

[For the final installment scroll down to page TWELVE]

The Conference

In order to give you an impression of the tone and direction at the conference I have prepared summaries of five of the eleven presented lectures and responses.

Hermeneutics and Dogma: Reading and Understanding of Dogma in this Time by prof. Dr. B. Kamphuis. We need to find new language and images for the Gospel in our time.¹

A dogma involves formulating in human language what you believe about God. Dogmas originate in words and they are put into writing when a difference of opinion exists about the content of what people believe about God. The time when a dogma originates and the thinking of that time exert a lot of influence on the formulation of the dogma. In addition, the persons who formulate those dogmas bring their own personal preferences to bear upon the dogma. It is important to pay constant attention to this in the field of dogmatics.

A dogma has both a limit and latitude within that limit. The limit is that this dogma expresses what we believe in order to be saved. But within this limit, there is latitude. There is latitude, namely, for mystery. Together with all the saints, we seek to understand the love of Christ, and at the same time, we do not progress beyond our ability merely to stammer about it. Within the purview of the totality of dogma, you must therefore allow latitude for each other. One person emphasizes the Father, another emphasizes grace, and yet another emphasizes sanctification. Doctrine allows latitude. The center is Jesus Christ and him crucified. He must be at the center. But no standard framework exists for faith experience. Important values within the practice of dogmatics include openness and catholicity (universality).

Metaphor

A dogma has something mysterious about it. There are things beyond our understanding. Why is this so? You can only speak about mystery when it is revealed to us. But how can God reveal what is beyond our reality to us? It is by grace that he is able to. He reaches to us and accommodates himself (adapts) to us. How does he accommodate himself? He adapts his revelation to make it suitable so it can be understood within our world of experience. He makes his revelation comprehensible by using images he borrows from our reality. We must therefore stick to the metaphors God uses for his revelation. These are images from our context to speak about what lies beyond our comprehension. For God is always greater than what He shows of himself. A dogma is always limited because we speak in metaphors about a reality that we cannot conceive. Therefore, we continue to

¹ I revised my translation of segment in order to bring it into line with the version appearing at http://www.tukampen.nl/Nieuwsartikelen/Historic_conference_in_Hamilton.aspx?objectname=NewsShow&objectId=113

search for images for what we believe, and express this in a language we understand today so that the gospel can resonate again. Desire, expectation and imagination are the guiding key words for this search.

Clear Language

After the lecture there was time for Prof. Dr. A. J. (Arjan) de Visser, Professor of diaconology to respond to what Prof. Kamphuis had said.

De Visser detected a change in Kamphuis with respect to his publication, *Klare Taal* (*Clear Language*, 1988). At that time, Kamphuis still spoke of the clarity (clearness, perspicuity) of the truth in the Bible, but now the discussion follows the direction taken by Barth, Berkouwer, and Gadamer. This direction suggests that God's Word is not adequate enough to provide complete understanding. That Word supposedly declares, "it is and it isn't." Nor are dogmas adequate, for they are human formulations. We must search for images in order to show forth the gospel for today.

He asked Kamphuis if God's Word comes to us in metaphors and, if so, whether this applies to the whole Bible? Does this not contradict what we confess in Article 5-7 of the Belgic Confession where God's powerful speaking is confessed in clear language rather than in obscure or metaphorical language. He agrees that the search for a new language to share the gospel is important in our time and place. But is there not also an inherent relevance in the Bible? As an example he mentioned the Canons of Dort which were received with enthusiasm in Africa during his time there as a teacher.

Kamphuis responded by saying that his development as a systematic theologian has not stood still, and that he had added two things to what he wrote in *Klare Taal*. The clarity of the Bible is a confession of faith. What we see is not clear language. We see an unclear word, but we believe that this is the Word of God.

Moreover, it is also the case that if the Bible is clear for me, it is also clear for the other person. Therefore we must also listen to the other person. Personal one-sidedness always affects one's listening to the Bible. The phrase "metaphorical language" means that we are using a word taken from one context within a different context. The sentence "Jesus came into the world in order to save it" is metaphorical in comparison with the sentence, "Barend came to Hamilton." In the latter sentence, the verb "came" is literal. But in the former sentence, alongside the literal meaning lies a mysterious divine meaning. The term "metaphorical" does not mean that the clarity of the Bible changes. Rather, it is simply a clarity that we will never be able fully to comprehend.

