historical preaching is the only response to all kinds of exemplaric preaching. It is necessary to preach Jesus Christ as Saviour, as chief Prophet and Teacher, as High Priest and Eternal King, and then the congregation will learn about their service as a living member of Christ. This will lead to truly Christological preaching. Sometimes it may be difficult to discover how Christ would be centred in the preaching, and yet, preaching must be *Theocentric*, not *Anthropocentric*: not man, not even a pious or faithful man may be at the centre, but God with his virtues and mighty deeds.

If we consider things in this way, we do not see any contrast between Theocentric and Christocentric (or Christological) preaching. *He who is reading Scriptures on his best, rejects the dilemma Christocentric or Theocentric as a wrong dilemma, because Christocentric is at the same time also Theocentric* (Kapteyn, n.d.:244).

Furthermore, if Christological preaching is considered in the right way, then it is also clearly *Pneumatological* preaching, for the work of God the Holy Spirit is very closely connected with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

Criticism

We have already heard the reproach that redemptive-historical preaching would lead to schematism, speculation and objectivism. C. Trimp rejected that criticism completely. But recently he said that by stressing the history of salvation, the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) is neglected. He said that partially in connection with Holwerda's speech of 1942 (Holwerda, 1983:passim), which is considered more or less as the program of redemptive historical preaching (Trimp, 1986:93ff).

I think Trimp is right when he relativates Holwerda's speech as just a new beginning. However when reading Holwerda we come to the conclusion that he pointed precisely to the fact that in Philo's *allegorical* way of exegesis, he had already shifted very easily from the history of salvation to 'the order of salvation.' And that is exactly the danger of exemplaric preaching, for exemplarism isolates one fact from its historical Biblical context. Yet it is salvation, so that the principal lesson of history became moral instruction; in his way he lost view of the history of redemption. He read into each story that which God did in every individual soul and then he drew a parallel with what God does for our soul. Holwerda warned against this method and showed the danger of old and modern exemplarism! However it was especially in the published sermons of Holwerda that it became clear that his preaching was not only Christological, but also Theological, and last but not least, also Pneumatological. He paid full attention to the work of the Triune God, stressing the fact that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts with the Word of God. Reading these sermons, as well as those of K. Schilder and M.B. van't Veer, demonstrates that neither the trinitarian aspect nor the order of salvation is neglected. Therefore true trinitarian preaching is the only response to exemplaric preaching.

But the reproach is repeated. H. Krabbendam quotes the applications of two redemptive-historical sermons (without mentioning where they are published) and

comes then to the conclusion that this method is to be rejected: *The text functions somewhat as a 'window' through which the phases and facts of Christ's march through history are witnessed. It is hardly surprising that the text as text, therefore, is frequently curtailed in its scope, ignored in its purpose, or even violated in its nature, as it is ultimately made to serve the cause of what may be described as 'aesthetic contemplation.' Indeed, preaching in the redemptive historical tradition is often comparable to a ride in a Boeing 747 high above the landscape with its hot deserts, its snowpeaked mountains, its dense forests, its open prairies, its craggy hills and its deep lakes. The view is panoramic, majestic, impressive, breathtaking, and always comfortable. But there is one problem. The Christian is not 'above' things. He is in the middle of things* (Krabbendam, 1986:235).

He pleads then for a so-called *covenantal-historical methodology, which honors God not only in His trinitarian self-disclosure, but also in His threefold objective of regeneration, justification and sanctification* (Krabbendam, 1986:234).

How does one respond to this? In the first place, it is not fair to jump from (possible) wrong application to the method as such. In the second place, it is not true that the redemptive-historical method places men above things on earth. God's people today are addressed by the messages of God's Word. They are encouraged, comforted, but also admonished and warned by the great deeds of God in redemptive-history.

It is therefore, not true that redemptive-historical preaching as such does not respond to the many needs and problems of people today. When exemplarism was attacked in the 1930s it was said that without such preaching the preacher does not go into the real sorrows and needs of the wrestling believer. In the same way one could say today that without such exemplaric preaching modern man is left all alone with his despairs.

