

P R O T E S T A N T R E F O R M E D
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EDITORIAL NOTES

Prof. R. Decker has turned his attention to a subject of considerable importance in his article in this Journal--the subject of preaching. There is, in the ecclesiastical world, a concerted attack made against preaching. This attack is on two fronts. Under the influence of modern higher criticism, the authority of Scripture is rapidly being undermined, and the contents of the preaching is no longer the truth of Scriptures. Substituted for sound Biblical expository preaching is a large number of discourses on every conceivable human social and political problem which the world faces. Every heresy, long condemned by the Church in the past, rears its head on today's pulpit. The people of God are no longer being fed with the Word of God in the Scriptures, but are being poisoned with the notions and ideas of pseudo-preachers who have turned their backs on true preaching. Yet even the sermon itself is under attack. Bored with traditional forms of preaching (in great part because of the vacuity of many sermons) and eager for something new, congregations are clamoring for changes in the worship services. Ministers, glad to oblige, are filling the pulpit with films, dialogues, entertainment of various sorts--all to the neglect of a preaching service. And congregational worship is being pushed aside to make room for "rap sessions", "sensitivity sessions" and the like so that, even in Reformed circles, one can scarcely recognize a church service. Prof. Decker calls the Church back to the preaching heritage of the Reformation in an important article so necessary for our times.

While the AACS continues to expand its influence, it is becoming increasingly apparent that at the heart of AACS thinking lies a false conception of the Word of God. This aspect of what has become a very dangerous philosophy is examined in an article dealing with this basic concept.

We hope and pray that our readers will continue to find thoughtful and Biblical material in our Journal.

The A.A.C.S. and the Word of God

- Prof. H. Hanko -

It is becoming increasingly apparent that at the very bottom of the movement which goes under the name of A.A.C.S. lies the conception which the leaders of this movement hold concerning the Word of God.

Generally speaking, the distinction is made between a three-fold or a four-fold Word of God: 1) The Word of God inscripturated; 2) The Word of God Incarnate; 3) The Word of God in the cosmos; and 4) The kerygmatic Word of God, i.e., the Word of God in the preaching.¹

The A.A.C.S. (Association for the Advancement of Christian Studies, with its main headquarters in Toronto, Canada) takes a position at variance with historical Reformed thought in many areas of life. It is not our purpose to discuss in this essay our differences with this movement in all these areas.² This would involve a much more extensive discussion than we anticipate for this article in our Journal. While we shall, in passing, mention some of these areas of disagreement, this is done primarily to demonstrate how the positions taken by the A.A.C.S. and with which we disagree follow rather naturally from the erroneous position which the leaders in this movement take on the important and fundamental question of the meaning of the Word of God.

In defining the Word of God in a three- or four-fold sense, the A.A.C.S. thinkers tend strongly to make a distinction between these aspects of the Word of God which is so sharp that they stand, in fact, unrelated to each other. This assertion is generally denied among A.A.C.S. thinkers, but these men are either reluctant or unable to make clear in their writings the relationships which are supposed to exist between these various aspects of the Word of God. The result is, both in fact and in the application of the principle, the separation is so complete that no discernible relationship exists.

¹Some make even further distinction in the Word of God.

²Cf. various writings on these matters in the Standard Bearer.

In connection with, or, perhaps, because of these distinctions which are made between various aspects of the Word of God, A.A.C.S. thinkers divide the whole of life into various spheres. The basic division into spheres seems to be the division between "Kingdom" and "Church". Concerning this distinction, several remarks are in order.

The concept of the Kingdom is never clearly defined in A.A.C.S. thinking. This is a basic weakness. Look as one may, while there is an abundant amount of discussion about the Kingdom, there is no evidence that clear definition has ever been offered the reader. Apparently, however, the Kingdom must be interpreted in terms of the so-called "cultural mandate": i.e., the Kingdom as the whole area and sphere of activity in which the Christian labors to subdue all of life and all of the creation to the rule of Christ. It thus embraces all of science, all of education, all of the arts, all of human activity in every area of life.

Already here, we have serious questions concerning this definition of the Kingdom. Without at this point entering into the matter in detail, it ought to be noticed that little is said about the effects of sin and the curse upon the creation and upon man's ability to engage in an effort to fulfill the so-called "cultural mandate". The result of this failure to reckon adequately with sin and the curse, results in strong tendencies towards post millennialism among those who hold to this Dooyeweerdian philosophy.

Also the concept "Church" is spoken of in two different senses. There is the "church" (with a small "c") which refers to the institutional Church; and there is the "Church" (with a capitol "C") which refers to the whole of the body of Christ. The former occupies a place in the life of the Christian which is of relatively little importance.³ This is why the charge has often been leveled (with justification) against followers of the A.A.C.S. that they despise the church as institute. The latter occupies a place of crucial importance because it refers to the members of the Church with a capitol "C" who engage in

³We return to this matter in another connection later in this essay.

Kingdom activity. This distinction too implies other serious considerations into which we cannot enter now. Suffice it to say that the church (with a small "c") deals with the Word of God as preached; while the Church (with a capitol "C") deals with the Word of God in the cosmos.

Also the Kingdom must be divided into spheres of activity. While in general, men of this school follow the ideas of Dr. A. Kuyper with respect to "sphere sovereignty", they profess to go beyond Kuyper in several important respects. They claim that it was essentially Herman Dooyeweerd who developed a Christian philosophy which can serve as the philosophical basis for their entire position with respect to Kingdom activity. Hence, their views are often known as Dooyeweerdian philosophy.⁴

In a general way, these spheres of activity stand connected to various aspects of the Word of God. This Word of God, in one form or another, is the guiding principle, the deepest motif, the fundamental basis for the activity (cultural activity) within that sphere.

Only the church (with a small "c") has to do with the Word of God inscripturated. That is, only the church as institute deals directly with the Word of God as it is incorporated in the Bible. And the contents of the written Word of God form the contents of the ecclesiastical confessions. These confessions then, are valid and of use only in the institute. They have no significance for the life of the child of God in other areas of his walk. The calling of the church institute is limited therefore to a sort of institution for the inspiration of the people of God as members of the Church (with a capitol "C") organism to fulfill their communal social calling. There is little more for the institute of the church to do than this. The communal social calling of the saints is the all-important thing.

And, as a matter of fact, the church institute is not absolutely essential to accomplish this calling. There are other means by which the calling can be realized. One of the leaders

⁴We do not mean to imply that the concept "sphere sovereignty" is in itself incorrect. We object to the application of the principle in the thinking of Dooyeweerdian philosophers.

of the A.A.C.S. suggests that home Bible study may serve this purpose just as well. Hendrik Hart writes:

The exercise of faith in the home is of extreme importance and perhaps the only⁵ means of recovering a life close to the Scriptures.

It is no wonder then, that this has led many to deprecate the church institute, to neglect divine worship services, and finally to thrust the institute of the church out of their lives.

