

ANTITHESIS OR SYNTHESIS?

The Greatest of These is Love

Today we often hear about the dilemma of love versus right. We are reminded not to insist on the rightness of something for it may lead to being loveless to those who disagree or are unsure. We must be less definitive about matters and more open to other people's opinions and interpretations. But such talk appears to go into a different direction than our Lord does when He tells us, 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.'
(Matt.10:34)

Now someone could counter that our Lord's words speak about the distinctions between the world and the church and should, therefore, not be applied to differences in the world or differences within the church. But even though this is the trend in our present society, it is not the direction God's Word and the lessons of history take us.

Henry M. Morris drew attention to this matter, as it applies to education, in his book *Christian Education for the Real World*. In it he points out that there is a real difference between what the world is and what it was intended. His main thesis is that a world view based on evolution, or the chance occurrence of what takes place can not produce anything that can be synthesized with a world view that is based on creation and the orderly development of history according to the rules and plans of God. He explains that these two must stand over against each other in an antithetical manner. He writes, " We are forced to conclude, therefore, that - difficult as such a choice and position may be in the eyes of men - a true Christian educational system, whether in church or university or elementary school or anything else, must completely divorce itself from all philosophy or either human or superman origin or content. Teachings or practices based on such philosophies, if they are necessary to be discussed at all, must be clearly delineated as anti-Christian in their entirety, with cogent reasons for repudiating them. While such a stand is different from that of most Christian institutions, and is bound to be unpopular and misunderstood, it would seem that concern for Biblical integrity demands that we return to it."

On the theological front the present day Christian historian may well wonder what all the fuss was about during the Great Reformation when Christians were anathematized, killed and persecuted because they held to the truth of Scripture. He might also question the motives of those who followed the words of Scripture when they were questioned, relativized and opposed leading to Secession and Liberation. Today this historian can read and hear all around him about talks of unity between evangelicals and Roman Catholics, about differences that none-the-less are not impediments to further unity. What was formerly seen as antithetical is now being approached in any way that will lead to synthesis.

Many discussions and disagreements are being concluded with a cry for a reasonable understanding of what is essential and what are non-essentials. It only depends on the speaker or author as to how

far they want to go with such definitions. In many circles there is no longer a need to define between "Christian" and "reformed", but only between "Christian" and "secular".

Herman Veldkamp finds instruction in Scripture about this state of affairs when he meditates on Jeremiah 8:9b in *Christian Renewal* of Feb.17, 1997. He says, in part, "In principle it makes no difference whether the Word of the Lord is radically rejected or limited to a few edifying remarks for pious souls by which the comprehensive and regnant Word of the Lord withers to a sorry-looking and rickety signpost pointing the way to heaven. And it is clearly rejection and reduction of the Word of God that has put an end to wisdom. It's hopeless. For those who still care to read the newspaper, there are ringing, well-reasoned arguments telling us how we should and should not live. But behind the earnest debates and sound discourses looms the grinning, cynical face of the universal jester. He has, after all, succeeded in squeezing the Word out of the picture."

He points out in his article that we would soon agree with such a condemnation until we discover that Jeremiah is not addressing the world but, "Jeremiah is probably addressing the teachers and leaders of the people who had fabricated their own explanations of the law of the Lord. When the troubled came to them for answers they offered their own advice rather than the Lord's instruction and thus substituted their own wisdom for the Lord's. In rejecting the Word of the Lord, the leaders drove the people to the abyss."

Mr. Veldkamp concludes with words of warning that we should all take to heart when we sit in our studies preparing the words we must take with us on the pulpit next Sunday, or when we must speak with our brothers and sisters at the next family visit, and make decisions at the next consistory meeting, or when we sit in the pew and receive the proclamation of the Word, or when we decide to criticize the minister or the consistory.

He says, "At a time when various antichristian powers seek resolutely to bury the truth, we still fuel the fires within the church with disruptive and divisive quarrels thereby hastening the church's decline..."