The answer is consistent. The Christian in all his troubles of faith is only really helped when he is addressed by the redemptive-historical revelation of the Scriptures. Modern man can only be addressed in the midst of chaos when the minister preaches to him with the command to repent and believe (Canons of Dort, II 5) which is given in the infallible Word of God and unfolded in the course of the revealed history of salvation. Thus ministers have the rich task to preach the only Mediator Jesus Christ who redeems his people from their sins and places his people as a blessing for the world. He is known only from the Holy Gospel.

As far as Krabbendam's 'solution' is concerned he does not do justice to history. For history is then actually limited to the history of individual examples of regeneration, justification and sanctification. But that is no history any more, let alone redemptive history. In this way the *ordo salutis* takes the place of redemptive history. Although Krabbendam rejects the exemplaric method, he actually works it into his 'methodology', which goes in a *soteriological* way, instead of a way in which the LORD is centred.

Krabbendam's essay has the title *Hermeneutics and preaching*. This title indeed raises an important matter. For hermeneutics is essential to this discussion. We may even say, the cardinal question is indeed a *hermeneutic* one: is there a recognition of the unity of the Scriptures and history of salvation? Sadly in today's theological world this idea of hermeneutics is clearly lacking. The notion of God's one, redemptive history as a whole is disappearing more and more. In connection with this, the confession that the Word of God is inspired by the Holy Spirit is virtually obsolete. Eugene A. Nida writes: *Exegesis may be described as the process of reconstructing the communication event by determining its meaning (or meanings) for the participants in the communication. Hermeneutics, on the other hand, may be described as pointing out*

parallels between the biblical message and present day events and determining the extent of relevance and the appropriate response for the believer (Nida, 1981:30). So on the basis of the proper type of hermeneutics, preachers must note parallels in modern life. Not one word is said about redemptive-history. Not one word is said about the inspiration of Holy Scripture by the Holy Spirit. The preacher's task is to lead the congregation in finding relevant *parallels* in modern life. In spite of the variety in modern exemplarism, there is an obvious unity among them.

Conclusion

May we say that the whole matter of *examples* in the Bible is excluded? N.H. Gootjes pointed to the fact that indeed examples are used in Scriptures, but always in connection with the great deeds of the LORD. There is sometimes an example in God's way of acting, or in the acting of the Redeemer. However these examples place God, not men, in the centre. We have not the task to imitate God (in the sense of to try to do what He did), but to obey Him in the office to which we are called (Gootjes, 1987:3; cf. Schilder, 1981:139ff.).

The fact that the Biblical events can be used as examples does not follow from the work of the Holy Spirit in the intercourse with God's people, but from the work of the Holy Spirit in the description of those events (Gootjes, 1987:23).

I started with the importance of preaching the Word of God. Now at the end I will stress the great responsibility regarding the way of preaching. I maintain the term redemptive-historical preaching. We have to administer the Word of God *Who goes a way in history with His people and Who reveals His wonderful Name on the way in words and works before the eyes of small and weak human beings* (Trimp, 1986:112).

Unfortunately, the isolation of Reformed preaching is a fact. Reformed ministers must be faithful, holding to the true preaching and be continually aware of all kinds of deformation in preaching.

THE SIFTING EFFECT OF PREACHING

Important matter

If we reflect for a moment on the sifting or the separating effect of the preaching of God's Word, we have to realize that the preaching as such is an enormous event. We have to do with a very important matter, which can only fill us with awe and wonder if we consider that God is coming to men in the form of speech. God's kingdom comes to us in, with, and through the preaching of God's Word. The kingdom of God and especially He in whom this kingdom is represented and realized, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the contents of preaching. But also special *aspects* of God's kingdom are called the contents of preaching. The New Testament speaks more than once about a preaching of *conversion*. God's coming kingdom is realized in the way of conversion in those to whom the preaching of the kingdom comes.

Moreover preaching is also a preaching of conversion *for the forgiveness of sins*. If the kingdom comes in the preaching, it brings with it forgiveness of sins, and not only that, but also the complete, full salvation in Christ. Therefore we can also speak of the preaching of the *gospel*.

It is very important to see in the first place this positive function of preaching.

But we have to be aware also of the negative side. "By the preaching is also realized the *judgment* of God." This happens in a twofold manner: First in those who believe.