It is interesting to note in this connection that those who include a "kerygmatic word" among the various divisions of "the Word of God" sometimes include this word as part of the life of the church. Others, however, speak of this kerygmatic word in a more Barthian sense: i.e., in the sense of any personal confrontation of man by Christ.

The Word of God in creation stands apart from the Word of God in Scripture. It is a special word of God, a speech of God which forms the basis for the cultural and kingdom activities in all other areas of life. This Word of God must be "discovered" and "developed" by philosophy, so that it can be taught as the basis for kingdom activity. To this end, a Christian university, committed to Dooyeweerdian philosophy is a necessity. When that word is discovered and developed, it will form the basis, the motif, the guiding principle, of all cultural and kingdom work in all life's spheres.

This Word of God should ideally be incorporated into various "creeds" which can be used in every sphere of life. Each sphere then would have its own creed which would form the basis for the Christian school, a Christian political party, a Christian labor union, etc. In other words, each sphere of activity has its own creed which contains truths gleaned for the reformational man from the cosmos by means of the cosmonomic law idea or the principles of Dooyeweerdian philosophy.

The consequences of all this are exceedingly serious. If, e.g., the basis for Christian schools is no longer the Scriptures

⁵The Challenge Of Our Age, published by the Association for the Advancement of Christian Studies, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

and the Reformed confessions, but a creed fashioned on the basis of an understanding of the creational word--an understanding explicated by cosmonomic philosophers, then the principles underlying present-day Christian schools are invalid. This is the reason why A.A.C.S. thinkers are prepared to abandon parental schools. They conceive of schools as being places where a pedagogical elite, trained in the ways of cosmonomic theory are completely responsible for all the education of the children of believing parents.⁶ Furthermore, it seems clear that the very fact that the inscripturated word is limited to the church institute, and the very fact that the church institute is not of any crucial importance in the life of the believer, leads many among the A.A.C.S. to speak slightly of the authority of the Scriptures evident in the writings of some of the men of this school; and there is a forthright effort put forth to subtract from Scripture its absolute authority in matters of faith and doctrine.⁷

But it is not our chief purpose in this essay to devote our time to an analysis of the serious consequences of A.A.C.S. thinking. We are more interested in the teaching of this school of thought concerning the Word of God. This seems to us to be crucial. If this can be understood for what it is worth, and if it can be gainsaid on the basis of the Scriptures and the historic Reformed faith, the rest of the rather imposing structure which the A.A.C.S. has built will collapse.

In order to expose the error of the A.A.C.S. conception of the Word of God, we shall have to say something positive about this whole matter. Too often the critics of the A.A.C.S. have attacked Dooyeweerdian philosophy at one point or another, have demonstrated that Dooyeweerdian philosophy leaves much to be desired, and is, in fact, contrary to the historic Christian faith; but they have not set forth, in a positive way, what is

⁶Confer "Schools in the Christian Community, a provisional statement offered to the Christian community as an opening orientation for communal reflection and discussion", by James H. Olthuis and Bernard Zylstra. For a criticism of the position which the A.A.C.S. takes on Christian education, cf. "Authority: Behind the Classroom Door", by Gerald Bonecamp.

⁷Cf., e.g., "Understanding the Scriptures", by A. DeGraaff and C. Seerveld; the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship; 1969.

the truth of the matter. This we consider to be important.

What then precisely is meant by the concept "Word of God" in A.A.C.S philosophy?

Robert A. Morey, in his book, "The Dooyeweerdian Concept of The Word of God"⁸ points out that the Dooyeweerdian movement speaks of the Word of God in a highly metaphysical sense. He shows from the writings of some of the group that by "Word of God" is meant in the first place, a kind of third "substance" which is neither God nor creation, but which stands between the two. He writes:

Our first task is to understand how the Dooyeweerdian movement defines the nature of the Word of God. What is the Word of God? Is it divine, i.e., God? Is it a creation by God? What is this word made of? Is this Word of God eternal, without beginning or end? What is the Word of God?

The Dooyeweerdian answer to this question is clearly put forth by Dr. Evan Runner, a professor at Calvin College. He states that the Word of God or law word, which is the boundary between God and cosmos, is neither the divine being nor is it created. It is, with the God and cosmos, a third mode of being. God creates the cosmos, puts the law. ("The History of Ancient Philosophy", class syllabus, Calvin College, pp. 17, 18)

"A complete ontology will recognize three manners of being (God, word, cosmos). (Ibid., p. 19). Now being, we have come to see, is of three kinds: that of sovereign God, that of reigning law and that of the cosmos subject to that law. A complete ontology will thus discuss all three kinds of being." (Ibid., p. 27)

Dr. Bernard Zylstra, another leading Dooyeweerdian states that the Word of God is neither divine nor is it a part of creation, but it constitutes a "third category." (The Word of God, the Bible and the A.A.C.S., Presbyterian Guardian, March, 1973, p. 41.) This third category is "the creator's Law for the creation." (Ibid., p. 42). He asks, "isn't there a 'third category' that upholdingly links the creation to the creator, namely, a word of power?" (Ibid.)

Dr. James Olthuis, another leader of the A.A.C.S. and I.C.S., states: "We believe that it is necessary to begin with a view distinguishing God, His WORD and creation." (The Kingdom of God, p. 3)....

According to the Dooyeweerdian position, the Word of God is neither fully God nor fully creature but forms a

⁸Published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974.

a third category, mode or kind of being

But what is this word made of? The Dooyeweerdian answer is that "God's Word is His power". (Zylstra, B. The Kingdom of God, p. 3). This power is not static but dynamic and alive. (Schrotenboer, P., "The Bible as the Word of God," o. 7 f.) The Word of God is POWER. Since the Word of God is Power, it cannot be "reduced to written, or spoken linguistic communication." (Zylstra, "The Word of God" p. 42. See also: Olthuis, *ibid*, pp. 7f.)

In summary, according to the Dooyeweerdian movement, the Word of God is a third kind, mode or category of being distinct from God and the creation. It is neither God nor creature. This third being consists of dynamic power.

It is this Word of God which takes on the various forms which are mentioned above. Morey in his book discusses these various forms and gives his criticism of the entire position.

Although there are many aspects to this teaching which are open to serious criticism, we shall concentrate our attention on the whole question of the meaning of the Word of God.

We must admit at the outset that the distinctions which the A.A.C.S. philosophers make in this concept are, as such, correct. Certainly Scripture speaks of the fact that Christ is the Word of God. Further, Scripture tells us that the world was formed and is continually upheld by that same Word of God's power. It is correct to speak of the Word of God in creation. The same is true of Scripture. The Scriptures are certainly the Word of God in the sense that they are the infallible record of the Word of God as God spoke that Word to His people. In addition to this, the preaching is also the Word of God as it is officially proclaimed by the church through her called ministry as the power of God unto salvation. In all these respects we agree that the distinction, as such, is proper.