Someone from the audience asked whether in this way, (the spirit of) our time was exerting too much influence on the text. For what is the whisper of "it is and it isn't" in the metaphorical sentence, "Jesus came into the world to save it"? Kamphuis answered: "Even though a danger is present here, we cannot walk away from our responsibility to speak in the here and now. 'Jesus came to save from sin' means: Jesus came as a man and also as Son of God. That is a whisper of something that we do not understand completely.

We must continue to hold to ancient dogmas and we must realize that they are human responses to the Word of God. But we are living in a different time now, and we must respond to the Word of God in our day.”

The following lecture and response are fairly extensive. That does not mean that everything that was said has been summarized. The intention is to reproduce the main points so that the reader can get an idea of what transpired. The remaining summaries will likely be shorter.



Salvation through Christ and our Understanding by Dr. Hans Burger

Burger tried to find a solution for the danger that arises when hermeneutical questions arise in a purely modernist thought climate. He pointed to a form of 'foundationalism' (i.e. there is an absolute truth which we can know) without being rooted in Christ. Where this occurs hermeneutical questions carry a danger. Burger looked for a solution by linking hermeneutics and the doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ. He did so because hermeneutical problems have to do with sin. Doing hermeneutics the right way, therefore, has everything to do with grace and redemption.

Burger asks why through all the storms of hermeneutical discussions and depillarization the experiential wing of the Dutch neo-Calvinists suffered less from loss of faith or

internal divisions. He seeks his answer in the trepidation they had of Abraham Kuyper—especially because he was influenced by modernism. He detects foundationalism with Kuyper. Kuyper aimed at absolute knowledge that was firm and sure. This certainty of firm and sure knowledge is accompanied with the defense of the authority of the Bible. Burger still sees this way of thinking and believing in Dutch Christian theology. The Bible is the foundation for this absolute, certain knowledge. Jesus Christ or faith in Him are not explicitly mentioned enough, according to Burger.

The more you follow a foundationalist model, i.e. the more you focus on absolute certain knowledge and on an epistemological foundation for this kind of knowledge, the more you follow a modern path and the more you will forget Jesus Christ as your only solid foundation. When the New Testament speaks about Jesus Christ as the foundation or cornerstone, then that is a metaphor that portrays life, salvation and community. Within this framework, epistemological questions are also asked, but they are less important than when emphasized in a modernist vision. In summary: a problem with modernism is its limited rational focus on knowledge issues. This knowledge threatens to be formalized knowledge without reference to the gospel and Jesus Christ. If you hold on to the ‘mystical’ union with Christ and you focus on the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, you are less vulnerable to the dangers of church separation or the uncertainty of faith. With everything you do, being in Christ is therefore of primary importance.

Burger then asks what the implications of ‘being in Christ’ has for hermeneutics. He distinguishes four things:

1. Our identity is dynamic and moves between sin and salvation. Because of sin our existence has become fundamentally unstable. Looking for new stability we justify ourselves, and we worship idols. This has implications for our knowing and understanding. By being ‘focused on ourselves,’ we are blind to the truth, reality, the other and God. We get entangled in mis-interpretations and misunderstandings, lies and misleading speculation. But Jesus Christ gives us a new identity. Justified by a restored relationship with God, man is renewed in a constant process of dying and rising with Christ. This transformation process of justification and sanctification in man affects our hermeneutical work.
2. In this process of transformation we receive the mind of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Only Christ teaches us to read the Bible the right way. He needs to enlighten our minds. Only in Christ, the Bible becomes a book of knowledge. Only in Christ, the Scriptures become a book full of the saving knowledge of the one true God. It is important to see the right sequence: Christ is our savior, not these books. Before you do anything, be conscious of your identity in Christ before all you do.
3. It is necessary to actively aim at formation. The process of transformation of the sinner begins with his conversion. This is a conversion from idols and false images of God; a conversion from misunderstanding of the scriptures, wrong concepts of our neighbors and the world around us. In the process of transformation, we learn new ways of thinking and how to use proper interpretations. The reality of God's Kingdom then breaks through.