They are and have been condemned and damned in Christ. The preaching of Jesus Christ is the most imaginable crushing sentence. For in Him the *forgiveness* of sins, *grace* is proclaimed. But there is only talk of forgiveness and grace for ungodly people! Forgiveness and grace *can* not be granted and *are* not to be granted except to those who are struck by God's condemning judgment. Therefore there is nothing in the world so totally destructive for man than the preaching of forgiveness and grace. For this preaching is the absolute and permanent condemnation of everything that is man himself, what he has and what he is doing. Added to this, however, the preaching brings about judgment to those to whom the proclamation of the kingdom proceeded but who did not believe it. Paul declared to the Corinthians, ". . . we preached Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23,24) (Veenhof, 1959:227; cf. also De Klerk, 1987:106).

Element of judgment

It is clear from the preaching of our Saviour Himself, especially from His preaching in parables, that the preaching of the kingdom contains not only God's blessing but also an element of judgment. Christ causes sifting, exactly by this way of preaching. The parable of the Sower shows that the seed brings to the light the condition of the soil. When the disciples ask the Saviour what this parable means, the answer is, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are (preached) in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand" (Luke 8:9, 10). After this parable Christ declares, "For nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light. Take heed then how you hear; for to him who has will more be given, and from him who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away" (vs. 17, 18). The light (about which also vs. 16 speaks) means undoubtedly the gospel itself, which is preached by the Saviour. What is hid but what has to come to light is the unbelief and sin, which the hearers of the gospel bear in their hearts, but which have to become manifest by the preaching which reveals the hearts. So there is a great responsibility in hearing: Christ impresses upon His people both the blessing and the curse of the covenant, grace as well as judgment (Geertsema, 1987:52ff.)

Blessing and curse

The Holy Scriptures are full of the two sanctions of the covenant, the twofold effect of blessing and curse.

Extensively in Leviticus 26, God's blessing is promised to the people of Israel if this people listens to the LORD. But, ". . . if in spite of this you will not hearken to Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I will walk contrary to you in fury . . ." (vs. 27). I think also of Moses' preaching of the sanctions of God's covenant when the people were standing upon the Ebal and the Gerizim (Deut. 27: 11-26, and also chapter 28). The notes on the old Dutch translation speak in this connection typically of "the register of the blessings" and "the register of the curse."

The prophets further develop the theme of covenant blessing and covenant wrath (Van der Waal, 1978:33).

The preaching of God's Word is given in order to be accepted, not only in the course of time, when it suits, but right away, "today," Psalm 95 says. The hearkening to God's *voice* is the listening to God's *Word*. Otherwise, hardening can appear, as was the case in the desert (vs. 9ff.). Later on, this Psalm is quoted, not only in Romans 10

(where Paul deals especially with the preaching of God's Word), but also in Hebrews 4, in the context of the proclamation of the gospel.

To take offence at the Word

Scripture tells us that one can also take offence at the Word. In the preaching of Isaiah, it is said of the LORD Himself, ". . . He will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offence, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken" (Is. 8:14,15). See also Isaiah 28:16, where it is said that God is laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone. Psalm 118 deals with the stone which the builders rejected, which however has become the head of the corner. The Saviour applied these words to Himself as the Messiah (Matt. 21:42 and 44) and the apostle Paul applied "the stumbling block" to the Jews, that the gospel went to the gentiles. The same is done by the apostle Peter before the Sanhedrin when he was defending himself (Acts 4:11), and in his first letter he made a contrast between "you who believe" and "those who do not believe" (1 Peter 2:7). The first category is building faith on the cornerstone Jesus Christ, while the second category "stumble because they disobey the Word" (vs. 8). That Word, Peter just argued at the end of the first chapter, "is the good news which was preached to you" (1:25). The unbelievers are stumbling. But they were destined to do so (2:8). The Word itself hardens them so that they stumble and fall.

To death and to life

The idea of a twofold function of the preaching is also found in another form in the second letter of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians. In the framework of the progress of the preaching of the gospel it is said that God "spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of Him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life" (2 Cor. 2:14-16).