This is, however, by no means, the whole story. The problem centers in other questions. What is meant by the concept "Word of God" in the above four uses of it? Where do we derive our

⁹pp. 2-4. This book by Morey is helpful to understand all the implications of A.A.C.S. thinking with regard to the Word of God and offers some excellent philosophical and Scriptural refutations and criticisms. This book is recommended to those who wish to pursue this matter further.

concepts of what the Word of God means in each instance? What is the relation between these various concepts? These and other questions are the important ones. The answers to them divide us fundamentally. To these answers we must turn our attention.

Before we proceed to a discussion of these questions, however, it is interesting to note that in an unsigned article in The Banner of July 12, 1974, one who evidently supports the A.A.C.S. treats these very subjects. A cursory reading of this article would lead one to suppose that the A.A.C.S. is, after all, in agreement with the position of the historic Reformed faith in these matters. It is interesting to note that this article, while unsigned, was written in response to a series of editorials in which the whole position of the A.A.C.S. was attacked. It is therefore quite possible that the article attempts to put the best possible face on A.A.C.S. teachings. However this may be, the article does not set forth the position of other A.A.C.S. writers in other periodicals and books. In this respect there is, in the article, a lack of integrity. There seems to be an attempt made to cover up what real A.A.C.S. thinking is. This article, when compared with what others have said and written in support of Dooyeweerdian philosophy, is not a faithful description of A.A.C.S. teaching. This is especially true when the article takes pains to point out that the A.A.C.S. gives to Scripture the highest and most decisive authority. It would seem from reading this article that Scripture is after all, the only rule of faith and life. Yet this is quite obviously not a real and honest description of A.A.C.S. thinking. This is evident from various considerations. In the first place, De Graaff and Sierveld themselves deny that Scripture contains "propositional truths" and that it is authoritative in matters of faith and conduct. A few quotes from their book "Understanding the Scriptures" will prove this.

The great commandment relativizes every other commandment the Scriptures contain.

Even the ten words (not commandments) are specifications of this central religious directive. All the

other ordinances are nothing more than concrete outworkings, positivizations of this Directive within a particular culture in a particular period of history. None of them can be literally followed or applied today, for we live in a different period of history in a different culture. (p. 35)

These "history lessons" in the Psalms and all the other so-called historical accounts in the Bible are not incorporated for their own sake, as so many scientifically established, verifiable historical facts, able to satisfy the curiosity of the twentieth century positivistic historian. Rather they are recorded to confront us with the living God of heaven and earth, the God of gods. To ask, therefore, whether or not these stories actually happened in every detail and in the order in which they are presented is to ask the wrong question. The Bible is not a source book for the historian.... (pp. 10, 11)

Just as the Bible does not answer our abstract questions about the existence of the idols, so the Scriptures fail to satisfy our intellectual curiosity about the nature of God. The Bible authors are not interested in an Unmoved Mover or a Pure Spiritual Substance, nor do they care to prove God's existence logically by making Him a part of a syllogism and comparing Him to other minds. The Scriptures know nothing about God's essence or about His incommunicable and communicable attributes. (p. 9)

Summarizing our findings thus far we can say that it is not the purpose of the Bible to inform us about the nature of God's Being or His attributes.... (pp. 9, 10).

What a terrible distortion to deduce this living Word of God to a collection of propositional truths (p. 18).

The Bible is not to be read as a collection of propositional statements about God and man that we can memorize and master. Neither does it contain general truths that we could possibly consider apart from their meaning for our lives.... (p. 21).

In the second place, the very fact that the creeds are repudiated as being a correct ground for the establishment of Christian schools is conclusive proof that A.A.C.S. leaders do not want the Scriptures to be the basis for Christian instruction in the Christian schools, because the creeds set forth the truth of the Scriptures.

In the third place, the very idea of cosmonomic law implies

in it that this Word of God in creation is the decisive Word of God in all areas of life other than the church (with a small "c", i.e., the church as institute.) For all these reasons, the article in The Banner is less than an honest presentation of what Dooyeweerdian thinkers actually believe.

However that may be, the best way to repudiate these teachings is to set forth the Scriptural teachings concerning the Word of God.

The very fact that we approach the matter from the viewpoint of Scripture already indicates that we stand firmly on the basis of the position that the Scriptures are infallibly inspired; that, as such, they are absolutely authoritative in all matters of doctrine and ethics; that there is no truth which can be known apart from them as a fundamental setting forth of the revelation of God. Although I am not particularly fond of the expression "propositional revelation", nevertheless, we may confidently assert that the Scriptures contain the written record of God's revelation of Himself in the face of Jesus Christ as the God of our salvation in propositional form.

Why must we assume this position? Did not Adam know God through the creative Word of God in Paradise? It is without any doubt true that he did. The spoken Word of God was known to Adam through the things which were made. To use a somewhat metaphorical expression, Adam could clearly "hear" the Word of God in all the creation. He could hear this Word of God so clearly that he could hear God Himself speak. The creation was a marvelous organic unity. In that creation all things occupied their unique place where they "fit" according to the plan and purpose of God. And when each creature in its own place stood in perfect harmony with the whole of the creation, the cosmos was a unity, a perfect organism which spoke to Adam of God Who had made it and Who continued to uphold it. This knowledge which Adam possessed of all the things that were made was a knowledge of God. And his knowledge was so perfect and so complete that it was wholly sufficient for him to dwell in covenant fellowship

with God as God's friend-servant.¹⁰

Why is it then that man can no longer see this Word of God in creation? The answer to this question has two sides to it. On the one hand, there is the fact that the creation came under the curse. God spoke a word in His creation which had not heretofore been heard. It was the Word of God's anger against sin. It was the Word of judgment and wrath. It was the Word which brought death and destruction upon all that God had made. The result of this Word of God's curse was that the original creative Word could scarcely be heard anymore. (Cf. Gen. 3: 17-19, Romans 8: 22). That is, according to Paul in Romans 1: 20, it is still possible to see God's eternal power and Godhead in creation. But that is about all. No longer can that unique Word of God which spoke of every creature's purpose, of every creature's place in the cosmos be heard. Death reigns. And the very fact that we are surrounded by death in all the creation with all its accompanying catastrophe and destruction makes it all but impossible to hear that original Word.

But this same curse came upon man. From a spiritual point of view man lost the image of God. And that loss of the image of God meant that man could no longer know God as His friend. His knowledge was changed to the lie and his righteousness and holiness to unrighteousness and corruption. Even the natural powers of the mind which Adam possessed were sharply curtailed by the destructive forces of sin. Our confessions call the remaining natural powers which man still possesses "remnants" and "glimmerings".¹¹ They are the moth-eaten shreds of a multi-thousand dollar fur coat. They are the sputtering and flickering glimmer of a candle in comparison to the light of the sun. That is all man has left. With spiritual knowledge gone and with natural powers sharply curtailed, man cannot see God's Word in creation anymore.

