

# VI “YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES” (Acts 1:8)

## REFORMATION AND MISSION

### “Minus the apostles?”

More than once it has been said by historians (and not only by adversaries of the Reformation but also by some who belong to Reformation circles) that it would be possible to write a complete history of Reformation times without even using the word *mission*. The Reformers, they say, did lot of good things in all respects, but they did not do anything concerning mission. The whole matter of mission was something done in Reformation times by the Roman Catholics, and the churches of the Reformation discovered the importance of mission no earlier than about a century later.

It is also said that actually *Pietism* awakened the call for the great commission to go out and to bring the gospel to the gentiles.

In Germany they used for that so-called lack of mission the word “Missionslauheit” (lukewarmness regarding mission) and they applied that word to Luther and to Calvin as well.

Many of those writing concerning this matter have stated that the Reformers (and they apply that especially to Luther and Calvin) wrongly believed that the missionary mandate of Matthew was limited to and fulfilled in the apostolic era. J. Verkuyl writes for instance, “It is incomprehensible that the Reformers and their contemporaries did not relate Jesus’ promise in Matthew 28 to be present even to the end of the age to the fulfillment of their missionary task, but it is undeniably true” (Verkuyl, 1978:19). In the circles of the ecumenical movement is even said, “Calvin made the most amazing mistake for an able man when he tried to reform the church by reconstructing it after the pattern of the apostolic age *minus* the apostles. The Spirit that has directed the history of the primitive church was wiser than Calvin” (E.J. Palmer on the Conference on “Faith and Order,” at Lausanne, 1927).

The conclusion is that the Reformers themselves did not encourage the sending out of missionaries or contribute to the theological study of our missionary task. The missionary consciousness had to wait until a later time and was initiated only with the coming of the so-called further Reformation and Pietism. “Then actual Protestant participation in world mission and the theoretical reflection upon this activity really began” (Verkuyl, *ibid.*). But as far as the Reformers themselves are concerned, there is not to be found even a *latent* missionary zeal: there is a complete *vacuum* in this respect.

### Complete vacuum?

What to say about these reproaches?

In the first place, it is unfair as well as scientifically inadmissible to summon the Reformers before the tribunal of a modern missiological concept, which has itself its historical limitations and its theological defects. In his dissertation, J. van den Berg points to this answer of especially some Lutheran authors, and he adds, “Too often indeed, missions have been identified with the ‘business of missions,’ with the organizational aspect of modern missionary life” (van den Berg, 1956:5). In the second place, when the Reformers give sometimes the impression that it was the special task of the

apostles to proclaim the gospel to the gentiles, we have to consider that they said that over against the “apostolic succession,” as if the Pope of Rome were the direct successor of the Apostle Peter. I give two quotations of Calvin’s Commentary on *Matthew 28:19 and 20* in this respect: “So we learn that the Apostolate is not an empty title of honour, but a responsible office; and that there is nothing more absurd nor more intolerable than that false men should usurp the honour to themselves, live at ease as kings, and do away with their responsibility to teach.” And concerning the last verse of the gospel according to Matthew, “We must note that this is said not only to the apostles, for the Lord promises His aid not to one age alone, but to the end of the world. It is precisely as if He said that, whenever the ministers of the gospel are weak, and labour under the lack of everything, He would be the Guardian, so that they may come out victorious over all the world’s conflicts. Thus today clear experience teaches that Christ works in a hidden way, marvellously, and the gospel prevails over numerous obstacles. All the more intolerable is the sin of the papal clergy, who make this a pretext for their sacrilegious tyranny. They claim that the church cannot err, being ruled by Christ, as if Christ, like a common soldier, hired Himself as mercenary to different leaders, and did not keep His authority firmly to Himself and declared that He would defend His doctrine, so that His ministers might confidently expect to be victorious over the whole world.”

So this is to be said in the first place: that the Reformers stressed the unique place and task of the apostles and that they denied the claim of the Pope to be the successor of the apostles.

But there is more. He who reasons that there was a complete lack, a vacuum in respect of the idea of mission in the mind of the Reformers, is absolutely wrong. Let us start with the main Reformers, Luther and Calvin.

## **Luther over against Turks and Jews**

We start with Luther, the first in chronological order. It is an evident fact that Luther placed himself also in missionary respect over against the Roman Catholics of his days. When Luther discovered the accent on *human* activities in Roman Catholic mission work, he stressed that mission work is in the first place the work of God Himself. Christ is the Head of the church, He leads her, He saves her, He sanctifies her, He purifies her, but He also increases her. He edifies and preserves His church and He uses for that purpose each and every member of the church. Luther says, “Jeder einzelne Christ ist dazu bestellt, dem anderen ein Christus zu werden.” That means that all Christians have to be involved in the spreading of the good news of the gospel. Actually Luther here said important things in respect of what is called later on *home mission*, but this also has to do with mission as such.

Speaking about Acts 8 where it is described that the eunuch, a minister of Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, was converted and being baptized, Luther said he could not imagine that the eunuch would not have *propagated* the gospel of Jesus Christ in his native land.

As far as the Turks are concerned, it is well-known that Luther was very sharp over against them. But is it also known that Luther reproached the Pope in Rome that he had undertaken crusades against the Turks (or the Moslems) but that he did not bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to them? That would be the first mandate for the Pope, according to Luther: to let the Moslems hear the Gospel of our only Saviour Jesus Christ! Another example concerning the Turks: In Luther’s time there were Christians made captives by the Turks in Eastern Europe. Then Luther said: these captive Christians have the important task to bring these Turks who are Moslems in contact with

Luther's Catechism. I ask, what else would that be if not mission work?

As far as the Jews are concerned, Luther mentions them often in one breath with the Turks, not as alien races, but as peoples who consciously deny Jesus Christ, who trust in their own human power and who expect everything from their own merits. In the first years after the Reformation of the church, Luther had a benevolent attitude over against the Jews. He had the firm expectation that they would be converted to Jesus Christ, now that the gospel had been brought to light again. He regarded it as an evident fact that the Jews had not found the glory of the New Dispensation during the dominion of the Pope: "The papists behaved themselves in such a way that, being a Christian, one should rather become a Jew than the other way around. If I had been a Jew, I would have preferred to become a *pig* rather than a *Christian!*"

Luther was the first one who understood that the gospel had to be brought to the Jews, because this people in the first place has rights to Christ. In this way came into existence what is called Luther's mission book *That Christ is a born Jew*. He cooperated with Jewish scholars and used their knowledge of the Hebrew language in order to understand the Jewish background the better. Luther discovered also that the Jews had come to their trade in money, to their practice of usury especially as a result of the attitude of many Christians who did not leave to them any possibility of life. But that, he hoped, would be changed: "All Israel will be saved." It was a bitter experience for Luther when he saw that things developed in a totally different way. He took offence at the Jewish mockery of the Messiah of the Christians, and when he heard that in Bohemia a number of Christians had become Jews, he wrote some very extreme statements against the Jews. "Ultimately it was a kind of 'harsh mercy' and it was an attempt to save those who would be willing to be converted." These severe statements were regrettable and they caused much evil. But let us bear in mind that Luther was absolutely not an anti-Semite. From Luther is also the prayer: "Oh God, heavenly Father, please turn aside and let Thy wrath be satisfied over them for the sake of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ. Amen" (Kooiman, 1959:171).

## **Eschatology**

More than once it has been said that Luther was so strongly convinced that Christ would come back very soon that there was no room in his theology for missiology. It has also been said that Luther had the idea that it was not worthwhile any more to go out with the Gospel because of his eschatological ideas.

Indeed, Luther had the conviction that Christ's return on the clouds of heaven was not very far off. But it is absolutely wrong to derive from that fact that Luther had objections against mission work. Precisely in the tension of Christ's coming back, we have to fulfil our task. Luther often called the day of Christ's return the "sweet last day." But he said at the same time, "If I knew that Christ would come back tomorrow, I would still plant a tree today."

## **Conclusion concerning Luther**

When we take account of the circumstances of Luther's times, of the struggle over against the papal clergy, also of the fact that there was a close connection between church and state and that it was almost impossible to go abroad with the gospel, our conclusion must be that it is totally wrong to say that Luther did not see anything of the mission task of the church.

## Calvin

In my first article about Reformation and Mission I paid special attention to Luther and I said that it is absolutely wrong to say, as many authors do, that Luther did not say anything concerning the Scriptural calling with regard to mission work. Some point in this respect especially to the Reformers' exegesis of *Matthew 28:19*, as if Luther and Calvin were of the opinion that the apostles had already done all the mission work, so that actually nothing was left for later times. But I stressed that we have to read Luther and Calvin in the context of their writings and, as far as this text is concerned, that over against Rome they very sharply rejected the idea of the *apostolic succession*.

At the same time it can be said that there are several places in Calvin's *Commentaries on the Bible* and also in his *Institutes* where we can see that Calvin did indeed have the idea that mission work had to be done and that it was not finished at all.