It is remarkable that the apostle calls *himself* "the aroma of Christ." What is first said of the proclamation of the gospel is now applied to Paul himself. The apostle says, I myself, in my work, in my travelling, in my struggle for the church, in my prayer and care for the flock, I am the aroma of Christ. In other words: he identifies himself actually with the service of the gospel as such. This is possible indeed because this service demands total commitment. The fragrance of the knowledge of God is at the same time the aroma of Christ. For in Christ the knowledge of God comes to its fulness and depth. If this service of the gospel is executed by the whole person, the apostle says it will have a double effect. That double effect is totally different. The same gospel will work life to the one and death to the other.

This is a very remarkable idea!

The same Word, the same gospel has two effects which stand diametrically over against each other. The same Word works for the one death and for the other one life. But it is the one, indivisible Word. So there is not a twofold Word, a twofold preaching and a twofold proclamation. No, exactly the same Word has a twofold effect. It brings to the unbelievers God's judgment of death and it causes destruction. But in those who believe precisely the same word works life by the power of God's grace. While it causes in the one an action from death to death, an action that leads inevitably and irresistibly to death, that same Word causes in the other an action that leads unquestionably to life. That means: it is indeed wonderful, to hear the Word of

God and to obey it. Then more light will be received, more glory, a going on from strength to strength, from the beginning of eternal joy to fulness of joy. But it is also terrible to be touched by the same Word, to hear it, but then to lay it aside. Then it means to go back from death to death, from death to eternal judgment, from condemnation to even heavier punishment. But always there is happening something, the one or the other (Douma/Deddens, 1965:20ff.).

Resistance against the Holy Spirit

It is clear from the Scriptures that one can resist the Word of God. One resists then at the same time the Holy Spirit who is working with the Word. Stephen reproaches in his redemptive-historical sermon the Jewish leaders of his days, “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you” (Acts 7:51). The fathers have persecuted the prophets who brought the good Word of God. These prophets announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One. But the Jews of his own days have betrayed and murdered Him. They have received the law — God’s own Word — as delivered by angels. But they did not keep it. They rejected the Word of God (vs. 52,53).

This resistance against the Holy Spirit is also clear from the last book of the Bible. The exalted Christ writes in Revelation 2 and 3 His letters to the seven churches in Asia. Seven times the Saviour ends these letters with the admonition, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” For His Word comes with grace and with judgment, with advantage and with disadvantage. He who resists that Word, undergoes the hardening effect of the Holy Spirit with that Word. It must be brought to the light, according to the Word of the Saviour in the gospel, in which direction it goes with the hearers. The antithesis will increase to its climax, and there are only two possibilities: “Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy” (Rev. 22:11). Meditating upon this text, K. Schilder called it “the two-edged sword, driven into the flesh of the *church* by the Bishop of the souls Himself” (Schilder, 1958:223).

John wrote these words precisely in the context of the mandate that the words of the prophecy of his book must not be sealed (vs.10). The prophetic Word must be passed on and the preaching of the antithetical Word has to go on until the very end of history.

Always efficacious

Especially the letter to the Hebrews stresses extensively that God’s Word is efficacious. Always a strong, powerful effect of God’s Word is present, also regarding those who outraged the Spirit of grace, although they had become partakers of the Holy Spirit, had tasted the goodness of the Word of God and had once been enlightened (Hebr. 6:4ff., cf. also 10:29ff.).

“A powerful effect is ascribed to the goodness of God’s Word — so the gospel or the promise — also in the unbelieving members of the church. Without a doubt it is not saving. It is not the beginning and the guarantee of the ultimate fulfilment of God’s Word in the new world. But it is indeed very real and very far-reaching. One must also be aware that it is even said of these apostates that it is impossible to restore them again to repentance — here considered as a change of insight. So there came about in these men indeed by the word such a repentance, which is now annulled in and through their apostasy and will never be renewed any more. But it was there once!

Moreover it is significant that it is said of those apostate members of the church that they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold Him up to contempt.

One wonders how this is possible *stricto sensu*. However, this expression is completely transparent for him who understands the nature of the Word, drawn by this letter. The crucified and resurrected Saviour is presented in the goodness of God's Word with all the gifts which He obtained and distributes. In that Word He comes to the people and He gives Himself to them. Therefore the rejection and the contempt of that Word is in the full sense to assault Christ Himself and to hold Him up to contempt. In this way the letter to the Hebrews is preaching the mighty truth that the Word of God is always efficacious, although not always in the same measure, in the same direction, and with the same effect. The Word of God is like the rain, which descends from heaven always as the same rain. But land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it it cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned (Hebr. 6:7,8). In this way the letter to the Hebrews teaches and illustrates the saying of Paul that the Word of God is always a penetrating fragrance, for many certainly to life, alas for most people to death" (Veenhof, 1946:22ff.).