Transformation of our understanding and transformation of our lives are related to each other. Burger believes it is important that we look at life from the perspective of the resurrection of Christ. That is the hermeneutical starting point for our understanding. Without the resurrection, we could not learn to read Scripture in the light of Christ. What letters in a book could never do, Christ can do through His word and Spirit. The Bible and the fellowship of the church also play an important role in this transformation process. The starting point in our Bible reading and life of faith in the Church and in the world is that we are in Christ, and in this way increasingly begin to look like Christ, and that the image of God is renewed in us.

4. The desire for a new understanding provides a new perspective. Living from the perspective of salvation in Christ, Burger clarified the consequences for the hermeneutical act of a Christian by referring to the distinction Ricoeur makes in a text. He distinguishes the world behind the text, the world of the text, and the world before the text. By becoming very familiar with these three 'fields' in the text we receive new perspectives from God. We begin to live from those perspectives: new perspectives on God, the world, ourselves and our neighbors .

A new perspective will not change everything. We meet others with their perspective—sometimes we disagree, sometimes we learn from them. Together we share the same reality. Our bodies and illnesses, our physical reality, our social communities and history—we share this, live in this, and scientifically study this. But from other perspectives we learn true knowledge. In the light of Christ, we must learn to discern what is true and not true. That is, clothed with the new man, with new attitudes, new faith that regulates, a new direction in our hearts, we learn to know with a new heart. And because sin and its consequences will never disappear completely on this earth, we need one another for a good understanding until Jesus' return.

Respondent

Prof. Alan D. Strange of Mid-America Reformed Seminary in the United States had the honor of responding to Hans Burger's lecture. He appreciates the distance Burger takes from modernism, but criticizes the hermeneutical move, as he perceives it, towards a post-modern Christianity. He argues that the separation made by Burger between Christ and the Scriptures is a false dichotomy. He wants to keep the two together and takes starting point explicitly in the Bible for knowing the truth and for knowing Christ. Strange finds it right to be critical of the foundationalism of Enlightenment thinking. This thinking is based on autonomous man with his reason and does not take God and His word as a starting point. He argues that from 1 Cor. 2 it is clear the human mind and senses fail in furnishing us what we need. Only the general and special revelation of God provide the necessary tools to discern God's wisdom. As Burger pointed out, man is obsessed with epistemology since the Enlightenment. When Modernism, however, failed, men turned to Postmodernism, with relativism as its fruit.

Thus, Strange appreciates Burger's criticism with respect to Modernism, but does not get excited about his alternative which he describes as a kind of Christian Postmodernism,

namely a coherentism that seeks to dodge the truth question. If the question of truth cannot be reached by modernism, it also can not be reached by the Postmodernism. For also this way of thinking starts with its own autonomy (i.e. the autonomy of the community and what it believes) instead of with God and His revelation.

Strange points out that Christ is both the soteriological and epistemological Lord. Both the Lord who brings salvation and the Lord who gives knowledge. He supports this with reference to 1 Cor . 2 and an article on this text by Richard B. Gaffin in the *Westminster Theological Journal* 57:1 (Spring 1995). The 'Christian faith' (Strange speaks of 'Christianity' in his response; it is not quite clear how he meant this, AdV) as the Bible speaks of it (specifically the ontological Trinity and the self-attesting Christ of the Scriptures) serves as the necessary and indispensable precondition of our understanding. This applies not only to our faith, but also to our view of all of reality (logic, science, ethics, etc.). The way to go about proving the Christian faith, then, is not by a rationalistic or empiricistic method, but transcendently, taking God and His Word as that which enjoys revisionary immunity (i.e. it has the quality to give us a corrected version of our understanding that is sacrosanct). The proof of the Christian faith is the impossibility of the contrary, because even the most virulent antitheism presupposes theism.

Strange agrees with Burger that we need an approach from salvation. However, not one that is placed against the truth, but one that leads to the truth. Truth, as the Bible speaks about, is different than truth defined by autonomous man. Modernism defines truth as propositional and Postmodernism defines truth as personal. Both definitions give us a false dichotomy (i.e. separation). Truth is both personal and propositional. John 14:6 says that the person of Jesus Christ is the truth, as elaborated in the inspired propositions of the Bible. It is the Word of God which gives us the truth about Him who is the truth. Jesus Christ is the living Word about whom the written word speaks. There is no dichotomy between the living Word and the written Word that reveals Him. He is true and His Word is true.