Through the words of Hosea the Lord admonished the prophets and the priests that the people of Israel, the Old Testament people of God, were being destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4). They did not hold up the truth of God's Word but promoted their own wisdom and conventional thought. They even tried to make the one fit the other. But they were told in clear language what the consequences of such leadership would be. There is only one solution - repentance - reformation! Time and again the Lord led His Old Testament and New Testament people to repentance - reformation. For it is not possible to synthesize the world with the church. It is not possible to synthesize the wisdom of man with the wisdom of God. There is enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. There has been a creation, not an evolution. There is a right way and a wrong way, not a "it doesn't matter" my way or your way! There is antithesis!

PdB

TOWARDS ASSOCIATIONS FOR REFORMED POLITICAL ACTION (1)

By: Rev. B. J. Berends

Several weeks ago I spoke at an Ontario Ministerial about Church and Politics which for us, of course, means - Reformed Politics. In doing so I like to take the opportunity to promote Associations for Reformed Political Action (ARPAs). More of them need to be established and interest needs to be aroused among our members. Their laudable objectives are clearly stated in their Constitution. They are:

- A. to study the political issues in the light of the Scriptures;
- B. to publish the result of these studies by various means;
- C. to determine the task of government on the basis of Scripture;
- D. to refute revolutionary ideas which contradict the ordained order of God;
- E. to pursue electoral activities at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.

I agreed to speak, and now write, on the subject of church and politics, on Reformed politics, because I believe that our Christian, our Reformed, heritage with respect to Church, State and Society will be well served via such ARPAs. With ARPAs there will "automatically" be an interest in the scriptural fundamentals involved and a study of how they were applied in the past by our forefathers, members of the Catholic, the Reformed Church of Jesus Christ; by people such as John Calvin, Groen Van Prinsterer, Abraham Kuypers, Klaas Schilder, Piet Jongeling, etc., and how these reformed principles, in harmony with the past, are to be applied in our present time, in the country of which we are citizens.

Since 1978 a number of motivated people have been involved in establishing local ARPAs and in encouraging a network throughout Canada. Unfortunately, very little has been heard about ARPA since 1986. That is the year the Christian Heritage Party was established. It seemed that many asked themselves, "Why have an ARPA if you can get involved in a real party, the CHP!" Anyway, ARPA activities either ceased or decreased since that time. This is a real pity, especially in view of the activities it generated in various locations, particularly in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia.

Back in 1986, in Smithers, we were in the process of establishing four ARPA committees, three to monitor and address the federal, provincial and municipal activities, and the fourth as a theoretical or steering committee. The latter would not only test the literary and spiritual quality of any given paper/brief and help seek biblical answers to political questions, but also would try to link up with the past, to search out how our reformed ancestors had applied biblical principles, as we confess them in our Reformed Confessions as members of Christ's Church. In other words, it was recognized that the political field as it has evolved since the Industrial and French Revolutions, and especially since the Second World War was a rather difficult, complex matter. It was understood that it would not do to write papers and briefs, unless you were sure of your facts, and worked with those facts in a biblical and knowledgeable way.

This brings me to the important question: why should we become involved in politics? More specifically, why are there pronouncements, even confessional statements, on the task of governments/magistrates, in the past and in the present? Is this a cultural endeavour that members of Christ, of His Church ought to get involved in? The word 'politics' comes from the root word "polis" - city, referring to the regulated activities among citizens of a city, of a designated area. To study how Christians should be involved in this activity should be a point of major concern, and a point of continuous study at every ARPA: what is Reformed politics...what is political activity that is biblical, pleasing to the Lord our God, to our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, to Him, who has received all power in heaven and on earth? He, who in heaven, in His headquarters/in the Capital of the universe, manifests Himself as Head of His Church through whom the Father governs all things, *all things!* Are we to be involved with that government that's on His shoulders? Again, what is biblical/reformed Politics? How has it been understood and applied in the past, specifically since the time of the great Reformation? We need to know, for, what did one of our Reformed ancestors say again, (as translated from the Dutch): "in the present lies the past, in what is now, the future, and the total sum of which lies in the hand of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords, the King of kings."