Let me mention first some texts of the Old Testament. In his Commentary on *Isaiah 12:4 and 5*, the Reformer writes, "He [the prophet Isaiah] means that the work of this deliverance will be so excellent, that it ought to be proclaimed, not in a corner only, but throughout the whole world. He wished, indeed, that it should first be *made known* to the Jews, but that it should afterwards be spread abroad to all men. This exhortation, by which the Jews testified their gratitude, might be regarded as a forerunner of the preaching of the gospel, which afterwards followed in the proper order . . . We ought especially to be inflamed with this desire, after having been delivered from some alarming danger, and most of all after having been delivered from the tyranny of the devil and from everlasting death." He continues his exhortation by showing what is the feeling from which this thanksgiving ought to precede; for he shows that it is our duty to proclaim the goodness of God to every nation." While we exhort and encourage others, we must not at the same time sit down in indolence, but it is proper that we set an example before others; for nothing can be more absurd than to see lazy and slothful men who are exciting other men to praise God."

This is nothing else than the fervour of Calvin in seeing the duty of mission works as "proclamation to every nation."

Also in his Commentary on the last book of the Old Testament, the prophecies of *Malachi*, Calvin stresses more than once that God's Kingdom is not complete yet but that it is growing and increasing also in our times and that we also are involved in that continuation of God's Kingdom.

## New Testament

In his commentary of the Gospels, Calvin mentions in respect of *Matthew 24:14*, "And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come," that there are "*antipodes*" and other far removed peoples, whom even the last fame of Christ has not reached. So the gospel of the Kingdom must be preached to all nations!

In a similar way we can read Calvin's opinion concerning the spreading of the gospel in his commentary on the letters to Timothy. In connection with *1 Timothy 2:4* he writes: "The Apostle simply means, that there is no people and no rank in the world that is excluded from salvation; because God wishes that the gospel should be proclaimed to *all* without exception."

Also Calvin's similar comments on the second letter to *Timothy* and the letter to *Titus* are to be mentioned, let alone what he said more than once in sermons on texts of the New Testament.

## Institutes

It is repeated many times in all kinds of books that Calvin said in his *Institutes* that the whole matter of mission had been finished at the end of the apostles' times. I said already that Calvin was of the opinion that there are no direct successors to the apostles, over against the ideas of the popes that they esteemed themselves as such, Calvin denied the "apostolic succession" and stressed that the office of the apostles was a very special and extraordinary office. But in the same context of his *Institutes* in which Calvin stressed this, he also added: "Although I deny not, that afterwards God occasionally raised up Apostles, or at least evangelists, in their stead, as has been done in our time" (*Inst. IV, 3, 4*).

Time and again it is to be read in Calvin's *Institutes* that it is our duty to proclaim God's goodness all over the world, and there are many places in the *Institutes* in which Calvin points to the fact that the heathen nations may be involved in the whole matter of salvation. It is also repeated time and again that especially in his *Institutes* Calvin put so much emphasis on the doctrine of election that this doctrine is not to be combined with the idea of mission. This would then be a kind of "theological excuse": because of the accent on election and reprobation, the Reformed would have locked the door to mission work. But he who carefully reads the whole part on the divine election and reprobation in Calvin's *Institutes* (*III, 21-24*) sees immediately that this argument misses any foundation. Quoting Augustine, Calvin assures us, "Because we know not who belongs to the number of the predestinated, or does not belong, our desire ought to be that all may be saved; and hence every person we meet, we will desire to be with us a partaker of peace" (*Inst. III, 23, 24*). It is true that Calvin discerns between general and special calling. The general calling has to do with the outward preaching of God's Word, and the special calling is the work of God the Holy Spirit through which the preached Word of God is attached in the hearts of men. But nowhere the conclusion is to be found in Calvin's *Institutes* that the Word of God is not to be proclaimed and to be preached to all nations.

## Prayers

Not only many sermons (more than 2000) of Calvin have been preserved, but also many prayers at the end of the sermons. Often these are prayers which have to do with the further propagation of the gospel. Then Calvin prays that the Word just preached may not only reach its goal in the hearts of the hearers, so that the congregation may bear many fruits, but also that the Word of God may be preached elsewhere and that it may also reach the hearts of the ignorant and those who have gone astray. In no way can one conclude from Calvin's prayers that the Reformer had no insight into the work of mission. On the contrary: many times he prayed that the gospel might be spread throughout the world.

## Geneva

When we have a look at the immense amount of work Calvin did in Geneva, we may even conclude that Geneva was a kind of *mission centre*. From all parts of Europe the students came to Calvin's city in order to be instructed in what he called the "pura doctrina," the pure doctrine of the gospel. And after having studied there, they spread the gospel over Europe, in many countries.

Some have objected more than once that this was only the preaching of the Word in countries which were already more or less Christianized. But when we take into

account how terrible the ignorance of the people was, we may say that it was indeed mission work, namely to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people that did not know its most elementary principles.

Besides, from Geneva Calvin wrote hundreds and hundreds of letters to many people in Europe, also to encourage the propagation of the gospel.

## **No attempts?**

Some have said, All right, but are there indeed attempts by the Reformers to go out with the Gospel and to proclaim the good tidings to the gentiles?

Now first of all I can point to what Luther said about the Jews and the Turks and how the people had to contact them.

In the second place I can repeat that Calvin had much influence in the whole of Europe and that there were many contacts in many countries. In the third place it must be said that in Reformation times the trade routes were especially in the hands of Spain and Portugal, Roman Catholic nations, so that it was almost impossible for the German, French, and Swiss people to go outside of Europe. But last but not least, in the fourth place: there was indeed a very important attempt at mission work in Calvin's times, namely in *Brazil*.

I will tell more about that in the next article, the Lord willing.

## **The mission venture in Brazil**

The French nobleman Gaspard de Coligny, who would become later on, in 1572, a martyr in the terrible massacre of Bartholomew's day, conceived the project of planning to send ministers to a French colony in Brazil. The goal was not only to support the colonists in spiritual respect, but also to bring the gospel to the Indians in order to convert them to faith in Jesus Christ. De Coligny was in contact with a certain De Villegaignon and he influenced the French King to allow De Villegaignon to sail out with two vessels to the new world. It was principally Protestants who accompanied him. De Villegaignon was also in contact with Calvin. In November, 1555, the expedition arrived at Rio de Janeiro. In the beginning they had a very hard time. There were dangers from two sides. The Portuguese, who claimed to have authority over that area, were very hostile, and the natives were also very dangerous. Disappointed and discouraged, some of the colonists returned to France. With those who remained, De Villegaignon took up his residence close to the coast on a small island which he gave the name "Coligny" (cf. VanderLinde, 1937:376ff.).

## **Request for ministers**

Already after a short time, De Villegaignon sent letters to De Coligny and to Calvin in which he asked them to send some preachers and also more colonists "in order to come to a firmer establishment of the colony and to a further expansion of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ." Then two preachers were delegated from Geneva, the first one was Peter Richer, a doctor of theology, and the second one was William Chartier. These ministers departed from Geneva on September 8, 1556. Several people accompanied them. Altogether there were thirteen who were willing "to bring the Kingdom of Christ to the new world." In France they find many Huguenots who dared to undertake the venture with them. In this way a group of three hundred people was gathered at Honfleur and they departed with three ships on November 19, 1556. On the tenth of March 1557 they arrived in the colony.

## Great expectations

There is a double report concerning the first three weeks after their arrival: a letter of Richer to an unknown person and also a letter of Richer and Chartier together to Calvin. Especially the last letter gives us an insight into the relation in which Calvin stood to these men and their work. It appeared that they were very closely connected with the Reformer. They wrote to Calvin, "Our fellowship in which we are connected by the Holy Spirit to the body of Christ, unites us together so strongly that the enormous distance which separates us, cannot hinder that we are with you in the Spirit, in the certainty that you also bear us in your heart."

In order to strengthen this fellowship, they want to let Calvin participate in their sorrows and joys. They are very happy with the way they were received by De Villegaignon. They call him their father and brother and they expect much from him and from his work. They have hope that rather soon a big congregation can be instituted to proclaim God's praise and extend Christ's Kingdom. At the end of their letter they ask Calvin's intercession for their work of mission, "in order that God may complete this building of Christ at this end of the earth." The church of Geneva gave thanks to God on these favourable messages from Brazil, "for the extension of Christ's Kingdom in a country so far away, on a piece of the earth so strange and among a nation which seems to be totally ignorant of the true God."

In Richer's letter we find more data about the religious life of the natives in and around the colony. He portrays the life of the natives in very dark colours. The summing up of the sins and misdeeds reminds us of what the apostle Paul writes in Romans 1. How can the preachers of God's Word get access to such people? Besides, they stand before an almost insuperable language barrier. Yet they do not despair. "Because the highest God Himself entrusted this office to us, we hope that one day this country of Edomites will become Christ's dominion."

