

A SCRIPTURAL VIEW

In the book of Proverbs we read about the wisdom of making our "speech judicious", and that such "pleasant speech increases persuasiveness" (Proverbs 16:21_23). The response by brother Aren Van Dyke to the editorial "An Invisible View" (Information, June 4, 1994) is both pleasant (brotherly) and persuasive (convincing). Therefore it is proper and beneficial that we respond to what was written in the same judicious and persuasive manner.

In the past the Westminster Standards (W.S.) have been criticized because they are Kuyperian. This, according to many, is simply impossible because Kuyper lived more than 200 years later. It is true that there are more than 200 years between the W.S. and Kuyper, but this does not mean that there cannot be an agreement between this confession and Kuyper. Kuyper appealed to this confession to support his unscriptural views. "Even if it is true that the W.S. do not say what Kuyper said, it does not automatically follow that the W.S. are fully Scriptural. We can only come to this conclusion after examining the Westminster Confession in the light of Scripture." ^{a)}

Br. van Dyke is correct when he states that the terms "invisible" and "visible" are not used in Scripture. "When we look at how the Bible speaks about the church we find that the gathering work of Christ is not limited to time, space, or persons. Christ gathered out of the whole human race from the beginning of this world to the end... We cannot 'oversee' this work of Christ. We can only see what happens around us, and in our life time. Just because this work of Christ is 'un-over-see-able', does not mean it is invisible." ^{b)} As I write, I cannot see my children and what they are doing, but that does not make my children and family invisible. "Although I cannot survey the work of Christ, yet I can in faith see what He does where I live. I am called to be obedient in my local situation, to join the local church, to join the holy catholic Christian church." ^{c)} This church is not invisible. If it was, how could I find it, much less join it? Rather, "the church has its location, existence, and being within definable geographical limits. It has an address. The church is all the Christians living and meeting in a particular place." ^{d)} This church is the gathering of true believers. Such a gathering is always visible in its confession, offices and worship. "We do not find in Scripture any grounds for the idea of an invisible church versus a visible institute." ^{e)}

The church can at times be hidden but that does not mean it is therefore invisible. Even though Elijah did not see the 7000 believers which the Lord had kept for himself, they did exist, and they certainly were not invisible. "Their obedience to the Lord wasn't invisible either. Baal's image was a public image, and the refusal of the 7000 to bow their knees did not go by unnoticed by the public." ^{f)}

The terms "visible" and "invisible" are not used in our Three Forms of Unity. "This distinction was never made into a dogma. Art. 29 B.C. speaks about hypocrites, but says they are in the church, but not of the church." ^{g)} Br. van Dyke notes that Calvin, and many other reformers did speak of an invisible church, and he is right. Yet when "Calvin speaks of an invisible church, he does not posit

it as a church which exists along side, or separate from the visible church, but only as the church in the judgment of God" ^(h); the church as God sees it. Calvin never played the invisible church over against or in contrast to the visible.

Br. van Dyke lists a number of Scripture passages and also refers to the Three Forms of Unity to show that there are visible and invisible aspects of the church. "But such a distinction is of no real help. To be sure, election, regeneration and so forth are, in a certain sense, invisible; but they do not exist in themselves. Election is of a people, and call is of a people; in each case the people are visible... The church has spiritual aspects, but these aspects are all concerned with real people; otherwise they would be mere theological abstractions... The church is always something real, something tangible, just as Christians are always real and tangible." ⁽ⁱ⁾

When we speak about election we should keep in mind that God has chosen us in Christ. "God's election cannot be separated from Christ. Because Christ is the Head of the Church, we may say that God's election is realized in the Church... However, this decree of election is hidden from us. We do not know who is included in it. God knows. Therefore in speaking about the church, we should not start from election, but from the fact that the church is a gathering. The point is then not whether someone is an elect, but whether someone is obedient to Christ." ^(j)

Do the Westminster Standards, like Kuyper, speak about an invisible church consisting of the elect, in contrast to, or separate from the visible church? If, as Br. van Dyke suggests, "we look with critical eyes in a positive way", we still cannot ignore what we read in the Form of Government of the O.P.C. Chapter IV.4, "The visible unity of the Body of Christ, though not altogether destroyed, is greatly obscured by the divisions of the Christian church into different groups or denominations." Nor do we need to speculate "at the intent" of what we find in the Book of Discipline, chapter 11 sub 3.b. "Members may be removed when they desire to be dismissed to a church of which the session cannot approve as a church of like faith and practice. If it appears to the session that the spiritual interests of the members will be advanced by their uniting with such a church, it shall grant them certificates of standing..." In these excerpts the Kuyperian view of the church is clearly evident. The notion of the pluriformity of the church is blatantly obvious.