Narrowing truth to just "having to do with the salvation of man and the world" has no basis in 1 Cor. 2. Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:2 that all of reality can be reduced to Christ and Him crucified. We see everything through this lens. Similarly, the work of the Spirit is all-encompassing. Gaffin's article proves conclusively: if you give secular (i.e. autonomous) reason an inch, then it will not rest content until it controls everything.

Burger is right, according to Strange, if he does not want rationalism to be the grid through which we read the Bible. Man is a rational being and has received senses which provide him with information. God created man with the power of reason. But he should use this reason ministerially, but magisterially. Accordingly, he should not judge God and His Word, or create a grid through which he will understand that Word, but he will have to recognize that God in His Word is our judge to whom we are accountable. So if we reject rationalism, we should not embrace irrationalism, but put our reason in the service of God.

It is right to call for a Christ-centered approach, but what does that mean? We do not know 'comprehensively' (only God knows comprehensively), but that does not mean we do not know sufficiently and truly. God has accommodated by deigning to speak to us and we can, as his image-bearers, and by his Spirit, understand him. Understanding truth from the Bible entails correcting yourself with 'the mind of Christ.'

Discussion from the floor

From the floor people reacted with both recognition and with new questions. The danger of thinking from covenant automatism with no connection with Christ was pointed out. Then faith can be simply a system. The emphasis on union with Christ is necessary in order not to follow a system, but to have a living relationship. Another participant mentioned again that the basis of our certainty is God's revelation. Another participant wondered: do we have the truth or do we focus on getting the truth? With these last casual remarks this part of the conference was finished.

After listening to presentations with a high verbal density for a three-day stretch, the humorous approach of Dr. Gert Kwakkel was a pleasant break for the listeners. In a practical way, he managed to bring a dry subject to life by placing it in the center of the listener's natural environment. On Saturday afternoon, he gave a speech entitled **The Reader as Focal Point of Biblical Exegesis**.

Exegesis relates to the question of what the text means. In our postmodern time, the key question asked is: *who* gives meaning to the text? Most attention is not given to the author and the meaning of the text, but to the the reader of the text. This can obviously lead to an arbitrary explanation of the text. Kwakkel recognizes this, but at the same time wants to offer some suggestions as to how a focus on the readers might help us in interpreting biblical texts.

Take, for instance, the text of a tax assessment. If you find it in your mailbox, you could ask yourself: did the government send this or is my neighbour playing a joke on me? The text itself cannot do anything about these different interpretations. It has to accept any meaning I assign to it. But at the same time a text is more than a piece of paper. A text functions within a social framework, i.e. a network of communication. There is a common understanding of what a text means in a particular community.

This is how a biblical text functions in the context of the Bible. The context of the Bible is God's creative and redemptive works. People did not have the same access to the Bible at all times. The Scriptures, now accessible to people all over the world, for centuries were only accessible to a limited group of people. Most received access to the Scriptures through a sermon. That access to the Scriptures also varied from place to place. At this point, Kwakkel moved to a different *reading* per time and place. Readers from different times and places read different things in the Bible. But the rule still applies that we need to read the Bible together with other believers within the Christian congregation. We can

help each other in understanding the message. But this understanding needs to be evaluated within the context of the whole Bible. The Bible is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. God's Word gives light to the place where I walk and the time in which I live. Even though I will not receive an answer all questions in the Bible, I do receive enough light to live with God through faith.

We read, therefore, as a community of people with different gifts. Through faith we can see that the Bible communicates its message. God the Holy Spirit brings this about. You cannot prove this with arguments that convince everyone - even unbelievers. You need faith to see that. Also here the rule applies that there is no firm epistemological basis outside our faith.

The book of Hosea is worth reading, not only by the first readers, but also by later readers. It's about wisdom the Holy Spirit still want to give, even though several of the prophecies have been fulfilled (cf. Hos. 14:10). He helps readers understand the text—also today. To be sure, you should always ask yourself how Hosea himself intended certain statements. Yet, at the same time, Peter says that the prophets sometimes said things without knowing who or what they referred to (1 Peter 1:10-11). In other words, it about more than simply the intent of the author. You can discover that “more” by asking how later readers may have understood the prophet's words. When you do this, the readers' perspective comes into the picture. Sometimes multiple interpretations prove helpful in determining the original intent of the author.