## Treason

But the great expectations of these missionaries proved false. It appeared that De Villegaignon was not the man he was supposed to be. After the first celebration of the Lord's Supper, quarrels broke out in circles of the colonists. Some of them were in favour of bringing more Roman Catholic elements into the celebration. Their spokesman was a certain Cointa, who had studied at the Sorbonne University in Paris. De Villegaignon sided with him, after having first sent Chartier to Geneva in order to ask Calvin for advice. Especially a letter from the cardinal of Lorraine caused him to conduct himself harshly over against the Protestants. Finally, their worship services had to be held in secret, just as in their fatherland. In this way the original attempt to build a Protestant colony as a centre of mission work among the heathen originals was frustrated. In this situation a group of them wanted to go back to France. De Villegaignon expelled them from the island. They fled to the continent of Brazil, where they tried to contact the aboriginals. They also attempted to bring the Gospel to them. One of them had already progressed so far in their language that he could give them a small dictionary of the language of the "*Topinambu*," as they called them.

## Return

But the refugees could not hold out for a long time. All kinds of hardships finally caused their return to France. Some of them preferred to go back to the colony. But De Villegaignon condemned them as heretics. One of them escaped, four others testified to their faith in a courageous way. The result was that De Villegaignon had

them thrown from a rock into the ocean. The names of these first martyrs of Reformed mission deserve to be mentioned: Pierre du Bordel, Matthieu Vermeil, and Pierre Bourdon. It is a bitter thought that these martyrs did not fall as a consequence of the resistance of the Gentiles, but by the perfidious treason of a fellow Christian. De Villegaignon spared the life of the fourth one, because he could serve the colony with his handicraft, according to his opinion. Those who stayed on the ship safely reached the French coast. Richer became a minister of the church at La Rochelle.

The colony was deprived of its best men, so it could not hold out either. De Villegaignon returned to France and remained an enemy of the Reformation for the rest of his life. He died just before the year of the martyrdom of Gaspard de Coligny. However, he did not die as a martyr, but in the greatest misery. . . .

One of the fellow travellers, Jean de Lery, described the whole journey extensively and when later on his book was reprinted, he dedicated it to Louise de Coligny, the daughter of Gaspard de Coligny.

Louise de Coligny was the fourth wife of William of Orange, who survived her husband. De Lery mentioned in this dedication “the reverent remembrance of the Prince of Orange.” In 1569 he had met the Prince, being delegated to thank him for the defense of the French Reformed churches, which he had undertaken with great sacrifices. On that occasion Prince William had answered that he wished he could do more for the service of the Lord and of the churches on behalf of which the delegates had spoken. So also the name of Prince William I of Orange is mentioned in the report concerning the first Reformed mission venture!

## **Calvin to Farel**

Calvin was closely connected with this attempt at mission work. In his letter to his friend Farel, he wrote on Feb. 24, 1558, about De Villegaignon as someone “who was sent by us to America (a nobis *missus fuerat*), where he has treated the good matter in a bad way because of his immeasurable hot-headedness.” Calvin wrote this letter about six years before his death. He deplored it very much that this first attempt at Reformed mission work in Brazil was not a success. But the failure was definitely not due to the Reformer himself. He encouraged the planning of De Coligny. He sent missionaries to the colony. He functioned as their spiritual father and gave his advice. They brought before him all their troubles and sorrows, and Calvin’s encouragement gave guidance to their work.

Our conclusion is that also in practical respects Calvin very much promoted mission work, although prospects were not favourable.

## **Propagation of the gospel**

We discovered that — in spite of all kinds of criticism — Calvin strongly promoted the work of mission, also in practical respects. He also encouraged others to propagate the gospel, and he was very grateful when he discovered that the propagation of the gospel met with success.

He wrote his dedicatory epistle to the first edition of the second part of his commentary on the *Acts of the Apostles* “to the most serene King-elect of Denmark and Norway, Frederick” and said at the end of it, “I shall touch on one thing which is appropriate for a royal personage. When the power of the whole world was in opposition, and all the men who had control of affairs then, were in arms to crush the gospel, a few men, obscure, unarmed and contemptible, relying on the support of the truth and the Spirit alone, laboured so strenuously in spreading the faith of Christ, avoided



no toil of dangers, remained unbroken against all attacks, until at last they emerged victors. Accordingly, for Christian princes, distinguished as they are by a certain authority, since God has provided them with the sword for the defence of the Kingdom of His Son, there is no excuse for not being at least just as spirited and faithful in the discharge of such an honourable task." Under the pressure of the Lutherans, Frederick refused this dedication of the 1554 edition. So Calvin dedicated the second edition of 1560 to Nicolas Radzivil, "duke in Olika, palatine of Vilna." But that does not diminish the well-meant words of the first edition with regard to the propagation and defense of the gospel.

It is also known that Calvin called *Luther* "an apostle," elected by God Himself.

In 1549 Calvin wrote a letter to King Sigismund of Poland wherein he expresses his joy about the progress of the gospel in Poland.

In the same letter he mentioned the name of *Johannes à Lasco*, a Polish nobleman, who later on played an important role in London and also in Germany. Calvin said, "I foresee that he will transfer the torch of the gospel also to other nations."

In 1561 Calvin wrote in a letter to the Scottish Reformer *John Knox*, "I rejoice exceedingly, as you may easily suppose, that the gospel has made such rapid and happy progress among you."

Finally, in the same year, Calvin wrote a letter to *Bullinger* about the progress of the gospel and the request for more preachers of God's Word: "It is incredible with what fervent zeal our brethren are urging forward greater progress. Pastors are everywhere asked for from among us with as much eagerness as the priestly functions are made the object of ambition among the Papists. Those who are in quest of them besiege my doors, and pay their court to me as if I held a levee. They vie with one another in pious rivalry, as if the condition of Christ's Kingdom were in a state of undisturbed tranquility. On our part, we desire as much as it lies in our power to comply with their wishes, but our stock of preachers is almost exhausted. We have even been obliged to sweep the workshops of the working classes to find individuals with some tincture of letters and pious doctrine to supply this necessity."

Calvin wrote this letter just three years before his death. One can say, this has to do with the ministry in the congregations, but we may also say: this has to do with the propagation and the progress of the gospel. Calvin was very concerned about that. It is, therefore, absolutely wrong to state that Calvin lacked the idea of apostolate!

## **Martin Bucer**

Calvin was closely connected with *Martin Bucer*, especially in his Strasbourg years, in 1538-1541. It is interesting to know Bucer's ideas about mission. We may say that he expressed himself very clearly about the task of mission. More than Luther and Calvin, Bucer stressed very much that the apostles only made a beginning of the work of mission in their times. He stated that the apostles had indeed received a special calling for the propagation of the gospel in the whole world. But speaking about the apostle Paul, Bucer said that "the apostolic fire was present in him in great measure as an example also for the times to come." He also stressed that the apostles had received extraordinary gifts: prophecy, healing, tongues. But therein, Bucer said, is an indication that "just as the beginning, also later on all the power would be delivered to the church to gather the church of God out of the whole human race." For although these extraordinary gifts were limited to the apostolic era, yet the church would also later on be able to fulfil the calling of Jesus Christ without the miracles of the beginning of the Christian church. Already in his book, dated from 1523 *Instruction of Christian Love*," Bucer said, "The believer, like a perpetual spring, must pour out the good-

ness which God imparts to him through Christ by furthering the welfare of all men” (Bucer, 1980:49).

Starting with these ideas, Bucer reproached the rulers that they neglected mission. He said, it is true that desire for expansion drove them into the world, but at the same time they had no desire to win the people for the church and for Christ. The Spaniards hurt the native population in a terrible way and tortured them. “Is that, then, what they call the propagation of Christianity?” he asked. Bucer also paid special attention to the Jews. He wrote, “Exactly through the sinful neglect of mission work among the Jews, now the Jews became usurers in the midst of Christianity.” In this respect Bucer also made a comparison with the Turks. He said, “In the same way we can say that the Turkish became violent oppressors of the Christians, and also that newly discovered islands and nations have become a source of much misery for the Christian peoples.”

As we saw before, Luther stressed that mission work is the work of God Himself. Bucer agreed with that, but he stressed at the same time that this does not exclude that we as God’s people have also a task. As he put it, “There is also a human element in the proclamation of the gospel.”

Very important is this statement of Bucer: “*Omnis ecclesia Christi debet esse evangelisatrix*”: each and every church of Christ has to be a mission church, a church that evangelizes.

## Conclusion

There is more to be said about Reformation and Mission (cf. Joose, 1988:passim). But I think it is very clear now that it is impossible to describe the Reformation times while leaving out the word *mission*. On the contrary: we may discover great powers which were already present in Reformation times in the hearts of men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Martin Bucer. Later generations took these powers over and would develop them in obedience to the great commission, given by the King of the church to the church of all ages!

# IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF THE WORLD

## Introduction

We all know that our Belgic Confession in Article 29 speaks of the *hypocrites*, who are mixed in the church along with the good and yet are not *part* of the church. Actually they are *in* the church, but not *of* the Church. They are in fact people of the *world*, although they call themselves members of the Church.

We can also say it the other way around: the true believers are *in* the world, but they are not *of* the world. And if we say that, we have to remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in His well-known High-Priestly intercession of *John 17*: “Father, I have given them Thy Word; and the world has hated them because *they* are not of the world, even as *I* am not of the world. I do not pray that Thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. As Thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (vs. 14-16,18).