The Word of the Spirit

The Word of God is the Word of the Holy Spirit. Christ said to His disciples before He left, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:13,14). This is worked out in the letter to the Hebrews. "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebr. 4:12). C. Veenhof wrote in connection with this, "He who hears the Word of God has to do with the Holy Spirit, who is pushing the work of God in this world to its completion. He will come inevitably in the grasp of the Spirit. Wherever the Word of the Scriptures is raised, there is the working place of the Holy Spirit. He who is listening to the Word, lets the Holy Spirit work in him. This Word may never be separated from the Spirit. He never lets it go. It is even wrong to say that the Word is an instrument of the Spirit. For He IS always His Word. He is always Himself addressing the people in His Word. He is seizing them and He is achieving in them the Father's good pleasure. Therefore to speak about the Word 'as such' is a folly and a blasphemy. As the Word of the Spirit it calls the dead to life and it drills through the hardest walls of hearts. But as the Word of the Spirit it also hardens the hearts of all who resist against God and makes them at last inaccessible to each and every working of grace. In short, as the Word of the Spirit it is the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul, but also the hammer, which is mercilessly smashing everything that rises against God (. . .) The Word is pushing through to what is deeply hidden and is growing together in the dark shafts of human life. It tears asunder everything and it draws what was first tucked-away into the blinding light of God's holiness. Everything that comes up in the heart of man such as desires, endeavours and thoughts are sifted and judged by the Word according to the holy right of God. That is — according to the letter to the Hebrews — the majesty and the power, the salvation and the terror of God's Word which is preached among us" (Veenhof, 1946:42 ff.).

Old Testament

We see this double effect of God's Word and the preaching of God's Word already in the Old Testament. Time and again there is the preaching of God's promise, but at the same time also the preaching of the threat of God's covenant. Noah was an instrument in God's hand for God's judgment, according to Genesis 6 and 7. But beforehand he warned the people. Therefore he is called "a herald of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5) and it is also said, "by faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed the ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith" (Hebr. 11:7).

When God later gives His promise to Abraham, the LORD says about his descendants, "they shall come back here in the fourth generations; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Gen. 15:16). First they were warned, but when the iniquity is complete they will be destroyed completely.

Not only in the historical books of the Old Testament is this double effect of God's Word shown, but also in the prophetic books. Isaiah writes in his prophecy, ". . . as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is. 55:10,11). God's Word and its preaching is not empty, so that nothing will happen when it is brought to the people, but it is the living Word of God, which always has effect.

The LORD says to His prophet Jeremiah, "I am watching over My Word to perform it" (Jer. 1:12). The prophet has to proclaim that Word to the people and because of the iniquity it is even called first the *destructive* Word, and after that the *constructive* Word: "Behold, I have put My Words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (1:9,10). There is a separating effect of the preaching of God's Word, and that effect is shown in both the Old and New Testament of the Bible.

Calvin

This sifting effect of preaching is clearly understood by the Reformers and especially by John Calvin. In his *Institutes* he quotes with respect to this the calling of Jeremiah and the mandate to preach the breaking and building Word. Then he continues, "But the prophecy of Isaiah presses it even farther home, for the Lord sends him out thus: 'Go and say to the children of Israel, Hear and hear but do not understand; see and see but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people stubborn, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they perchance see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed' (Is. 6:9,10; cf. Matt. 13:14,15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40; Acts 28:26,27; Rom. 11:8). Observe that he directs his voice to them but in order that they may become even more deaf; he kindles a light but that they may be made even more blind; he sets forth doctrine but that they grow even more stupid; he employs a remedy but so that they may not be healed. And John, applying this prophecy, states that the Jews could not believe Christ's teaching (John 12:39), for this curse of God hung over them" (Calvin, *Institutes* III, 24, 13).