Discussion from the floor

One questioner wondered what you do in the story of the tax assessment with the fact that the author of the Bible is known, namely God. Kwakkel: interpretation and a wrong view of who the author or sender is are interrelated. If you consider a tax assessment to be a joke your neighbour is playing on you, then that obviously is a misinterpretation. But it could also be good forgery. As a reader you have to make the decision to see whether that is the case or not. The tax assessment cannot take that decision for you.

Another questioner asked: where are the limits to the interpretation of the reader? Kwakkel: God has the last word. I trust that the Spirit will guide me.



On Monday there was time for relaxation at the now thawed Niagara Falls. From left to right: Dr. G. Kwakkel, Drs. J. de Jong, Dr. B. Kamphuis



Women and Church

On Friday January 17, Dr. G. H. Visscher (Gerry) spoke on the position of women in the church. He argued that Paul's rule for women in the worship service is still valid. He built his argument from Paul's letters to Timothy and the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11 and 14 and 1 Tim 2:12-15). In a worship service a woman may not provide education or speak with authority over a man.

Paul's appeal (as an apostle) to creation is decisive, for through such appeals, which were also employed by the Lord Jesus, the church is reminded of principles that transcend culture.

On this point Visscher does not agree with the report of the deputies of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands on Male/Female in the Church. In his view it speaks too disparagingly about the created order. The report suggests that Paul's appeal to creation in 1 Timothy 2 has less authority and expressive power than his references to Old Testament texts. The report says that referring to this historical event is not a normative appeal to God's ordinance. Visscher replied that an inspired author needs no other Old Testament text to add weight to his words. He is in fact inspired himself. Moreover, if such an author cites events of creation and the fall as the grounds for his prohibition, then such a reference has weight and is relevant with regard to God's rules, because it explains to the reader what creation according to God's original intent means. The creation ordinance refers to principles that show how people are meant to live. These are principles that are instituted before the fall of the man into sin. It is plausible that these principles remain part of our life in Christ, i.e. Christians who are increasingly renewed in the image of God. Not only Paul appeals to creation; Jesus does the same when he appeals to creation as a decisive argument regarding divorce. The same applies to David in Psalm 8, Solomon in Proverbs 8, Isaiah in chapter 40, Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, the author of Hebrews in the 2nd chapter of his epistle.

Visscher is convinced that the world desperately needs to hear that man and woman, marriage and family are not entities that have come about by sociological developments or an evolutionary process. We need to accept that, along with all other variety and beauty of God's creation, God has ordained this variety and beauty: that the man will be different from the woman, and that they are physically, emotionally and psychologically different. This variety and beauty also includes the fact that one of them will take more leadership in the church and the home than the other. Today these God-ordained differences should be emphasized instead of blurred. A church that projects and proclaims the clear lines of Genesis 2 and 3 in today's culture, including the call for men to be leaders, has a powerful message for our culture. But the church has nothing left to say when it gives in to the arbitrary changing moods and attitudes of every civilized culture.

Another problem Visscher has is the rapport's approach to the culture. Christianity has always seen itself as a power that forms and transforms culture through the power of the gospel. But now it is claimed that Paul's culture was so unique and that our culture is so unique that the message preached to one culture cannot be normative for the other culture. He asked: "Is this not a regrettable hermeutical approach? If Paul's time is so unique that the biblical principles of the two cultures cannot be bridged, how can we then move from the Old Testament world to the New Testament world and from there into our world? How can we then decide what is the relevance of Scripture? Is it still relevant?" The report claims to follow the hermeutics of the previous generation, Visscher said, but he experienced a significant and far-reaching shift and feared the consequences of this

shift. Instead of following this approach, he urged the people of God, on both sides of the ocean, to continue to believe that the living and active Word of God is capable of dividing soul and body, bone and marrow. And to believe that the Word can also be read with the illumination of the Holy Spirit in such a way that context and background actually help rather than hinder in understanding the abiding principles of the Word.