That is what John wrote in his gospel concerning the fact that the true believers are *in* the world, but not *of* the world. And in his first letter, the same apostle wrote:

“Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them (namely the spirits who are not of God); for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world, therefore what they say is of the world, and the world listens to them. We are of God.” And in the same chapter John wrote, “as He (that is Christ) is so are we in this world” (1 John 4:4,5,17). So, if we are *in* the world, but not *of* the world, we have a great task over against this world, the task to proclaim that Jesus Christ is the only Redeemer and Saviour, the task to bring the good tidings of the gospel to the people of the world.

## Alien or alienated

It belongs to the nature of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ to seek *outsiders*. The Church has to do that with the gospel, the infallible Word of God, which has been entrusted to her.

Who are ‘outsiders’? They can be people who are entirely alien to God and His service, who live without God in this world. They can also be people who have been *alienated* from the Lord God and who still have a vague (although usually a wrong) idea of who God is.

“First of all,” Paul wrote to Timothy, “then I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” The last sentence of this passage is very remarkable: God desires *all men* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. In the background of this apostolic command we must see the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Jesus Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise of John 3:16 is quoted by the Canons of Dort in ch. II, art. 5 concerning “the universal proclamation of the gospel.” This article continues: “This promise ought to be announced and proclaimed universally and without discrimination to all peoples and to all men to whom God in His good pleasure sends the gospel, together with the command to repent and believe.”

That means: the Church has a very responsible task! If the Church is a true Church, then she desires to reach all these men who are alien to or have been alienated from God and His service with God’s Word and to call them or to call them *back* to the communion with God and His people.

## Office-bearers

But one says: all right, the Church has to fulfil this task, and it is a very responsible task indeed. But the *Church*, that means: the *office-bearers*, ministers, elders and deacons. So let *them* do everything concerning evangelism. And one even quotes for instance *Eph. 4:11-13*, where Paul mentions the office-bearers and their task. The office-bearers, we learn from that passage, are gifts of the exalted Christ Himself. Paul writes: “And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” G. VanDooren, however, pointed to the fact that in this quotation from the Revised Standard Version translation one *comma* too much is used. We read: “Christ’s gifts were that some should be apostles (and so on), for the equipment of the saints, (comma!) for the work of ministry.” I quote now VanDooren: “The com-

ma after 'the saints' shouldn't be there! You see how putting one comma too much after that word, changes the whole sentence, the whole picture even of the Church of Jesus Christ. *With* that misplaced comma you see before your eyes ministers and elders and deacons running around, doing all the work. Theirs (according to that evil comma) is a *threefold* office. They must equip the saints (but do not ask me what for . . .). Then they must do (all) the work of ministry. And finally they must build up the body of Christ. You haven't heard a word about what that body, the whole congregation, has to do. No, everything has to be done by the 'special' office. Paul mentions here the 'preacher and teacher.' That would then mean that ministers have to do all the running (which easily becomes a running around in circles). But Paul would not object against adding the elders, even the deacons. *But that comma should not be there!*" (VanDooren, 1979:47).

That is according to the manner S. Greijdanus explains this text. He says: "Here is not pointed to a special office, but here is spoken of the office or service of all believers. Each elected one and every believer has his office: the one this, the other that. For the fulfilment of this task they must be completely equipped. And for that equipment of the believers to their service the Lord granted the several special offices and office-bearers" (Greijdanus, 1925:91).

We ask then: is there a task for the office-bearers? The answer is: sure, there is a great task. The office-bearers shall especially by preaching, catechesis and home visits point the members of the congregation to this calling and shall equip them unto the fulfilment of this calling.

So we can understand that Paul continues in verse 15 and 16: "We are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love."

## Consistory

Sometimes indeed the impression had been given that the whole matter of evangelism was a responsibility of the consistory of the Church, as for instance in the Netherlands at the synod of 1923, which stressed the task of the consistory concerning evangelism. But synod of Kampen 1975 decided that the decisions of 1923 should no longer be considered as a good expression of the evangelistic task of the Church. Synod of 1975 quoted first 1 Tim. 2:1-4, Eph. 4:11-16 and C.D. II, 5, and stressed then the task of the *members* of the congregation.

It is not to be denied that there is a task for the office-bearers; in the sermon, in catechism class, in home visits. But what about the task of the consistory as a whole? Well, the consistory must be on guard that things do not grow out of hand. So "the consistory shall continuously accompany this task of the members of the congregation by means of supervision and instruction," synod said. There can be a *guidance* from the side of the consistory, according to what the apostle Paul said to the consistory of Ephesus, saying farewell to them on the beach of Melitus: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the Church of God which He obtained with the blood of His own Son. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert."

The task of the consistory is therefore, to accompany the activities of the members of the congregation in all regards, in evangelism as well. But the work itself is to be done by the believers.

## Salt and light

It appears from Scriptures and from the practice of the early Christian Church that the propagation of the gospel is a matter of the whole congregation. The apostles act as *ambassadors* of Jesus Christ with special authority, but the congregation *bears* from her side the apostolic mission work with her *gifts and talents*.

The Church is placed *in* the world, but she may not one moment be *of* the world. Neither can she go *out of* the world, but she has to fulfil her task in the *midst of* the world. And then, in the midst of the world, among the gentiles, the Church must show herself and prove herself as the holy Christian Church. So the apostle Peter says: "As He who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written: 'you shall be holy, for I am holy.' " And *holy* does not mean *sinless* or *pure*, but it means: to be separated, to be *sacred*, to be prepared to the service of the only true God.

The apostle Paul often appeals to a holy conduct in connection with *baptism*. The members of the congregation are baptized. They are set apart by God Himself. Hence the calling: "Cleanse yourselves and make holiness perfect in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

*Holiness* — that is the new and for Christians the characteristic attitude of life, which is to be manifested in daily life and which comes forth from the communion with their God and Saviour in faith and gratitude. *Negatively* this holiness means a total break with sinful conduct of life. *Positively* it means a life in accord with the will of God, in order to show that Christians are totally different from the people of the world.

Being the salt of the earth, they have to penetrate the world and let their lights shine before men, Christ said in His sermon on the mount, "that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." In the same way the apostle Peter will later write to the exiles of the Dispersion, chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light: (1 Pet. 2:9).

## Godly walk

In the same chapter, Peter admonishes the exiles of the Dispersion: "Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God in the day of visitation."

The Heidelberg Catechism refers to this text in Lord's Day 32 in answer to the question why we must do good works. One of the reasons to do good works is 'that by our godly walk of life we may win our neighbours for Christ.' We may *win* them if we walk godly. So our Christian behaviour in the world is very important with respect to those who are outside. Sometimes we can *win* the outsiders even without words, and that is the other text from the same letter of Peter, to which the Heidelberg Catechism refers: "Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behaviour of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behaviour."

So there must be a right Christian behaviour. But what does that exactly mean? In the letters of the apostles we find three points which are especially important in order to understand this. These are the three elements which I will elucidate from the Scriptures, namely:

concord of the Church;  
obedience to the commandments;  
joy of faith.

## Concord

In the first place the apostles stress the *concord of the Church*. When the apostle Paul writes to the Philippians that he might hear of them that they stand firm in one spirit (Phil. 1:27), then he points especially to the common contention for the faith of the gospel. In the same context he calls that concord the mark of a conduct, worthy of Christ's gospel. Not only does concord fortify the members of the congregation together in order to testify outside, but concord itself is a testimony as well. So we read in the following chapter (2:1ff.) the urgent summons (sometimes called *the most emotional appeal* of the apostle Paul): "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in *full accord and of one mind*. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." In the same chapter the apostle admonishes: "Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as light in the world." Actually Paul writes here that the Philippians must do everything without '*peevish discussions*', in the same way as he writes to his spiritual son Timothy as well.

But immediately he continues: "So that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labour in vain." That means also: that Paul's *mission work* will not be in vain. And that would be the case indeed if they should not hold fast the word of life, the word of preaching. Then they themselves would not be true *fruits* of Paul's diligence. But at the same time the apostle is thinking of a possible defeat of the continuation of his work towards *other people*. Paul is always afraid of that: the *discord* which lies everywhere in wait, and impedes time and again the progress of the gospel in this world. Wherever Judaists or other people contradicted the gospel, which Paul proclaimed, they withdrew men from Christ alone, and then the mission work suffered a loss. Then the powers were spent in competition and dispute. Paul calls that "to proclaim Christ out of partisanship" (Phil. 1:17). Besides that, the world would have reason to turn away from the preaching. Hence we can understand the great offense the apostles had to *discord*, also of *private quarrels*.

But one has not only to maintain concord on account of the progress of the work of God *inside* one's own congregation, no, one must radiate love also to the *outside*, in order to attract other people in this way. When the apostle Peter admonishes 'to have unity of spirit, sympathy (that means actually *compassion*), love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind,' then he directly connects this with the admonition, not to return evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary to *bless*. Surely Peter has in view here the outsiders. The mutual bond in the congregation does not mean at all a repelling attitude to those who are outside, but is connected with entirely similar feelings to fellow-men. Brotherly love cannot exist without the true Christian affection and humbleness.

Those two qualities are always connected with *self-denial*, even with the blessing of the oppressor.