Calvin stressed very much that the first function of the preaching is the power of God for salvation, according to Romans 1:16. It is the *gospel*, good tidings. But preaching of the Word of God can also have a condemning, a deadly effect. With

respect to this C. Veenhof wrote, "In an intensive way Calvin deals with the fact that the preaching of the gospel can have this twofold effect. However, and with that we touch immediately the kernel of his expositions in this respect, Calvin does not think one moment to place this double effect on the same line. On the contrary, he states with emphasis that the relation between the preaching and the salvation worked by it, is totally different from the relation between the preaching and death, worked by it. Or, to say it in another way, Calvin teaches that, from the point of view of preaching there is a incongruity on principle between the working of the gospel with an effect of salvation and the other one in which it functions as a power of perdition. That the preaching of the gospel is working salvation is namely its specific nature, its genuine character, its proper office. If the preaching becomes a reason of condemnation and death for those who reject it, that is concerning this preaching something accidental, something occasional, even something that is clashing with its real nature. If the preaching of the gospel in contrast with its nature changes in a deadly, condemning power, that has to be ascribed to the malice, the sin, the guilt of men. The deadly and condemning effect of the preaching of the gospel is indeed regarding the godless people something proper, something genuine, but concerning the gospel this effect is always something accidental, something occasional, something that goes directly against its nature" (Veenhof, 1965:98ff.).

I purposely gave this extensive quotation of Calvin by C. Veenhof. In his reproduction of Calvin concerning the so-called occasional, accidental matter of preaching he went a little bit too far, according to my opinion. The condemning working of preaching is indeed not the first function of preaching according to Calvin. But at the same time the Reformer warned more than once against oneness and exaggeration with regard to this. J. Kamphuis pointed already to the fact that Calvin used more than once the softening expression "in a manner of speaking," or "so to say" with relation to the deadly effect of preaching (Kamphuis, 1968:162ff.). Calvin did not promote complete inequality in the matter of the quickening and mortifying effect of preaching. L. Goumaz elaborated on that in his summary of Calvin's commentaries on the New Testament concerning the office in the church, namely in a chapter about "The twofold authority of the office."

I quote, "Christ has assured on the one hand those who are His of the grace which is promised to them in the gospel in such a way 'that they expect this with an equally great certainty as if He had come down from heaven in order to testify it personally'; on the other hand the LORD has frightened the hardened sinners, by assuring them that their contempt of the ministers of the Word and the proclamation of forgiveness will receive its sanction. The ministers are but human beings, 'earthly vessels'; this weakness causes that they see their preaching constantly questioned. But Christ assures that in reality this weak human word proclaims the forgiveness of sins for those who receive it with confidence, but also the judgment of God to the wicked who refuse to accept the promise of grace" (Goumaz, 1964:114).

Calvin was very pessimistic concerning the number of unbelievers and hypocrites in the church. He wrote, "If the same sermon is preached, say, to a hundred people, twenty receive it with the ready obedience of faith, while the rest hold it valueless, or laugh, or hiss, or loathe it" (Calvin, Institutes III, 24, 12).

A. Kuyper

Later on also A. Kuyper stressed the first function of the preaching, namely the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven. "But also the other way around," he wrote in *E Voto*: "From week to week has to be announced in the name of God the judg-

ment of condemnation to everyone who resists faith and who does not convert to God wholeheartedly. Like a hammer that smashes the rock, this terrible Word of our God has to come down on the souls of those who are hardening their hearts. As a two-edged sword that horrible word of judgment and eternal condemnation has to penetrate between the separation of soul and spirit and between the separation of joints and marrow. It has to be made impossible to you more and more to resist your God, so that you are doing finally one of the two: to give in over against God, or: to go out and to say: no, I do not come back under such a preaching. But in that way the key-power is executed" (Kuyper, 1892:310).

K. Schilder

When the Holy Spirit is hardening the hearts of those who hear the Word of God but refuse to accept it, He abandons at the same time these unbelievers to Satan. Meditating on the text about Judas "after the morsel (or the sop), Satan entered into him" (John 13:27), K. Schilder wrote, "The sop which Jesus gives has the same effectiveness and the same effect as the Word which God gives. That Word, also, never returns void; it achieves whatever pleases God and quickly effects the purpose for which God sent it. That Word forces choices upon men. It converts men, or it hardens them. It makes men bow, or it stiffens their necks in haughty obstinacy. Both, the sop and the Word, send out the Spirit unto repentance, or Satan unto a hardening of the heart. Take the sop; listen to the Word. Afterwards men can say of you: Then entered the Spirit into him; or they can say: Then entered Satan into him. The one or the other effect will follow" (Schilder, 1938:176ff.).