Finally, Visscher said, the inspired apostle is very explicit about the importance of his rule in Timothy, both before and after the verses in Chapter 2:7 and 3:15, and also in the middle of 2: 12. He does the same when he writes to the Corinthians in 11: 16: “If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.” Likewise in 1 Corinthians 14:37: “If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.” According to him, Reformed churches stop and think when an appeal is made to God's creation. But they will also sit up and pay attention when, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the servant of the LORD is so serious

Respondent

In his lecture as a response, Dr. P.H.R. van Houwelingen defended the position of the report of the deputies on Male/Female in the Church. This report can be found at: http://godgeneratedlife.com/downloads/2014male_female_report.pdf. Here are a few elements of his argument.

The meaning of 1 Timothy 2:12-15, according to Van Houwelingen, is that a woman cannot teach in an authoritarian way. Verse 12 should be translated as: “to assume authority over a man.” The sentence—the woman will be saved through bearing children—shows the cultural relativity of that time. Thus Paul's rule has a wider radius. It is a rule of conduct for both men and women in leadership functions.

In Paul's time, the position of women in church and society were the same. In our time, that is not so. In society, she is allowed to do more than in the church. It would be a hindrance to work for the gospel if we do not allow women in office.

Discussion from the floor

The order of creation is a stronger argument than reasoning that the discrepancy between a woman's role in the church and her function in society would be a hindrance for the spread of the gospel.

An attendee asked if the position on homosexuality is not an obstacle to the progress of the gospel. Can the same analogy be used?

The predominant reaction was summed up by an attendee: the context is king in the new hermeneutic. The cultural compatibility has priority over what Paul says.



“Traditional” Bible reading: An Alternative to the Postmodern Reading. On Friday, January 17, Dr. C. Venema of Mid-America Reformed Seminary presented an evaluation of post-liberal or post-critical hermeneutics. He considered the way of understanding the Bible during the time that preceded the Reformation to be a better alternative. Taking his starting point there, he arrived at a way of reading the Bible which he calls **“Interpreting the Bible in and with the Church: The Imperative for and Challenges of a Confessional Hermeneutic.”**

Venema began with an historical overview of hermeneutics. In early Christian times biblical texts were read as part of one rich and diverse book. The basic character of the Bible is the story—the real, factual story. The Spirit used people to give it to us. The structure of promise and fulfillment gives meaning to the content of the Bible. The Bible interprets itself. Unclear texts are explained with portions that are clear. The church was seen as the privileged authority to which Scripture was given for interpretation. She does this with the help of the confessions.

In modern times, however, a distinction is made between reading the Bible in the church and in the academy. The Bible was no longer seen as a God-given, coherent whole preserved for us in the canon. Instead it is considered to be simply an historical text. Using the tools of modern historical research, scholars search for strata (historical layers) in the text. Only those parts of the Bible that can stand the test of critical reason are considered to be true. The primary interest is to find in the Bible what the text meant for the first readers or hearers. This is how one determines what people might have thought in the past. Not much remains of the text as a whole because it has been deconstructed.

At the end of the period of historical criticism, more radical forms of deconstruction occur. For instance, the reader-response approach to interpretation, in which the text means what it means to me. The reader’s subjective interpretation of the text is the reference point for the interpretation of the text. The Bible is treated as literature. This means that actual facts are no longer recorded. The texts must be reconstructed to determine their meaning. In addition, different cultures can each give their own interpretations.

According to Venema, this shows that you should keep the Bible and historical-critical research separate, for the text is less important and man is more important than the Bible when you keep them together. It is important to start from the belief that God is the author of the Bible, and that the meaning of the biblical text coincides with the divine meaning intended and that this meaning can be apprehended. Although God accommodates himself and uses human language, He is the One who speaks and He does so in a sufficiently clear manner. If the belief of the ancient church concerning the nature of the Bible is true, then that is the basis on which you can say that the church is able to hear and understand what God has spoken. Venema appreciates the effort of some post-critical modern school theologians (in response to the deconstruction of texts by nineteenth-century modern theologians) to read the Bible holistically and canonically. For instance, if you try to read Genesis 3:15 in isolation and asks how that text came into the canon and what it might have meant, you will not discover its meaning. Only if you place this text in line with God's purposes, taking into account biblical motifs in the course of the history of salvation, will this text become clear as an advent text. Venema, therefore, appreciates the return to the big story of the Bible, the recognition of the holistic nature of the Bible, the refusal to get lost in the deconstruction and separation of biblical texts.