In the same way the apostle Paul writes to the Romans in chapter 12. In this chapter Paul progresses even twice from brotherly love and concord of the church,

to the blessing of the persecutors. It's of great concern to him that the members of the congregation have the right attitude to the outsiders. "If possible," he writes in verse 18, "so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all." And to Timothy he writes: "Shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22). And to the Thessalonians he says: "Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in all ways" (2 Thess. 3:22). We may not be the reason of a quarrel. If it happens through no fault of ours, then we may not be revengeful. Time and again this is said in the New Testament letters and it is proven by the Old Testament. To outsiders the true Christianity must appear from that. All desire of *vengeance* must disappear for Christians. It *can* disappear for him who know that God will do justice. But the main thing is: desire of revenge must be strange to anybody who himself received *grace*. So this attitude is a *Christian preaching par excellence*.

Beautiful is what the apostle writes in verse 20 (still in Romans 12), that the benefits which the Christian delivers the enemies will at last be so *unbearable* (hence those 'burning coals upon their heads'!) that they will be shamed into giving up their hostile attitude. So here we find the shame of the slanderer by means of positive deeds of love.

Such an attitude of a Christian is not *passive* but the highest *activity*. On the same line we see the end of this chapter: Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (vs. 21)

## Obedience

Besides this trait of concord and brotherly affection in which the holy Christian behaviour reveals itself, the apostles very much emphasize *obedience*. Most of the time people used to see this obedience in the light of the *law*, namely of the *fifth commandment*. But in the passage 1 Peter 2:13-3:6 the whole appeal of obedience is an aspect of the *new obedience*, rooted in the faith in Jesus Christ. That starts already in verse 12 of chapter two: you may never suffer as wrongdoers. The world slanders often. But if the world hates you, it may never be because of your bad behaviour!

We quoted already the beginning of chapter 3 that the husbands may be won without a word, by the behaviour of their wives. The situation was such that there were Christian women, who possessed heathen husbands. That is difficult and hard: an unbeliever in your own family! They had not been married as a mixed couple, mixed in the sense of a believer together with an unbeliever. No, rather through the conversion of the woman and the fact that the husband had not been converted, but remained a heathen, the marriage became mixed up. But what now? Did these women have to leave their husbands when they got troubles? No, Peter says, *be not inobedient*, but stay submissive day by day. Show in your behaviour what it means to be a true Christian. If the husband does not want to listen to words any more, maybe he will look at your conduct. In this way he could be attracted! And further on the apostle writes (vs. 15): "But in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong."

To make a defence — that does not mean: to allow yourself to be drawn by everybody, to speak with everybody at any time he wants to dispute. No, it is: if you are called to *defense*, especially in *trials*, then you have to make a defense. Then you

have to profess the Lord, you have to speak freely and frankly, without diplomacy.

But yet: with gentleness and reverence, that means: with submission and meekness, with careful caution. Your attitude, for instance an attitude of challenge, may not become the reason of hatred and persecution. So the slanderers will be ashamed and otherwise they would not. A Christian is always a *priest*: if indignity and persecution appear for Christ's sake, the Christian has to bear that and to suffer that. Even then he has to pray for his enemies.

## Joy

There is still another quality of Christian behaviour in the world and that is *joy*. The gospel is a good and joyful tiding. That must be seen! Christians have to show that. Joy is always communicative, attractive and contagious. That concerns especially the true Christian joy, that is joy-in-oppression. Hence the apostle Paul can write in his letter to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."

But too easily one can respond in this way: "All right, but a man does not always have the same mood. . . ." No, it must *radiate* from us, even in difficult circumstances, that we belong to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, *they* were far from their native land and *he* was in prison. So there were difficult circumstances on both sides. But yet this letter is called: the letter of joy. The apostle himself is an exponent of this joy with his joy even in martyrdom. And he writes: "I am glad and rejoice with you all." But in one breath he continues: "Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me: (Phil. 2:17,18). It is this joy in circumstances otherwise so sad which contrasts with the frame of mind of the neighbourhood and which irresistibly attracts the outsiders.

So Paul can write to the *Thessalonians*: "You become imitators of us, and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with *joy* inspired by the Holy Spirit; so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:6,7).

Therefore the utterance of this joy, for instance in Christian singing, can be a preaching to outsiders as well. Paul is speaking about that to the Colossians: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God: (Col. 3:16).

The history of mission in Europe started with such joy-in-oppression, and especially with songs of praise in the night! "And the prisoners were *listening* to them" (Acts 16:25).

## Word and deed

These three aspects, concord, obedience and joy are decisive for our Christian behaviour in the world. We have to present a pious *example* to the outsiders, and in this way we must attract them. But you can ask: what about *speaking* to outsiders? Do we not have to speak to them at all? The apostle often places deed and word on one line and mentions them close together.

We read for instance in 1 Thess. 4:11 and 12: "We exhort you, brethren, to do so more and more, to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs and to work with your hands, as we charged you; so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody." When the apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians, the congregation had been instituted not that long before. But yet they had been oppressed very soon after that start. Now the outsiders observed very closely the



members of the congregation: how would they behave themselves? Now keep in mind, Paul says, especially three things:

- 1) *You must be quiet.* Do not be noisy fellows. No sensational behaviour! Do not cause scandals!
- 2) *You must mind your own affairs.* That means: be not meddlesome. Do not meddle in other people's affairs. Meddlesomeness leads to pride and quarrel and envy.
- 3) *You must work with your hands.* That means: stay at your own place, where you belong. There you serve God with diligence and exertion. You have to do that as a servant or as a free man, having a good job or a humble occupation. Everybody has to do what is put upon his shoulders. Be not dependent on others.

If the congregation lives in this way, she may command the respect of outsiders.

But then she has no doubt the task to *speak* to the outsiders! Pay attention to what the apostle Paul is writing to the *Colossians* in chapter 4, verse 5 and 6: "Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone."

The Church of Colosse, living among Jews and gentiles, had to conduct herself *wisely*. Wisdom is always connected with care and caution. That does not mean: to beat around the bush, to be dishonest. But it means: do not tackle everything at once, do not needlessly go into all kinds of subjects! We have to know the times and the opportunities. If the world hates us, then it must not happen because of our follies, shortcomings and imprudences.

And then: *we have to make the most of time*, like the wise dealings of a merchant. He does not buy everything, nor does he buy continuously, but he waits for the good opportunity, the best possibility. So we have to *speak* with the people of the world. We have to do that personally, but speaking together, for instance in groups, is not excluded from that.

But our speech must be *gracious*, the apostle says. That does not mean that we can flatter, that we can beat around the bush. No, it means: our speech must be *attractive*. We may not speak without *contents*, without any *context*. We may not be annoying to outsiders! Do not be *boring*!

And: not without *salt*. Salt makes food tasty and averts decay. So we have to avoid depraved words, any dirty and musty speech! "You may know how you ought to answer everyone," the apostle says. That means: if worldly people are *asking* something, if they have sincere questions, then we *have to answer*. But we cannot give the same answer to everybody. Sometimes we have to *warn*, if we have the opportunity to do, so just as Paul did over against the people and Peter did over against the Jews and the rulers.

Sometimes worldly people are quarrelsome. Then most of the time it will be better to keep *silent*.

The one desires *instruction*. Look for such an opportunity!

The other one is a *disobedient child* of God's covenant. Call him back to God's Church!

The one is a *mocker*, who wants to provoke. The other one is a totally *worldly* man. But we have to know — and that is a matter of much wisdom! — how we ought to answer everyone.

But we know what James writes: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting" (James 1:5,6).

## Attractive and merciful

That must be — in short — our Christian behaviour in the world. We are set in this world and we cannot go out of the world. That is what Paul is writing in his first letter to the Church of Corinth (1 Cor. 5:9).

B. Holwerda said — and I will end with his remarks which are worthy of consideration “There we meet that famous expression: we cannot go out of the world. But if you want to use this word, take it exactly as it is written. It does not mean: if you contact the world, then you can palter with the truth, you do not need to be too precise. No, Paul had just said in 1 Corinthians 5: you are redeemed by Christ’s cross and now you have to celebrate the feast of pureness and truth. You cannot live a double life, and vacillate between two opinions. Your Christianity may not be a varnish, a jacket that you put off when you join another society. If you refuse encounter with the world, then you go out of the world. Then you would judge the world. But that is not your task. You can judge only as office-bearers judge sinful people in the Church. God Himself will judge those who are outside. God judges the world.

So it is exactly contrary to what we think about it. We say, if we are going to walk on the brink, does the Bible not say that we cannot go out of the world? And we reassure ourselves. We are aware that we receive our part of the rejoicing of the world. Otherwise we would wrong ourselves. But Paul says it just the other way around. *Not*: you would wrong *yourselves*, but: you would wrong the *world*! Encounter with the world? Yes, but provided that we know ourselves always as *missionaries*, who seek the salvation of all of them whom God wants to save. Provided that you do not make an excursion of the *service journey* to which God calls you. So: attract the outsiders. Be moved with mercy toward the people of the world.

He who reforms his encounter according to God’s Law, he has to *say* something. He also knows what it means: not *of* the world, but yet always *in* the world. He has found his lifestyle for good” (Holwerda, 1947:15f.).