It is this which A.A.C.S. philosophers refuse to recognize.

¹⁰It is striking however that already in Adam's life in Paradise God spoke to Adam by means of theophany. Cf. Gen. 3: 8, in which verse is implied that the voice of the Lord God walked in the garden in the cool of the day, also while Adam stood in a state of rectitude.

¹¹Cf. Belgic Conf., Art. 14 and Canons of Dordt, III and IV, Art. 4.

Indeed, they talk a great deal about sin; but their talk about sin is always rather abstract and without any real significance as far as man is concerned and as far as his place in God's world is concerned.

It is because of the fall that God speaks through Christ.

We must be clear on this point and there must be no confusion as to what we mean.

The Scriptures are very explicit about the fact that the Word of God by which all things were made is the same Word of God which is Christ. There are different places in Scripture where this truth is mentioned. In John 1: 1-4 we read: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." vss. 1-3, 14. The same truth is described in Hebrews 1: 1-3: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." In Proverbs, chapter 8 Christ is described as being the Wisdom of God. Concerning this wisdom we read: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth nor the field, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depths: When he established the cloud above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:

When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." The same truth is set forth in Colossians 1. Of Christ it is said: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." vss. 15-17.

What does this mean?

There are, of course, many things which these profound passages teach. But, as far as our purpose is concerned, they imply and teach the following. In the first place, it is apparent that God's intention in Paradise already was to send Christ. We must never consider Christ to be an afterthought, a bit of repair work which God performed because of man's recklessness in destroying things. The creation itself gave evidence of this; although, of course, Adam could not see it. The first Paradise was constructed by God to be a pattern of the heavenly Paradise. The Paradise which lay to the east of Eden and which had at its center the tree of life was a dim picture of the tabernacle with its outer court, its holy place, and its inner sanctuary where was the ark of the covenant. And even the Paradise above has in it a tree of life which is for the healing of the nations. Further, it is a most remarkable fact that man was created by God with the restorative powers of body to heal--even though these powers were not needed until sin had wrought its destructive work. All of these things indicate that already in Paradise the first, God had Christ in mind.

Paradise the first was ordained by God to be the means to bring Christ. Hence the closest possible connection must be established between the Word of God which became flesh and dwelt among us and the Word of God in the creation.

That connection is of two sorts. On the one hand, it is through that Word of God which became flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, that all the creation is redeemed and finally delivered from the bondage of corruption. For that very reason, the creation itself speaks loudly and clearly of Christ. This is why Scripture can call Christ by such names as "Lion of Judah's Tribe, Rose of Sharon, Morning Star, Son of Righteousness," etc. This would be fundamentally impossible if it were not for the fact that all the things of the creation speak of Christ and reveal Him. They are the earthly pictures and symbols, the earthly pattern of the heavenly reality. The same is true of Jesus' parables. There would be no possibility of parables except for the fact that all of this earthly creation is the pattern of the heavenly. And it can be such only because Christ is in all these things. Why is it that a fisherman casting his net in the Sea of Galilee constitutes a parable of the kingdom of heaven? This can only be because the earthy contains the pattern of that which is heavenly.

Secondly, Christ is the power of the renewal of His people. We need not linger here, for this lies at the very heart of the truth concerning salvation. What needs to be emphasized in this connection is that this renewal is essential for one to see anew and hear the Word of God. Just as sin darkened in a spiritual way man's whole being so that he became spiritually unable to hear the Word of God anymore, so renewal by the wonder of regeneration is necessary for man to be put into contact with the Word of God once again.

There is in this connection, the question of the proper interpretation of Romans 1. In vss. 19 and 20 of this chapter Paul speaks of the fact that God makes Himself known to the ungodly by means of the things of His creation. And he is referring to the natural man who apart from grace comes to a certain knowledge of God's power and Godhead by means of which he is without excuse. This has often been interpreted to refer to a certain "common grace" which comes to man via "general revelation", and by means of which man retains not only a knowledge of

the truth as distinct from the lie and a knowledge of right over against wrong, but it has been extended to mean that the natural man, apart from grace, is able to act on this knowledge so that he can, in his literary and oral production, include elements of the truth which the Christian is required to sift out and use for his own advantage; and he is able to arrange his life so that in some respects at least, he lives in conformity with the will of God. It is not our purpose in this article to enter into this whole question. For the moment we simply observe that there is no mention made in the whole of Romans 1 of any kind of common grace. Quite to the contrary, Paul speaks in vs.18 of the revelation of the wrath of God from heaven. And this revelation of God's wrath is really the title to the whole section which includes all the rest of the verses in this chapter. After all, the knowledge of God which the unregenerated possess is, according to Paul, a knowledge which they "suppress in unrighteousness". The wicked change, (and we ought to observe carefully the force of this word here) the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man and fourfooted beasts and creeping things. While they profess themselves to be wise, they become fools and worship and serve the creature rather than the creator. Vss. 21, 22, 23, 25.

To see the Word of God and to hear that Word of God in such a way that one comes to receive it as the Word of God, to believe it and to put his trust in it, requires the efficacious and sovereignly effected Word of the Holy Spirit of Christ. Without that work no man can see God. Without that work of regeneration, one cannot see the kingdom of heaven, for the natural man cannot see the things of the Spirit, much less believe them. I Cor. 2: 14.

All this finds its unity in the Word of God as that Word is incorporated in the Scriptures.

Dooyeweerdian philosophy simply overlooks and ignores these things. This system of thought takes the position that the Word of God in creation is unaffected by the Word of God's curse; that the Word of God is still there in all its pristine beauty and power. Nothing has really essentially effected that Word. It is still within the grasp of anyone who will take the time to

listen if only he uses the hearing aid of the cosmonomic philosophers. And because this Word of God in creation is the most important Word of all, it is the Word with which we particularly have to do. The church (as institute) can content itself with the inscripturated Word. And, if it has any right to existence at all--something which is increasingly doubtful--its only calling is to use the Word of God in the Scriptures to inspire and motivate men to get on with the task of uncovering the creational word, so that that word can be applied to that supreme calling of the Church (now with a capitol "C", for the body of Christ is referred to) to engage in Christian communal social action.

Even Christ stands outside the picture, isolated from the Word of God in creation. It is true, of course, that the Dooyeweerdians have a lot to say about Christ. They speak of Christ as the supreme King. They speak of the need to engage in the redemptive action to which Christ has called us so that all the creation and all creation's structures can be brought under the lordship of Christ so that He may be Lord of all. They speak of bringing all of society and its structures under the sway of the rule of King Jesus. But when it comes to defining in any clear and intelligible way what the relation between Christ as the Word of God and the Word of God in creation is, they have little or nothing to say. And one is left to guess what in the world they mean.¹² The only conclusion one can come to is that each use of the Word of God is so divorced from every other Word that the Word of God is compartmentalized hopelessly, and no intelligible relation exists between them.