As you know, besides being called Christians, Reformed, we are also called Calvinists. And that is not without good reasons. Our confessions, our church order, carry a Calvinistic flavour, as drawn from the "Institutes of the Christian Religion," as well as from other writings by John Calvin. In volume IV, chapter 20, the final chapter of his Institutes, Calvin deals with the Civil Government as a whole. In it Calvin set forth the scriptural teaching regarding the origin of all government. After stressing the need for a proper scriptural distinction between civil and ecclesiastical authority, he goes on to say that these two governments are not antithetical, for both find their origin in God, both are placed under the one Head, Jesus Christ. He held that Christians were bound to accept whatever form of civil government they lived under, to show obedience to the authorities as long as this did not conflict with the revealed will of God, and that it was the duty of all governments to protect the citizens from evildoers, and to protect the church so that it could grow and function freely.

As reformed Church we repeat this Calvinistic hermeneutic in article 36 of our Confession of Faith. In Catechism instruction for the youth of the Church we also come across these matters. As part of the lesson the students and I discuss the question: How did the Reformer John Calvin explain the relationship between the kingdom of God and the created world? The answer:

1. The whole world was created in order that it should be the stage of God's glory;
2. After the fall of man into sin, it could no longer reach its intended goal. However, in principle this goal is reached again through the Lord Jesus Christ;
3. It is in the kingship of Jesus Christ over the world that God restores His sovereignty over the world again;
4. There is therefore no principle "dualism" between the kingdom of God and the world;
5. The calling of the Christian is to overcome the result of sin in this world, and to bring everything under the rule of Christ. He should do so in every sphere of life and at all levels of society;

6. The church and state in their respective functions must cooperate and support each other in order to promote that one kingdom of Christ.

Conclusion: There is no area in this world which would not be subject to the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. All the spheres of social-political life are part of his domain, which is reminiscent of that well-known sentence coined by the famous Dutch theologian and politician, Dr. Abraham Kuyper: "There is not an inch of the whole area of our human life about which Christ, who is Sovereign of all, does not proclaim, "Mine!"

This brings me to Kuyper's predecessor, Groen Van Prinsterer, a man who could also be mentioned under the heading: Origin of Reformed Politics. Groen was born in 1801, in the Netherlands, of wealthy and socially prominent parents. He was a brilliant student of law and literature. In the preface of his well-known book, "Unbelief and Revolution," Groen writes, "The following lectures constitute an essay in demonstrating from history that there is a natural and necessary relation between *unbelief and revolution*. As the denial of the living God is related to disorder, injustice and slavery, so the union of freedom with law and order is sought in vain apart from submission to the highest Lawgiver and King.

In these lectures, then, Groen argued that the root cause of the evil of his age was "unbelief." "As a result we are living," he said, "in a condition of permanent revolution. Revolutions are here to stay and will grow much worse in scope and intensity unless men can be persuaded to return to Christianity, to practice its precepts and to obey the Gospel in its full implications for human life and civilized society."

Since about 1830 Groen has seen the poisonous/dangerous influence of the underlying principle of the French revolution: *No God, no master!* To him this was revolt, rebellion, and revolution against the Most High God, the absolute Ruler of the universe. So he cried, literally, "Over against the revolution, the gospel," by which he meant: over against the spirit, principles; and over against the methods of revolution, we must raise the banner of God's Word and apply its teachings to the whole of human life, also via Reformed politics. To that end he and others established, "The Antirevolutionary Party (The AR)". As you can hear there is an obvious political antithesis with Groen, something new in Dutch, in Reformed, Politics. Over against a man-centered, a humanistic approach to politics, he pursued a Biblical, a Reformed approach to politics.

Now you should know that in the days of Groen one could hardly speak of political parties. Platforms were not written. What held the party members together were the personalities, principles and policies of the leaders. At first the Antirevolutionary representatives were actually being used by the Conservatives to further their own ends. In the election year, 1871, Groen called for a clean break with them. By doing so he remained true to his principles. He is the man who coined those well-known words: "In our isolation lies our strength." He meant that the Antirevolutionary party must be independent and stand by the biblical, reformed principles it had adopted, for therein lies its strength. Such was the shape and stand of him who could truly be called the father of Reformed politics. Still, he was not the man to lead the "AR" out of obscurity into prominence. He was not

the man to organize the troops into a viable force. That important task was left to the Dutch theologian and politician Dr. Abraham Kuyper.