I want to finish with the following *conclusions*:

1. It belongs to the nature of Christ’s Church to seek with the gospel which has been entrusted to her also those who are alien to or have become alienated from God and His service. According to the apostolic command the Church makes intercession to God her Saviour. For He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The Church desires to reach all these men with God’s Word and to call them to the communion with God and His people (1 Tim. 2:1-4; C.D. II, 5).

2. The office-bearers will, especially by preaching, catechesis and home visits, point out this calling to the members of the congregation and will equip them for the fulfilment of this calling (Eph. 4:11-16).

3. The consistories will continually accompany this task of the members of the congregation by means of supervision and instruction (Acts 20:28-30).

4. The members of the congregation, being the salt of the earth, have to penetrate the world and to let their light shine before men (Matt. 5:13-16, 1 Pet. 1:15, 2:9).

5. It is very important that by our godly walk of life we may win our neighbours for Christ (1 Pet. 3:1,2; H.C., answ. 86).

6. Characteristic for a godly walk are in the first place: concord and love of the brethren (Phil. 1:27-2:10; 1 Pet. 3:8-12; Rom. 12:9-21).

7. Furthermore an important requirement is: obedience, especially to the civil government and to the husband (1 Pet. 2:13-3:6).

8. In Christian behaviour toward those who are outside, joy must radiate from God’s children (Phil. 2:18, 4:4; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 1:6).

9. Speaking to the outsiders is also important, but there must be a harmonious coherence of deed and word (1 Thess. 4:1-12; Col. 4:1-6).

10. When approaching those who are outside, one has to keep in mind the need to attract them, and to be moved with mercy toward them (1 Cor. 5:9, 10, 13).

## QUESTION CONCERNING THE JEWS

### Introduction

Once again Israel is in the centre of attention. Various problems have arisen regarding the people of the old covenant people — problems which cannot be easily solved. Millennialists have all kinds of ideas and theories concerning the Jews, giving us an excess of subject material relating to many Scripture passages and providing quite a number of exegetical problems. Moreover, the present state of Israel has given rise to many questions in connection with this. These questions are not so much related to the present status of Israel as to the future of the country and its people. And it is of great importance what the Jews themselves think of the fulfillment of God's promises. In other words, what kind of Messiah expectations are prevalent in Israel? If I am not mistaken, there are essentially three questions demanding an answer:

1. What is the Scriptural information about Israel's future as a nation?
2. How should we regard the present-day development of the state of Israel?
3. Which thoughts do the Jews themselves entertain concerning the Messiah?

We have very briefly formulated the questions, and it will become evident that they will overlap here and there, but at least we will have a guide to assist us in the maze of the numerous problems that have arisen.

### Scriptural information

In the first place we shall deal with the information provided by the Scriptures concerning the future of Israel as a nation. Some have expressed as their opinion that with the coming of the Lord Jesus, Israel as nation has completely lost its special position. According to them "Israel" is today the New Testament church, nothing else. All the promises which the LORD gave to Abraham and his seed have been totally reflected to this New Testament church. According to them, there is absolutely no more hope for a national Israel. G.Ch. Aalders offers as his opinion that after the coming and death of the Messiah, Israel's national existence as a people was ended completely and forever. He speaks this way absolutely and without any reservations. The Old Testament, according to Aalders in this pre-war book, knows nothing about an awaited earthly future for Israel: "The earthly future of Israel, which was foretold in the Old Testament *has* already arrived according to the word of prophecy, and has already been annulled" (Aalders, n.d.:257f.).

Many years have passed since this book by Aalders made its appearance. There has been a war since then which seemed to have made an end of the Jews. Hitler, Eichmann and their satellites managed to destroy no fewer than six million Jews, a slaughter which has no equal in history. However, a miraculous event took place: not only did a remnant of the Jews survive (even though in Europe, for instance, only 28% of the pre-war population), but a large number of them managed to unite together and settled in the new state of Israel. On May 15, 1948, the State of Israel was established as an independent state in Palestine. And then arose the question: What about the earthly future of Israel, which according to men such as Aalders could no longer

be expected? Many people immediately came to the conclusion that this indicated a national rebirth, a complete return, even a total conversion to God. Above all, however, and that is our concern at the moment, many saw in the occurrences of 1948 the confirmation of the prophecy which they interpreted in a millennialistic sense. We cannot circumvent millennialistic theories with regard to the future of the people of Israel when we consider the problem of the Jews.

## **The thousand years**

For that reason we will briefly summarize the essential beliefs of millennialism. Millennialists believe in a first and a second return of Christ, and between these two events lies His thousand-year reign with a restored Jerusalem at the centre. Long before there was any question of the return of the Jews to Palestine, these people already voiced a strong expectation of the return of the Jews to the Holy Land, based on Old Testament prophecies, and also on some information in the New Testament, to which they give their own interpretation. They believe that Israel's national task was temporarily given to the gentiles, and that this task will last only until the times of the gentiles have been fulfilled (Luke 21:24). Israel's spiritual task was temporarily assigned to the New Testament church, from the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to the first return of Christ. Then, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:17, the church will be taken up into the air, and that moment will signify the marriage of the Lamb, although it is not yet the end of the world. The taking-up of the church designates the final period of time. Then God will return to Israel and this people will again take over its task from the church. God will renew the ties with Israel through the 144,000 of Revelation 7, who will be missionaries on earth during the great persecution, the final period of the times of the gentiles, which commenced at the lifting up of the church. However, the conversion of Israel will be accompanied by heavy persecution and distress, for Israel will be gathered to the arms of Jesus only through the great persecution of the anti-christ. Jerusalem will prove more and more to be a rock of offense, until all the nations will gather together against her. That signals the great Armageddon, and in her distress Israel will learn to seek the Lord Jesus. Then the moment will have arrived that God will pour out His Spirit over them. Christ shall again place His feet on the Mount of Olives and return with all His holy ones who had been lifted up to Him earlier. By divine intervention all the armies gathered in the valley of Armageddon against Jerusalem shall be defeated. The Beast and the false prophet shall be cast into the pool of fire. God shall again establish the throne of David and the millennium of Christ shall dawn in full glory. At that time Satan will be bound so that he can no longer tempt the nations. People will gather from all the ends of the earth to Jerusalem to worship the King who is seated on the throne of David. The church will share in the glory of Christ and sit as kings and priests with Him on His throne. Also, the temple will be rebuilt and the priestly service will be restored according to the prophecy of Jeremiah 33:18. The new temple at Jerusalem will be the spiritual centre of the whole world. Many people and mighty gentiles will come to worship God in Jerusalem. This will be the great mission dispensation of history. In this present day there are only individuals who come to believe, but then "all the gentiles will come to Him and fall down before His face." At the end of Christ's reign of peace follows a short time when Satan's bonds will be untied, and he will once again cause a rebellion. These are his final movements, however, for this rebellion will seal his own doom. After a cleansing process by fire, whereby the elements will melt, and God Himself will use atomic energy, the last stains — reminders of sin — will be removed. Then will dawn the new heavens and the new earth, where righteousness dwells.

## Texts

It is impossible to discuss all the texts which are put forward by the millennialists to promote their ideas. Their main argument is their opinion that everything that is written in the prophecies must be taken *literally*. Let us take their interpretation of Isaiah 11:15 and 16 as an example: "And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt; and will wave His hand over the River with His scorching wind, and smite it into seven channels that men may cross dryshod. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant which is left of His people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt." Their argument is as follows: the crossing of the Red Sea actually happened, so it must be the same for this prophecy. And since it has not yet taken place, there is only one conclusion, namely, that it must still happen! Moreover, they say, the prophecies speak of Israel's being gathered out of all nations (cf. Jeremiah 32:37 and Ezekiel 36:24), whereas the exile involved only Assyria and Babylon. In addition there is the prophecy that Israel will once again be planted in its country and will never again be plucked out of it (Isaiah 11:11, Isaiah 14:1, Amos 9:15), whereas it certainly was plucked out again after the return from exile. Special references are made to the prophecies of Zechariah, since he prophesied after the exile. A favourite quotation is Zechariah 14, which calls Jerusalem the divine worship centre for the entire world.

As for the New Testament, they find support for their position in Acts 15:14-17, where James points out that "God has first visited the gentiles and after that will return and rebuild the dwelling of David which has fallen so that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the gentiles who are called by My Name." A final proof to them is the parable of the barren fig tree. For three years Christ sought in vain for fruit from the people of Israel (Luke 13:7). His personal presence could not bring a change in that barrenness, and although he found leaves, there was no fruit. Hence His curse: "May no fruit ever come from you again" (Matthew 21:19). This *seems* to be evidence that Israel has totally lost its special importance, but (according to them) these words refer only to this dispensation. And so they say that in this dispensation Israel as a nation has never brought forth fruit and will not do so. However in the next dispensation of Messianic salvation, Israel *will* bring forth fruit. The time of the end will bring the summer near when the fig tree will again bud forth (Matthew 24:32). That budding of the fig tree will occur when Israel returns to Palestine.