¹²This is also one of the bitter ironies of so much of what these men write. They are constantly admonishing us to abandon old cliches of theologic jargon which have become meaningless in our modern age, but they foist on us a jargon infinitely more cliché-ridden which they solemnly urge us to use. And when questions concerning the meaning of their jargon are put to them, the questioners are given the solemn answer: we have no time to weary ourselves with insignificant technicalities; we have kingdom business to attend to.

The Word of God in the Scriptures is the unifying factor. God spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets. He spoke in these last days through His Son Whom He made heir of the worlds. That speech of God which, according to our Heidelberg Catechism, was "first revealed in Paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law: and (was) lastly, fulfilled by God's only begotten Son" (L.D. 6, ans. 19) is the Word of God which reveals God as the God Who saves His people in Christ. That Word of God, fulfilled in Christ, is infallibly recorded in the Scriptures. De Graaff and Sierveld destroy the Scriptures when they deny that the Scriptures give to us objective propositions concerning the truth.¹³ The Scriptures are the divinely-given record of God's revelation in Christ. The Scriptures tell us of God and His works in Christ because God has spoken concerning Himself and His work, and He has given us the record of that speech.

Nevertheless, the Scriptures in themselves are the record of God's speech. They are the infallible record. They are the authoritative record. They incorporate in themselves Truth--all the truth; the only truth. But they are the record. For this reason God has ordained that His Word be preached. The Scriptures teach this in so many places that we need not pause to point out the truth of this. That preaching is not and may not be divorced from the Scriptures. A preacher is one who is called and sent by Christ to proclaim Christ's Word. That is his only calling. The Word of Christ can be found in no other place than the Scriptures. The whole content of preaching is limited exclusively to the Scriptures. And departure from the Scriptures is a departure from the Word of Christ. Indeed, the authority of the preached

¹³ Confer their quotations about and their book "Understanding the Scriptures". Morey in his book, op. cit., points out that the view of the Scriptures which is held by cosmonomic thinkers is this: the Scriptures are nothing more than Israel's response to God; "man's confession to God". Cf. p. 12.

Word, the authority of the "thus saith the Lord", is an authority which is rooted in the authority of the Scriptures themselves. So to speak, the Scriptures "come alive" in the preaching. When the Scriptures are preached Christ works salvation by His Holy Spirit. He calls out of darkness into light. He quickens and transforms. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. (Rom. 1: 16). The gospel is the means of that spiritual renewal by which the Lord Jesus Christ brings His people into contact --living, spiritual contact--with the Word of God.

Thus the Scriptures are the key of all knowledge. (Luke 11: 52.) There is no knowledge of the truth apart from the Scriptures themselves. Only through them can the Word of God be heard and understood. There is no other way.

This revelation of God through the Scriptures is therefore principally the only revelation of God. And if this is the overwhelming significance of the Scriptures, then the preaching of those Scriptures is not a relatively unimportant matter limited to the church (with a small "c") to inspire to Christian communal social action. It is of decisive importance, for it is the sole means whereby God accomplishes all His purpose in the world. Through Christ Who preaches the Scriptures by means of the instituted Church, all the purpose of God as He has determined it from before the foundation of the world is realized. Of such crucial importance is the preaching.

Even God's speech in creation can be seen and heard and understood only through the Scriptures. This is true for several reasons. It is true in the first place, because the power of the Scriptures preached by the church is the renewing and sanctifying power of Christ through His Spirit, whereby His people are given eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to understand the mysteries of the kingdom. But this is true in the second place, because the Scriptures contain that Word of God which is the explanation for all that God does in the creation. The Scriptures contain the explanation for the origin of the creation, God's purpose as He works it now in the creation, and all that God does as He has determined it in His counsel. The Scriptures

contain the whole interpretation of the universe as God has destined the creation to be renewed finally in Christ Jesus in the new heavens and in the new earth.

In other words, the Scriptures tell us all that is most fundamentally true about the creation. These things are indeed reflected in the creation itself. Creation speaks a word of God, but that Word of God is also Christ. This is simply because the creation was formed by God to be the stage upon which would be enacted the drama of sin and grace, of the fall and salvation in Christ. Hence, this work of God is reflected in the whole of creation. Christ is evident in the creation. But Christ can be seen only when the creation is viewed through the Scriptures. This can be seen by the renewed and sanctified child of God who walks with the Scriptures in his heart and mind, who, according to Calvin, wears the spectacles of the Scriptures on his spiritual eyes.

There are a couple of conclusions which follow from this.

In the first place, only a child of God can really know the truth, even in the creation. In order to understand this, it is quite important to make a distinction here. For the purposes of clarity, although the terminology is not particularly desirable, we distinguish between a formal knowledge of the creation and a material knowledge of the creation. Formally, the information available in the creation is reachable by all who make the creation an object of their study. The ungodly too are able to discover a great many things about the creation. They are able to unlock the mysteries of the creation in their searches and discoveries in the fields of the natural sciences. But such knowledge as they acquire can never really give them true knowledge. They divorce the creation from God. No, they do worse than that. They deny God and fight against Him in hatred. We must remember Paul's words. They profess to be wise, but they become fools, for they worship the creature. For that reason their knowledge is never genuine knowledge of the truth. It is a mere factual knowledge of certain aspects of the world. It is like knowing that the door to the house is made of wood panels

with a glass window, but without knowing how the door was made or what purpose it serves or is intended to serve. It is like knowing that a loaf of bread which one holds in his hand is made up of a certain white texture which can be analyzed: but without knowing how the grain that is put into it grew, how the bread was baked, and that the loaf nourishes the body. It is like starving to death with the loaf, wonderfully analyzed, in one's hand. The wicked hold the creation in their hands, analyze and explain it, but cannot tell how it came into existence, what purpose it serves, and what its end is. Their failure to tell is not rooted in the fact that God has not showed these things to them, but is rooted in their own wicked rebellion.

The wicked are indeed fools. They hold the truth in unrighteousness. They throw the book in which all the truth concerning creation is contained in the garbage can. They discard as senseless and foolish the book which tells how the creation is formed and the purpose why God created it: they take the true and genuine explanation for all things and toss it on the ash heap. They spend millions and billions of dollars to send a man to the moon so that he can retrieve a handful of dust, an analysis of which men will use to tell us how the world came into being and its reason for being here. It is like a man entering an old European castle with the purpose of finding out how and why the castle was built. But he throws a book found on the shelf, written by the builder of the castle, in which all these details are given, and he pitches it into the weed-infested moat. Instead he collects a handful of dust from a small corner of a high tower room and takes the dust back to his laboratory to analyze it and to learn from this analysis how and why the castle was built.