Venema also wants to join these theologians in responding to the question of how an ancient text can still speak in our modern world. Their answer is: the interpretation of the Bible is part of the work of the church. This is how the historical distance between then and now is bridged, for we belong to the same church as the church of the first centuries, and we read the same scriptures. We read the Bible together as a body that is on a journey through history. That means that we are not be the first people to read the Bible. The value Venema sees in this approach is that, as a modern reader of the Bible in the here and now, you cannot say that you do not have an obligation to the church of all times.

That brings him to the role of the confession in a correct reading of the Bible. The Spirit will always be with the church. Thus, when we read the confessions, we do not read what some early Christians believed the Bible taught, but we read what the Spirit through and in the church understood what the Word of God wanted to teach (while the confession remains subordinate to the Word). Thus, we do not start all over again. We are not the first ones reading the Bible. We do not read in isolation, but together with all the saints. The confession, therefore, is a reliable instrument for understanding the Bible. The connection with the church of all ages bridges the distance in time in our reading of the Bible.

Respondent

Dr. R. D. Anderson of the Free Reformed Church in Rockingham, Australia began with a summary of Dr. Venema's lecture, who had adopted four presuppositions for correctly interpreting the Bible in our time:

- The authority and inspiration of the Bible;
- A canonical approach against the consequences of the historical-critical method;
- An ecclesiastical approach to bridge the historical difference between the Bible and our

times;

- And confessional approach, as a logical consequence.

The universal church of all times and places is the road and bridge for reading the Bible in our time. The rest of his argument he developed from a series of questions. He then came with a proposal.

Dr. Anderson began with the question of whether justice is done to the presupposition of the authority and inspiration of the Bible by juxtaposing it with the canonical, ecclesiastical and confessional presuppositions. What good is a canonical-ecclesiastical reading of Scripture, as that is done with a theological reading of the Scriptures, if the reason for one's acceptance of the canon is an incidental act of history brought about by some faith community with little or no historical or factual basis?

It surprised Dr. Anderson that in an overview of the history of the interpretation of the Bible no reference is made to the history of revelation. The result is that in this way the canonical interpretation of the Bible is starkly pitted against the historical-critical method. This, in turn, runs the risk that the full weight of dogmatics is read into every bible book, regardless of its position in the history of revelation which tries to think through how each bible book came into being and took its place in the history of this world. Does the historical-critical method really have to be adversarial the church's interpretative tradition? Should belief in the inspiration and authority of the Bible not be an encouragement to also think through God's self-revelation in history, even though this is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible? If we accept the biblical worldview, may we not see history as a gradual unfolding of God's revelation of his plan of salvation in the history of the world? As a condition for this approach to the historical-critical method Anderson assumes a faith position of the biblical scholar. This scholar also takes into account the input of ancient civilizations.

For instance, the Bible suggests in Genesis 1:1 that the book of Genesis was written during the time of the kings. But would it also not be possible to make a connection between God's revelation during the time of the kings (Genesis) and the events and divine revelation before the Flood? A connection between what God's people knew during the days of Noah and beyond? That could be through a proto-Sumerian literary tradition that may later have been translated into Sumerian. And from there was translated via Akkadian to the Hebrew language. Can this not also be the basis for the origin of Genesis during the time of the kings? Anderson thinks this is a better hypothesis than that of a prophetic dictation of new revelation during the time of the kings. Let alone that a group of Yahwist prophets wrote a theological critique of the Babylonian narrative of origins. With the idea of the history of revelation you can also, for instance, ask if Genesis one already reveals the trinity or not just yet.

Finally, a word about the problem of historical distance. Anderson fails to see how Venema's solution of interpreting the Bible along with the tradition of the Church solves that problem. How does the idea of the continuing church absolve interpreters from first establishing what the text meant for the first readers before they can determine what it

means for us today? Moreover the cultures of today are very different from the cultures of the Graeco-Roman world.