I quote also something of what K. Schilder wrote in *Christ in His Suffering* about the text "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22: 31,32): "Christ knows that Satan is but the second, that God is the first cause of the sifting. Therefore He turns to God asking that faith may not abate — May they remain in Thy hands, Father! Thou dost sift; and Satan sifts. But Thy method is not his! — Satan wants to keep the chaff and blow the wheat away. Christ would retain the wheat and take the chaff out of it. By sifting, Satan wants to suppress the good by the evil; Christ, also by sifting, would overcome evil with good" (Schilder, 1938:263).

Opened and closed

Many texts from the Holy Scriptures are still to be mentioned, in which the sifting work of God the Holy Spirit is shown, as He is working with God's Word. For the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit, which cuts from two sides, as is said in the Notes of the Old Dutch translation on Hebr. 4:12. They point then also to Revelation 19:15, where is said of the exalted Christ that He is called the Word of God and that from His mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. When He smites with the sword of the Word, nobody can stop Him. In Revelation 3 He is called "the holy One, the true One, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens" (vs.7). He gives indeed an open door in Philadelphia (vs.8), but it is also possible that one closes his ears to what the Spirit says to the church, and that one does not want to open the door, although the knock at the door is clearly to be heard." (3:20).

That brings us to what we confess in Lord's Day 31 of the Heidelberg Catechism about the keys of the kingdom, to which A. Kuyper already pointed. First the kingdom is opened by the preaching of the gospel. But in the case of hardening of hearts follows

the closing of the kingdom. That is the double effect of preaching. In this way the Word of God comes to all the hearers, without distinction, with command of faith and conversion. I quote with regard to this Prof. B. Holwerda: "They all have to hear without distinction the promise. Then this promise itself will achieve separation: the one believes, the other one hardens his heart. They all have to hear without distinction the admonition. The one is converting, the other one refuses conversion. In this way the kingdom of God is opened for the one and closed for the other one by this comforting sermon. But also the one is brought to conversion and the other one to hardening by this chastising sermon. But always something happens, the one thing or the other. Nobody remains the same under the sermon. That is the enormous seriousness of each and every sermon . . ." (Holwerda, 1955:82). Elsewhere Holwerda wrote: "What about so-called distinctive preaching? Does the minister have to divide the congregation into groups, and does he have to address himself to every part separately and distinctively? Let him preach the gospel to all of them! Then he uses the axe of Christ for *all of them*. Only then! Woe to the preacher who assumes there to be separations and brings the word of the text only to the one part. He has to bring it to *all of them*; in this way Christ will *make* separations! This makes the sermon a thousand times more dangerous" (Holwerda, 1957:77).

Conclusion

I come to a conclusion. Besides the blessing effect of preaching there is also the condemning effect of it and this effect is not something accidental or occasional, but the reverse of the first effect. This twofold effect may never be neglected in preaching. Often the word of the apostle Paul is quoted that we can eat and drink at the Lord's Supper judgment upon ourselves (I Cor. 11:29). But what about to *hear* judgment upon ourselves? Precisely in connection with the fact that we can spurn the Son of God and profane the blood of the covenant by which we were sanctified, and outrage the Spirit of grace, the letter to the Hebrews mentions the "fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries" (Hebr. 10:27). Then the Spirit hardens the hearts, He abandons to Satan. He abandons the unbelievers to themselves, to their own sins.

Let us maintain our confession in the Canons of Dort, "It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of the Christ offered by the gospel, nor of God, who calls through the gospel and who even confers various gifts upon them, that many who are called through the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not converted. The fault lies in themselves" (III/IV,9). Indeed, "the fault lies in those who are called, in *their* culpable carelessness or slackness or worldly-mindedness" (Meijerink, 1971:44).

Take heed then how you *hear*!

But also: take heed then how you *preach*!