True knowledge of all things comes through the Scriptures. It is indeed true that the Scriptures are not a textbook to be used for instruction in the various courses of the curriculum of a Christian school. But if one relies on the cosmonomic law idea, the Word of God in creation, independent of the Word of God in Scripture, one will come with a foolish and sinful idea of the

creation and will advance little beyond the darkest pagan. The Scriptures do give to us all the most fundamental and basic elements of the knowledge of God's purpose in Christ without which not one single aspect of the creation can be understood. This is why the Christian schools must be based upon the Scriptures and the historic Reformed confessions. This is why the A.A.C.S. robs the people of God of their Christian covenantal schools with their nonsensical and wicked philosophies.

But there is one other matter to which we must call attention by way of conclusion.

The A.A.C.S. defines the very heart of the Christian's calling in life in terms of the so-called calling to Christian communal social action. By this is meant that the Christian must engage in social action in union with the body of Christ to establish schools where cosmonomic philosophy rules, to establish a Christian political party, to build a Christian labor union, to found the home on principles of the Word of God in creation, in short, to bring all of life, under the guiding principle of the creational word. Apart from the question now of whether Scripture points the Christian to such a social calling, the fact of the matter is that just as soon as this social calling is rooted in the creational word, something happens to it. In the first place, because this conception involves the whole truth concerning the entrance of sin into the world and the fall, and the curse, this communal social calling is interpreted in terms of the original cultural mandate which God gave to Adam. In this respect, the A.A.C.S. has capitulated to the theory of common grace. Individuals of this movement have told me in personal conversations, and some of their writings suggest, that the A.A.C.S. repudiates common grace. But this is really not true. Common grace is very much a part of their thinking; so much a part of their thinking in fact, that it is difficult to see how anyone who maintains common grace can successfully and in the long run withstand the errors of Dooyeweerdian philosophy. But however this may be, the fact of the matter is that rooting the social calling of believers in the creational word, the calling of the Christian is

brought back to the original cultural mandate which continues to be present unimpaired or unchanged by the reality of sin. It is this error, so often committed, which leads to the postmillennialism so obvious in A.A.C.S. thinking. In their efforts to bring the whole creation and all the structures of society under the rule of Christ, Dooyeweerdians fall into the error of bringing the kingdom of heaven to the earth. This is why Dr. MacIntyre can say in his essay, "The Forgotten Art Of Worldshaking": "Our association works for nothing less than the reformation of learning and, in truth, of North American culture. As the Lord grants, ARSS (the former name for the A.A.C.S.) advanced education will send throughout all of North America the world-shakers and history-makers in every facet of life, Christian men and women who will turn the world upsidedown for the Lord God."

When one understands, however, that God's purpose is never reached in this present creation or in the history of this world or in the societal structures of this age; when one understands from Scripture that this world is for the purpose of the salvation of all things and the Church in Christ in the new heavens and the new earth, then this radically changes the whole perspective. We cannot enter into this question here.¹⁴ It is sufficient to point out that this whole erroneous conception rather naturally follows from the A.A.C.S position on the Word of God.

We must repudiate this view therefore. We must repudiate Dooyeweerdian philosophy. It is a denial of all the truth which the church has historically maintained. It is, in its practical consequences, of serious import in the life of the child of God. It is no exaggeration to say that the whole cause of Christ and of His truth goes down to defeat if the church succumbs to the philosophical thinking of the philosophers from Toronto.

¹⁴ Those who wish to pursue this matter further can consult my article in the September 1 issue of The Standard Bearer entitled "The A.A.C.S. and the Kingdom", which article has been reprinted.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING

-- Prof. Robert D. Decker --

Prior to the Reformation preaching had fallen into such neglect that it virtually ceased to be a function of the church. This was on account of a variety of reasons. Among these were widespread ignorance, unfaithfulness, and sheer laziness on the part of the clergy. There was also the failure of the bishops to exercise oversight in their dioceses. Ecclesiastical titles were purchased with the result that bishops were often totally unknown to their people. There was little or no concern at all on their part for the souls of the sheep of Jesus Christ. This led inevitably to the death of preaching. Also this belongs to the entire climate which made the Reformation so necessary. From a theological point of view the Reformation was necessitated by the apostasy of the institute of the church of that day. And belonging to that apostasy at its very heart was the elevation of the church over the Word of God.

It is not at all surprising then that the rediscovery of the Word of God as the sole authority involved the rediscovery of the necessity of preaching. This is what the Reformation was all about! As to what has been called its formal principle the Reformation was a return to the Scriptures alone. The Word of God is the absolute and only authority for faith and life. And the reformers to a man insisted that no church, no hierarchy, and no pope could stand alongside of or above the Word of God. Belonging to the theme of the Reformation along with justification by faith is sola Scriptura, Scripture only. And that meant preaching. The reformers understood that if the church was to be renewed it was essential that preaching be restored. And the reformers were preachers. Martin Luther and John Calvin both preached several times every week and not just on the Lord's Day. Martin Luther himself is reported to have said: "Often I preach four sermons in one day." We are told that during one Lenten season Luther preached two sermons and delivered one lecture every day. In the year 1529 Luther preached 18 times in eleven days from Palm Sunday to the Wednesday after Easter. We agree, therefore, with A. Skevington Wood when he says in his excellent book, Captive to the Word;

"Preaching was the spear head of the Reformation." Phillip E. Hughes in his book, Theology of the English Reformers, states: "A church that has ceased to preach, or that preaches error contrary to Scripture, has ceased to function as a true part of the Church of Christ." (p. 122, pub. by Eerdmans of Grand Rapids)

All this speaks volumes to the children of the Reformation today. There is a striking parallel between our times and Reformation times in that today once more, and that by the Reformed community, the authority of Scripture is called into question. The church today studies and calls into question the nature and the extent of the authority of the Bible rather than simply accepting the Bible as the very Word of God Himself and therefore the absolute authority in all of life. This constitutes an attack at the very heart of the Reformation and hand in hand with this attack against the Scriptures goes the depreciation of preaching. The neglect of preaching is bound to lead to apostasy both doctrinally and practically. The power that reformed the church in the 16th century was the power of the preaching of the infallibly inspired Word of God. Apart from preaching there could have been no Reformation. And the power that will lead the church today in an ongoing reformation is preaching. This is according to the Bible's own testimony. Men call preaching foolishness in our day. Preaching is said to be irrelevant and old fashioned and not the best means of communicating the gospel. Preaching is foolishness. Men called it that already in the apostle Paul's day. (Cf. I Cor. 1). To them that perish preaching is always foolishness. But it is exactly by that foolishness that God is pleased to save them that are called and who believe.