How should we evaluate this viewpoint? In the first place, we can never be satisfied with a literal fulfillment of prophecy in itself. When millennialists apply the texts which refer to Jerusalem's restoration and future only to the earthly Jerusalem, then they come into thorough conflict with the Scriptures themselves. The name "Jerusalem" in the Bible does not apply to the Jerusalem in Palestine only. I merely refer to what Paul writes in Galatians 4:24-26 about the distinction between the Jerusalem of his day and the Jerusalem that is above. Think also of what John says in the book of Revelation about "the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God" (Revelation 21). There is also Hebrews 12:22: "But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." So the Scriptures clearly forbid us to dwell only on the earthly Jerusalem whenever the city is mentioned. Also in this aspect the Old Testament is explained via the New! It is obvious that a literal interpretation of prophecy can lead astray when we see the millennialistic belief (based on Jeremiah 33:18) in the restoration of the Levitical priesthood with burnt offerings, cereal offerings, and sacrifices. This, however, is in direct conflict with the continuing witness of the letter to the Hebrews, especially the chapters 7 to 10. "Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood . . . what further need would

there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek?" (Hebrews 7:11). "For if that first covenant had been faultless there would have been no occasion for a second" (Hebrews 8:7). "Consequently, when Christ came into the world, He said, 'Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure.' Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do Thy will O God,' as it is written in the roll of the book" (Hebrews 10:5-7). And especially 10:9: "He abolished the first in order to establish the second."

So we are also not to anticipate a literal fulfillment of Isaiah 11:15,16, that a highway will be made through the Red Sea and the River (Euphrates), for where to-day there is no longer mention made of the Philistines, Edom, Moab, Ammon, etc., why should the same not apply to the former?

An interesting proof text is Acts 15:14-17. If the context had been closely kept in mind, it would have been obvious that James was not at all discussing the *future* restoration of Israel and the fallen dwelling of David. On the contrary, he argues that at that particular time the fallen dwelling of David *was* restored. The kingship of Christ has now come, and it may be expected that the gentiles who turn to God will now no longer be asked to keep all kinds of Jewish laws and statutes.

The interpretation of the withered fig tree is also incorrect. The expression "(not) ever again" is used more often in the Bible to indicate a permanent situation. Moreover, one may not automatically identify the fig tree with the Israel in Palestine. Matthew 24 deals with the signs of Christ's return and it is natural that Christ uses the symbol of the fig tree: in Palestine the fig tree gets its leaves in the spring, in contrast with many other trees that are green all year long.

Now a comment about Israel's being gathered out of all nations, from the four corners of the earth. The millennialists feel that Israel was exiled only to Babylon and Assyria and so the "gathering" cannot refer to the return from exile. They forget, however, that Israel was indeed scattered throughout many places. Jeremiah 43 describes how Johanan took the remnant to Egypt. Also their theory concerning the two returns of Christ: the contrast between 1 Thessalonians 4 (return on the clouds) and Zechariah 14 (standing on the Mount of Olives) is untenable. For in the first place, Paul does not speak about Christ's remaining in the air, but about the believers' being brought up to meet Him. Moreover, he connects to this return the destruction of those who do not await the Lord's coming. In the next chapter he mentions the people who say: here is peace and security, and *those* are the ones who will be caught by the destruction. There will be no escape, says Paul; in other words, repentance is no longer possible, for the end has come. Therefore it is the same return as mentioned in Zechariah 14, even though it is seen from a different perspective. But it is one and the same return, when everything in Judah and Jerusalem will be holy to the LORD.

## Positive

Although we reject all these millennialist views and interpretations that does not mean that there are no positive references concerning the future of Israel. I think of Christ's discourse on the last days as Luke renders it in ch. 21:23,24: "For great distress shall be upon the earth and wrath upon this people, they will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the gentiles, until the times of the gentiles are fulfilled." This, then, refers to a dispersion of Israel, which at the time of its prediction was still totally in the future and would be extremely severe. Jerusalem would be trampled by the gentiles, nations different from God's covenant people. This prophecy was very literally fulfilled during and after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. At that time and also later in history the Jews

were persecuted, hunted and scattered all over the earth. Who does not know the history of the crusades, when the Christians rose up to rescue the “holy places” out of the hands of the Saracens? The Turks dominated Palestine until 1917, after which the Arabs virtually became rulers. However, when speaking about the signs of the times, Christ emphatically used the word “until.” The dispersion would not last forever, but until the times of the gentiles would be fulfilled. We do not know exactly what is meant by the times of the gentiles. Perhaps it means that they were to rule over Israel and Jerusalem and thus to execute God’s judgment. It may also mean that Israel was to receive an opportunity to return to God. Perhaps it is both, for the one does not exclude the other. One thing is sure, however: God has set a time limit also to the trampling of Jerusalem by the gentiles, a beginning and an ending. Added to this is the fact that the end of the trampling of Jerusalem does not immediately indicate the end of the world.

## Romans 11

Some promises for Israel remain yet unfulfilled; think especially of what Paul writes in Romans 11. Here the apostle begins by asking: “Has God, then, rejected His people?” It is obvious that “His people” in this case means the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” Then the apostle refers back to the time of Elijah. *At that time* the LORD established His faithfulness to His promises by keeping for Himself 7000 men who did not bow the knee to Baal. “So, too, at this present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.” The faithfulness of the LORD is not bound to a number. Did not the New Testament church totally and completely have its origins in Israel? Did not the LORD start with them when He instituted His church in Jerusalem, first gathering them from Judea, and after that sending His apostles to the gentiles? If is because the LORD maintained the old line, the line of election through grace, that salvation by-passed the greater part of Israel. For the majority in Israel sought their salvation by means of works and were therefore hardened (vs. 6-10). But Paul emphasizes that their rejection of Christ, their stumbling over this rock, does not mean their permanent rejection. “Have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means” (vs. 11). The LORD executed His complete counsel of salvation through their trespass, so that by this means salvation might come to the gentiles. Not to the exclusion of Israel, however, but in order to make Israel jealous. For as long as Israel has not come to repentance, there is a great deficiency. Therefore, because of his love for his own people, Paul feels all the more compelled to journey all over to bring the gentiles to repentance of Israel. In the first place he argues that God is able again to accept Israel, to bring it to repentance, to graft in again the broken-off branches. If God is able to graft in the branches of a wild olive tree, that is, if God is powerful enough to bring the gentiles to faith, how much more the natural branches, that is the Jews. And the LORD not only *can* do this, He also *will* do it. Paul warns in vs. 25: “Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved.” If one has followed the discourse of Paul closely, he will understand that it would be completely illogical for Paul to switch suddenly to *spiritual* Israel at this point. Doekes in his commentary on Romans 9-11, writes: “In these three chapters Israel is mentioned no less than eleven times. The ten previous references unquestionably point to the Jews in contrast to the gentiles. What specific reason would force us now to a different conclusion? Surely not the context, for the distinction between Jews and gentiles does not stop at vs. 25 but continues in the next verses. Nor is it the prophecy which Paul advances as proof of the truth he has stated and which testifies to it with the expressly

used names of Zion and Jacob. Everything pleads for letting “all Israel” be understood to mean the Jewish people. Obviously a contrast exists between “all” and “the remnant chosen by grace” (vs. 5). As long as “all” is not understood to mean the total number of individuals, a mass conversion. This must not be interpreted to refer to the *number* of the Jews which will be saved, but to Israel as a *people*” (Doekes, 1915:298). S. Greijdanus also remarks in his commentary on Romans 11 that it is not the number as such that is at stake here, but the people as a whole (Greijdanus, 1933:516). Is this such a strange thought? Paul himself refers to the Old Testament prophecy that the LORD will banish ungodliness from Jacob. The very sad fact of today is: the Jews are enemies of the gospel. They have rejected the glad tidings of Christ’s coming. Yet they do remain the beloved of the LORD! Not because of themselves but according to God’s election, for the father’s sake. And so one line is drawn through the history of salvation. At first the nations were all disobedient; therefore they were rejected, and the Lord then chose Abraham, Israel, out of grace, to be His people. But that was not because the LORD cut off those nations. No, when the LORD called Abraham and chose Israel, He had in mind the deliverance of those people. That salvation of the nations was realized when God sent His Son, Jesus Christ. However, that salvation was also realized through the disobedience of Israel, because they nailed the Lord Jesus to the cross and rejected Him. So the LORD was merciful to Abraham and Israel in their calling and election, so that we in turn might gain mercy, and the salvation from the Jews might come to us. In this way *we* have received mercy, so that through *us*, *they* might again obtain mercy. And as Paul the Jew, led us to Christ, we must now lead the seed of Abraham to Christ. Therefore there is, for Jews and gentiles both, only one road to salvation throughout the ages, to the end of time: the way of God’s mercy.

## The state of Israel

Now that we have discovered that the history of the Jews is not concluded after all and that God did not close off the road for His old covenant people, we must answer the following question: How should we view present developments in the state of Israel? For as D. Holwerda states in his outlines on Romans, we do not face an ethnological problem but rather an eschatological event (Holwerda, 1949:66). The constitution of the state of Israel in 1948 is not a coincidence or an interesting geographical phenomenon! No, it is a sign of the times, a fact which is very closely related to the prophecy of the Scriptures. For even when we strongly reject the millennialist theories, do we not face the prophecy of the Scriptures with regard to the developments in present-day Israel, and should all these events not be regarded in the light of prophecy, especially in the light of Christ’s prophetic speech concerning the future and Paul’s hymn of praise to God’s mercies in Romans 11?