Kuyper was born in 1837, in Maasluis, the Netherlands. He proved to be a brilliant student. Like his father he became a minister. It was during his Amsterdam ministry that he became fully involved not only in the reformation of church life, which eventually led up to the Second Secession, of 1886, but also in the reformation of political life by organizing that new political party based on biblical principles, the Anti-evolutionary, the AR party. On January 21, 1874, Kuyper was elected to the "Tweede Kamer," the Second chamber of Parliament (similar to our House of Commons). After Groen died in 1876 Kuyper became the new leader. A declaration of principles was adopted on January 1, 1878, and forwarded to the Antirevolutionary Voters Clubs throughout the country for ratification. In March 1879 Kuyper's commentary on this declaration appeared in book form with the title "Ons Program" (Our Program). The twenty one articles treat such matters as basic political philosophy, the constitution, the budget, decentralization, the schools, public health, finances, the national defense, the colonial problem, the social question, and the problem of church and state. This declaration made it clear that the AR was not a party of single or moral issues. Even though the school question held centre stage at that time, the AR platform encompassed the entire political governmental terrain.

Under Kuyper's leadership, thanks to his great organizing, journalistic and speaking ability, the AR grew in stature and in number. To make a long story short: after a number of elections, the AR became a major party, Kuyper became Prime Minister of Holland in 1901, Dr. H. Colijn (another member of the Reformed church) became Prime Minister in 1933, and until World War II this Biblical/Reformed party played a dominant role in Dutch politics.

As you may know, not everything that Kuyper did was positively Reformed. After he died in 1920, many of his followers tried to put his more questionable views, his semi-theological, his semi-philosophical system, into the practice of their politics, rather than drawing their direction solely from the Word of God as it is confessed and summarized by the Church in the Ecumenical creeds, in the Reformed/Calvinistic confessions. We think here of Kuyper's theory on presumptive regeneration, which led to the Liberation in 1944. We think of his teaching on the doctrine of the Church, his theory of the pluriformity of the Church, his acceptance of denominationalism. Notably his theory on the covenant - covenant with the elect only! - caused a church split, when it was placed by the Synod of 1942 on par with the three forms of unity. As a result there was the need for a **Liberation and Return**, as stated on August 11, 1944 in that well-known meeting at The Hague: a liberation from those unscriptural synodical decisions and a return to the Word of God as it is confessed and summarized in the Three Forms of Unity.

It didn't take our immediate forefathers very long to realize that such a liberation and return applied to more institutions than the church. It became increasingly difficult to draw one line in the Reformed societies and organizations of school, labour and politics established since the days of Kuyper. It became increasingly clear that members of the Reformed church could not carry out their calling with respect to state and society if they could not be united

as a church. As you can imagine, the synodical decisions had their impact in all of the Christian organizations, if only from an ethical point of view: on Sunday in church people were declared schismatic or separatist, and during the rest of the week they would be welcomed as allies in Reformed organizations, which were there as a result of the church. Without exception our parents and grandparents no longer felt at home in the many Antirevolutionary Voter Clubs throughout the country after the Liberation. As a result a meeting was held in Amersfoort in 1948 to discuss what direction to take. This meeting is known as the "Amersfoort Congress" (Convention). The conclusions at the Amersfoort Congress with respect to these members' political calling were summarized in some twelve thesis or statutes, which gave birth to a new party, called "Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond" (the Reformed Political Covenant/Alliance).

This meant a new direction. A period was put behind Kuyper's semi-theological, semi-philosophical theories, a period behind that AR program of principles, which had no immediate contact with scriptural, confessional pronouncements. The new basis for Reformed Politics became and has remained, in our sister churches: the Word of God as it is taught in a summary by the church in the Three Forms of Unity, the very reason why the existing ARPAs, in keeping with the stand of our immediate forefathers, have adopted this direct link between Church and Politics, by making a reference in its basis to the confessions of the church, the Three Forms of Unity. For, don't we believe that the Church is, indeed, the power station for all educational/social/political activity?