Consider with me that preaching was the power of the Reformation. What is preaching? This is a crucial question in our day for preaching is severely criticized and called into question. It is said that preaching is one method of communicating the gospel but not the only means of communicating the gospel. There are other ways to communicate the gospel which can serve equally well if not much better than preaching. Drama, panel discussion, and dialogue are said to be among these other and better ways of

communicating the gospel. Some churches are substituting these activities for preaching from time to time. In addition preaching is said to prohibit the congregation from active participation in the worship service. The question is asked, why should one man speak to and for all the others? Are not all Christians, prophets in the Lord Jesus Christ? Hence it is alleged there should be less preaching and more testimony on the part of the lay members of the church. There ought to be more responses and more of this and more of that and less and less of preaching. Preaching, we are told, is an outdated form of communication in our modern technological age of mass and highly sophisticated means of communication. It is old fashioned to preach and preaching does not reach people. All of this goes under what a college student called in conversation with me recently, "essential Christianity". Besides, we are told, that the church has a much larger calling than just to preach the Word. The church must get out into the ghettos and market places of the world in order to effect social change and to better people's lots in life.

What are we to think of this? Is it true that we should discard or at least de-emphasize somewhat the preaching of the Word? Has the church been missing the mark in all of these centuries of preaching? It is well, in the light of these events, to take the time to discover, or perhaps we should say, rediscover, what preaching is.

We can best begin by analyzing the two terms translated, "preaching", in I Corinthians 1. The first of these we find in verse 17 which reads: "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." Here the apostle speaks of his mission in terms of Christ sending him not to baptize but to "preach the gospel". The words "preach the gospel" are only one word in the Greek text. This term means to proclaim, to announce joyful tidings. The other word translated "preaching," is found in verse 21 and again in verse 23. In verse 21 we read: "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them

that believe." Verse 23 reads: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness". The word translated "preaching", in these two verses means: to herald something, or simply herald. Preaching is to herald the Word of God. We find the same emphasis with this word on the idea of proclamation. In fact some linguists and commentators regard the two terms, the one used in verse 17 and the one used in verses 21 and 23 as being synonymous as far as their meaning is concerned.

Preaching, therefore, is fundamentally proclamation, a proclaiming, or a crying out. And, it is the proclamation of the Word of God. That is implied in the term used in verse 17. Preaching is proclaiming the good news of salvation, the gospel. In verse 18 the apostle calls it "the word of the cross". This is what preaching declares or announces or proclaims, viz., the word of the cross. That word of the cross is the word which God speaks in and by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 23 the Scripture declares the content of the preaching to be "Christ crucified." This stands to reason for Christ is, after all, the Word which was with God and which was God and which was made flesh. (Cf. John 1). Christ, therefore, must be preached. The Christ taken and crucified by wicked hands according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God must be preached. (Cf. Acts 2: 23). The Christ of the Scriptures Who is the revelation of the God of our salvation must be preached. Now this simply means that the content of preaching, or what is preached must be nothing other than the Word of God. That Word is infallibly inspired, God-breathed, and therefore inerrant. It is the Word which God spoke in Christ and which He gave us in the Holy Scriptures through the miracle of the inspiration of the Spirit of God. This certainly means that the preacher must say nothing more and nothing less than what God in Christ says in the Word. Every sermon must be "Christ crucified", "the Word of the cross". From a practical point of view this means that there is only one correct method of preaching, namely, expository preaching. If the preacher is to avoid speaking either his own or another man's word he must expound the Scriptures. He must as the late Rev. H. Hoeksema was

fond of telling his students, "listen to the text". Whatever the preacher does he must never impose himself upon the Word of God. He must expound the text or passage in the light of the whole of the Word for Scripture is its own interpreter. And in expounding the Word the preacher must apply that Word to the lives of the people of God.

This is what preaching is according to the Scriptures. This means that preaching is the means of grace. By this concept we mean to say that by means of the preaching of the Word God through the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ works His grace in His children. Just as God sustains human life with food and drink, He sustains the life of Christ in His children with the food and drink of His Word. This is plainly taught in I Cor. 1: 21, where we read: "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." By this means believers who are the called (verse 24), the saved (verse 18), receive the grace of salvation. We must understand that preaching is not a means among several or many other means of grace. In the strictest sense preaching is not even the chief means of grace among other means. It is true that in the Reformed tradition we speak of the Word and sacraments as the means of grace and of preaching as the chief of these. There is nothing wrong with speaking in this way providing we remember that the two, preaching and the sacraments, cannot be separated. The point is that the sacraments have no mysterious power in themselves. They function only in connection with the preaching of the Word. This means that the sacraments by themselves are of no benefit; rather, they derive their power and efficacy only from the Word of God preached. Preaching, therefore, is THE means of grace. This means very emphatically that grace is not communicated in any other way than by preaching. The Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ uses nothing else than preaching to save God's people. Preaching is indispensable so that the church cannot get along without it or find some substitute to take its place. The church of Jesus Christ as instituted in the world stands or it falls at this critical juncture. This is the clear teaching of

the Bible and not just an old piece of theology. In Luke 10 we find Christ sending out the seventy to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In this connection Jesus says, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." (vs. 16). In John 10: 27, 28 Jesus says: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." If we turn to Romans 10: 13-15 we may learn how the sheep of Christ hear His voice. These verses read: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" It must be noted that the words, "how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard" are erroneously translated in the King James. These words should read, "how shall they believe in him whom (not of whom) they have not heard." This passage teaches that we must call on the Name of the Lord in order to be saved. We cannot, however, call on Him unless we believe in Him and we cannot believe in Him apart from hearing Him. And we cannot hear without a preacher who is sent! What could be clearer than this? This means that today as well as in Jesus' own day the people of God hear His voice. Precisely for this reason Christ instituted the offices in His church. Ephesians 4: 11 teaches that Christ: "...gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers". Why did Christ give these? "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying (building up) of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and in the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and

cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love, they grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." (Verses 12-15).

At this point the question is often raised, cannot God save any other way? What about Bible reading and prayer and Bible discussion and witnessing by word and Godly living, cannot God save by these means? The answer to that is that all these things simply would not be were it not for the God-given means and power of preaching. The question is not can God save with other means, but the question is will He? And the answer is, no, He will not. No more that He will keep men alive (though He could) without the ordinary means of food and drink will God nourish men with His saving grace unto everlasting life apart from the means of preaching. Why not? The Scripture's answer is "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1: 21). It is simply the good pleasure of God to save His own in Jesus Christ by means of the preaching of the Word. The 16th century reformers recognized that clearly as is evident from these words of John Calvin:

"More detestable than this attitude is that of the apostate who had a passion for splitting churches, in effect driving the sheep from their fold and casting them into the jaws of wolves. We must hold to what we have quoted from Paul--that the church is built up solely by outward preaching, and that the saints are held together by one bond only: that with common accord, through learning and advancement, they keep the order established by God. (Cf. Eph. 4: 12)"

(Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, Bk. 4, ch. 1, the Westminster Press, the Library of Christian Classics.)

And if you ask still further, but why did God choose preaching? The answer is that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and God chose the foolish things to confound the wise. Why? That no flesh should glory in His presence is ever the Word of God. Let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord! (Cf. I Cor. 1). To despise preaching, therefore, is to despise the wisdom of God. It is to pretend to be wiser than God!