G.Ch. Aalders, who in his pre-war commentary came to the conclusion that there is no future for Israel, still maintains in his post-war brochure (published in 1949, a year after Israel became a state) that what has happened in Israel, and whatever still may happen, has no connection with divine prophecy (Aalders, 1949:31). Also the book *Israel*, published in 1955 by G.Ch. Aalders and H.N. Ridderbos, expressly emphasizes: Israel is rejected as a nation — and that is that (Aalders, 1955:19). Yet after reading the many books available on Israel today, we strongly feel that this is an eschatological question. All events proceed to the fulfillment of the prophecy, to the fullness of times. However, and that is the other side of the coin, let us not rejoice prematurely. For example, when we recall the attitude of the Dutch Reformed (Hervormde) Synod in the Netherlands regarding the so-called “dialogue” with Israel, we might conclude that now already a large-scale, massive and even national return of the Jews is in effect.



They expressed agreement with Karl Barth's statement: "The glory of the risen Lord is reflected in the church, but His suffering is reflected in Israel." They even go so far as to say that Israel has been set among the nations as a mirror in which we see our inability to live by God's grace and power, and also as a mirror which shows the judgment of God. Israel judges itself to be the Messiah of the nations and for that reason the church and Israel are not two independent entities which exist beside or over against each other. No, the church and Israel are one in Christ. For that reason there is to be no more mission work *in* Israel but dialogue *with* Israel.

## **Special function?**

We will not dwell on this except to remark that in this way the accent has been shifted completely. They have taken as their basis that the Jewish people has to fulfill a special function in history and believe that now the era of complete brotherhood and spiritual unity has arrived. Such a conclusion is premature, to say the least. The facts give us a different picture. Since the people of Israel after the defeat of the Bar-Kochba uprising in the years A.D. 132-135 were permanently sent away from Palestine, the prayer for the peace of Jerusalem has never ceased. The wish expressed after every Passover, "next year in Jerusalem," originated many centuries ago. Originally this desire was strongly religious in character without any political overtones. Jerusalem became the city of pilgrimage. Many Jews travelled there to visit the holy city. A portion remaining of the old temple wall was used especially on Fridays to mourn and to pray (the so-called wailing wall). Great was the desire to be buried on the Mount of Olives in order to be among the first to greet the Messiah when He returned to raise the dead. In the 14th century there was again a Jewish congregation in Jerusalem which maintained itself there and became the centre for studying the Mosaic laws. The congregation concerned themselves with nothing else and existed from the gifts and donations sent by other Jews outside Palestine.

Beside this religious Zionism, the previous centuries saw the origin of a political Zionism which arose mainly because of anti-semitism. As long as the Jewish people lived in segregated areas (ghettos) they were not too badly off. But in the French Revolution, when the rights of man were proclaimed, the situation changed. The Jews also liberated themselves from old custom and ties. Then followed the disillusionment. Many people felt that a Jew always remains a Jew, and of course the latter experienced the results of this belief. This state of always being isolated promoted nationalistic feelings and created a desire for a national home of their own, a native country. In 1897, a Zionistic organization was established with the aim to establish a home in Palestine. Through the blazing hatred against the Jews and the terrorism of the Nazis, the Jews all the more considered a national existence of their own as the only solution. This resulted in the great Exodus; a stream of Jews travelled from their dwelling-places to the old homeland. Although in 1932 there were only 180,000 Jews in Palestine among a general population of one million, this number quickly increased after the war to one million Jews. The hatred, the enmity and the attempts to wipe them out completely, became the strongest motives to seek an independent existence in Palestine.

## **No conversion**

Originally there were great contrasts within the Jewish people, especially with regard to the Zionistic aspirations. The orthodox Jews kept themselves aloof from Zionism, especially because it has a political background. Radical elements were not satisfied with a national homeland but wanted a complete Jewish state. Others sup-

ported the idea of co-existence with the Arabs who lived there already. Most of the differences have gradually disappeared because of the need to present a united front to the world outside. There are still important differences between religious and political Zionism, and whereas the latter is liberal, the former is typically Jewish and conservative in the Jewish sense. In no way therefore do the events of today indicate a total conversion of the Jews. That is still out of the question. We will return to that point when discussing the third question. As far as political developments were concerned, when the English decided on May 15, 1948, to give up their mandate, the Jews proclaimed the state of Israel in the area designated by the U.N. The Arabs, however, who had long felt threatened by the massive invasion of the Jews, had also not been idle. The Arab countries had formed a coalition with Egypt, and on the same day that England gave up its mandate, Arab troops entered Jewish territory. After a fierce conflict, in which the Jews suffered severe losses but to everyone's amazement stood firm and even gained territory, the armistice was concluded at the end of 1948 and the Jewish state could consolidate itself. Practically all the Arabs had fled Jewish territory. It continues to be an uneasy peace with an explosion every so often.

Aside from that, in the years following 1948 steady progress has been apparent, especially in the economic sector. The accomplishments of Israel during these years are almost unbelievable. A tremendous amount of Jewish capital has entered the country. Modern cities have been built, electrical generators, oil refineries, and all kinds of other industries were established. An enormous amount of work is still being done and the energy of the Jewish people demands our admiration.

## Blood and soil

And yet, and that is the last point, does the return to the *country* of the fathers also a mean a return to the *God* of the fathers? We have already expressed our doubts about such a conclusion and now at the end we want to justify our doubts. We have previously mentioned the war between Israel and the Arabs. The war is considered a holy war by the Zionists, which fact unites the Zionists in Palestine together today. It is the conflict of yore between Ishmael and Isreal, about which Israel already sang in the Middle Ages when they feared the threat of the Arabs. Today, however, it is no longer the fearful cry of those days, but now it is a cry for self-assertion. It is the same contours of hatred and enmity against the Arab world, the enemy of ancient times, which control the Israel of today. Present-day Israel does not praise God's mercy as Paul did in Romans 11 but praises itself, in total contrast with the praise of Romans 11. Today Israel sings of blood and soil. While the destroyers of this people, the Nazis of Germany, gloried in German blood and German soil, the Jews now glory in Jewish blood and Jewish soil. They sing of self-vindication and of salvation by their own efforts. For now I touch upon an essential point in the present Jewish development: they are full of . . . themselves, of national values and national pride. And they even go so far that they imagine themselves as nation, as people, to be the messiah who was to come. This Israel does not differ from the Christian faith in that it places in the future what for us has already happened. No, they see the messiah incorporated in the people, the nation, "blood and soil." That is why their fighting is so fanatic. Today Israel sings:

A generation that wants to be saved;  
Only then do you rise to your task and are delivered,  
Only then do you rise to your task and deliver!

Please note: what is said *passively* in the second line, has become *active* in the third. They are delivered, yes indeed, but because they save themselves. The nation is its

own saviour, its own messiah. And when does this happen? When they *want* it themselves. The will power of a people is the actual power of salvation.

## Conclusion

I could underline this thought with more examples, but we should come to an end.

Today's Israel has a messianic theory which flatly contradicts the Scriptures. It does not follow the way of the covenant and the grounds for pleading which the covenant provides. By saying this we do not wish to imply that this is the last word from Israel, and even less that this is our last word *about* Israel. The dismissive formula — “once rejected as covenant people, always rejected” — does not fit within the framework of the Scriptures. However, we do say: let us beware of premature conclusions regarding the return of the Jews to Palestine. The last word concerning the Jews, also about the future of this people, has not yet been spoken. Who knows what the future may bring, also for this chosen people of old. As long as *we* now speak up. With the return of so many Jews to the old homeland perhaps possibilities for a true conversion may be given — possibilities which cannot as yet be imagined. For let us not forget one thing: conversion must always come through prayer and work. Yes indeed, it is God's doings from A to Z, but the LORD uses people in His kingdom and those people may not be idle. They must approach God in prayer, also for this nation. Do we still remember this old covenant people in our prayers?

However, they and we must also come together through action. That does not mean a dialogue in which two parties simply come together to supplement each other. No, in this age of levelling off and of syncretism we are again called to confess the antithesis. We must confess the antithetical word that our only salvation lies in the Christ of the Scriptures. Therefore our work among this people must be done from a missionary viewpoint. In the Netherlands a new initiative is being undertaken in that direction, and I believe that there indeed lies a task, no matter how difficult. C. Van Dam, in his article, “Mission work among the Jews?” in *Clarion*, September 19, 1986, has also pointed to this task. May the LORD, the God of His people who propels the history of the nations, also of the old Jewish people, to the end of times, still give us the time, the power, and the desire, so that this nation may again as people of God find in Jesus Christ the promised Messiah who has come and will return. Then they will no more sing of blood and soil, not even the song of Moses only, but together with all the saved ones sing the song of Moses *and* of the Lamb, the song of His blood:

Thee, holy Lamb of God, we bless;

Thou'st through Thy cross redemption sent us.