Thus it is too, that the preaching of the Word is the chief

key of the kingdom of heaven. By means of preaching Christ opens the door of the kingdom to His own and closes it to unbelievers. When Christ opens no man shuts and when Christ shuts no man opens. The preacher is an ambassador or official representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is His mouthpiece. He comes expounding the Word of Christ and bearing, therefore, the authority of Christ. In this way Christ rules the Church through His Spirit and Word. This is why the preaching of the Word is always effective. The fruit is always there! To the Jews preaching Christ crucified is a stumblingblock and it is foolishness to the Greeks; but, to the called it is Christ the power and the wisdom of God. (Cf. I Cor. 1). This means too, that neglect of the preaching leads to all kinds of false doctrine, apostasy and ungodly living. (Cf. Eph. 4: 14). Calvin understood this too, for he says:

"Fanatical men, refusing to hold fast to it (to preaching--R.D.) entangle themselves in many deadly snares. Many are led either by pride, dislike, rivalry to the conviction that they can profit enough from private reading and meditation; hence they despise public assemblies and deem preaching superfluous...And if we rashly attempt anything without God's command, strange inventions forthwith cling to the bad beginning and spread evil without measure."
(Institutes, Bk. 4, ch. 1)

When preaching goes discipline goes and everything goes. Without preaching sound doctrine is not vindicated and worldlimindedness creeps into the church and the people of God.

Finally, this is why preaching along with Christian discipline in the love of Christ and the proper administration of the sacraments is the mark of the church of Jesus Christ. The church is not marked by its size, its buildings, its programs, its hierarchy, or any such thing. The church is marked by the pure preaching of the Word! Do you wish to know where the church of Jesus Christ is? Look for that church which preaches the Word. Judge by what the pulpit brings. Again, listen to the Reformers:

"The sure mark by which the Christian congregation can be recognized is that the pure gospel is preached there. For just as the banner of an army is the sure sign by which one can know what kind of lord and army have taken to the field, so too, the gospel is

the sure sign by which one knows where Christ and His army are encamped...Thus we are certain that there must be Christians wherever the gospel is, no matter how few and how sinful and weak they may be. Likewise, where the gospel is absent and human teachings rule, there no Christian lives, but only pagans, no matter how numerous they are..."
(Luther's Works, Philadelphia & St. Louis, Vol. 39, p. 305)

Or again Luther says:

"Now, wherever you hear or see this Word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that the true ecclesia sancta catholica, 'a Christian holy people' must be there, even though their number is small...And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's Word cannot be without God's people, and conversely God's people cannot be without God's Word. Otherwise, who would preach or hear it preached, if there were no people of God? And what could or would God's people believe, if there were no Word of God?"
(Selected Writings of Martin Luther, 1529-1546, Fortress Press, p. 342).

Calvin echoes the same when he says:

"Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists (Cf. Eph. 4: 20)".
(Institutes Bk. 4, ch. 1)

And nowhere is this truth more beautifully stated than in that reformation creed, the Belgic Confession:

"The marks by which the true church may be known are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if Church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin...hereby the true church may be known from which no man has a right to separate himself..."
(Belgic Conf., Art. 29).

Preaching was the power of the Reformation. If you should ask the question, how did it happen? How could it be that a simple monk of base, weak, humble origin could precipitate the movement that reformed the church and put her back upon the foundation of Christ? The answer to this question is, God's power of preaching. The Reformers preached! In obedience to the call of Jesus Christ, the King of the Church, the Word of God was proclaimed

all over Europe once more. By that "foolishness" the Church was reformed and put back under the authority of the Word of God. God's children heard Christ once more speak to them of repentance and faith. The gospel message, "the just shall live by faith" once more comforted and assured the children of God. And no pope, no hierarchy, no councils, no indulgences. in short, no human wisdom and no man could prevail against that power of God! It pleased God to save not by the pomp and ceremonies of the church, nor by the decrees and power of men; but it pleased God to save by the foolishness of preaching.

May God's people learn this lesson. The same power of preaching that produced and sustained the reformation of the 16th century is the power of reformation today. That the churches generally and the Reformed churches specifically are in sad condition today is gross understatement. This is evidenced by many factors. There is widespread doctrinal departures as for example: the denial of the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures, the relegating of the Genesis account of creation and the fall to myth or teaching model, the denial of the flood account, the denials of the miracles, and the literal reality of heaven and hell, the rank Arminianism that permeates much of the preaching, teaching and personal belief of the members of the church; the questioning of the nature and extent of the absolute authority of the Bible. Along with these is the fact that there is all kinds of departure in life and practice. The evidence of this is the general worldlimindedness, the compromise on such questions as divorce and remarriage, unionism, drama, dancing, etc. Nothing is considered to be wrong anymore. Nothing is considered to be sinful or offensive to the Holy God. Anything goes in the churches, so it would seem. Why? What is the trouble? The answer is, pulpit failure. By pulpit failure we mean the lack of Biblical, expository preaching of the Word. Much of preaching is not to be faulted for the heresy it brings but because it leaves so much unsaid! Preaching becomes homilies on social, economic, or racial issues and similar issues. But the Scriptures are not expounded and applied to the lives of the people of God. That spells trouble for the church! When that

happens everything begins to tumble and fall away. Discipline weakens, laxity and compromise on one or another issue is the result. The most tragic evidence of this is the shameful ignorance of the truths of the Word of God. When one says, for example, "God loves only His elect" or "Christ died only for His sheep", people regard you as if you were the worst of heretics. They are totally unaware of the fact that this is the whole point of the Canons of Dordt. There is a whole generation among churches of the Reformed tradition which does not know the meaning of some of the most important concepts of the faith: covenant, antithesis, divine sovereign predestination consisting of election and reprobation, total depravity. Well may we lament with the prophet of old, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Let it be said once more that the reason for this is poor preaching of the Word. The calling is plain. Children of the Reformation, do you really want to be Reformed according to the Word of God and the Three Forms of Unity? Then insist on the pure preaching of the gospel. Do not allow your preachers to say anything but "thus saith the Lord." As laymembers protest vehemently against all impure, poor preaching. And if it be too late in your church find a church that still preaches the infallibly inspired Word of God. Find a church that still reveals that mark together with Christian discipline and the proper administration of the Holy Sacraments. That church may be small and it may have many faults, but if it be still preaching by God's grace it is the pure manifestation of the Body of Jesus Christ. And God will save by that means. God will not let His church be destroyed. Not even the gates of hell can prevail against her. Say then with Martin Luther, "Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me." Go on in faith, faith in the power of God and not in the wisdom of men. Let the world and the ungodly scoff and call preaching foolishness. It pleases God to save by it. And we may be sure, "a faithful church shall serve Him till generations end."

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