"The term invisible becomes dangerous when used with regard to an invisible church as an entity on its own, distinct from the visible church. There is no Scriptural ground to conclude two churches, one visible and one invisible, exist" ^(k) "Schilder said that the idea of an invisible church allows unfaithfulness. He meant that when you reason from an invisible church idea, then it doesn't matter so much to which visible church you belong." ^(l)

"The Westminster Confession (W.C.) in chapter 25 speaks about the invisible church as a church separate from the visible church. It also speaks of the invisible church as the total elect that have been, are and will be. In addition it has in it the idea of pluriformity... The W.C. is on the point of the church not in agreement with Scripture." ^(m) Neither is it in agreement with our confessions. Therefore "it is not a matter that the Three Forms of Unity are to be preferred above the

Westminster Standards, but that the latter are unscriptural with regard to this matter. This will have consequences for our contacts with Presbyterian churches." ⁽ⁿ⁾

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(a)Do You See The Church? P.19. D.G.J. Agema (unpublished); (b)(c)(e) Ibid p.14; (d) Ibid p.15+16; (f) Ibid p.4; (g) Ibid p.8; (j) Ibid p.16+17; (k) Ibid p.22. (L) Ibid p.16; (m) Ibid p.23+24; (n) Ibid p.24; (h) Presbyterian or Reformed? Pg 9 K. Kok (unpublished).

OCT.31: HALLOWEEN?

In 1973 Stephen M. Crotts, a pastor of Christ Church in Burlington, NC visited the Blarney Castle in Ireland and kissed the famous stone. Only later did he learn the legend behind the tradition. It seems a witch was drowning in a nearby lake. The king happened by in his boat and saved her. She thanked him by blessing a certain stone high up on his castle wall. Anyone who kissed it would receive the gift of eloquence. "All this and I'd kissed the thing! I'd been involved in the occult unknowingly! Blah! I tried to wipe the kiss off he later wrote in an article in Christian Renewal of Oct.26, 1992. Many of us will have the same experience with Halloween. How many of us haven't worn the costumes and carved the pumpkins?

OR REFORMATION DAY

Stephen Crotts went on to explain some of the history behind Halloween. At least one major source for Halloween is the Durid religion. It celebrated Oct. 31 as its New Years Day. It was a time when the summer warmth was gone and the dark and cold of winter was upon them.

They believed that on this day the god of the dead, Samhain, called together the wicked dead who'd been forced to live in the bodies of animals for the past year. This was the night he decided which body they'd get next year. Ghosts, witches, monsters, disembodied spirits - the sum of all our fears - began to prowl the earth looking for a new body to possess.

They lit great bon fires to encourage the sun to return and dispel the darkness. They believed black cats held the spirits of particularly evil people. They dressed like goats and witches themselves in order to trick the evil spirits into believing they were already one of them, and so be left alone.

The Italians added to the celebration of Halloween by their worship of the goddess Pamona who was lord of fruits. The Irish contributed by believing that on Oct. 31 their dead ancestors would return from their graves. And they also gave us the lore of Jack O'Lantern, who was not admitted into hell, but was sent to wander the earth till judgment day. He is still said to be the one pulling pranks on Halloween.

The early church responded to the preoccupation with death and spirits by holding "All Saints Day" services in which the preaching was about death, heaven, victory over evil, and the light of Jesus Christ.

Over the years this day also began to be corrupted. Relics were prayed to, purgatory was taught and indulgences were sold to free souls from suffering.

On Oct.31, 1517 the Reformers began to loudly proclaim the truth of Scripture over against these many heresies.

When we come to Oct. 31 we too may be reminded of the changes in the seasons, the coming of darkness and death. We should speak with our children of these realities. And then together with them we may flee to Jesus Who has conquered Satan and overcome death. - Hallelujah. "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing."

PdB

THE BIBLE ON THE CHRISTIAN SEXUAL OFFENDER

Rarely in the past, but more frequently these days, we see allegations of sexual abuse within Christian circles. It is suggested that this should not be attributed to an actual increase in sexual abuse but to the fact that more of the victims are coming forward (as they are more certain of being believed now than in the past). Unfortunately, we, the Canadian Reformed Church, are not excluded from the Christian circles". Consider for a moment that a friend confided in you that she (or he) had been sexually abused; what should you do? Do you tell the minister and wash your hands of the matter? What are the laws that apply to a situation like this? Or do we disregard the civil authorities?

In B.C. and most other provinces, the present law is very clear when it concerns the abuse of a child; the law requires individuals in a position of authority to report any suspected incidents of abuse (sexual or otherwise) of a minor. A Christian looking at this from a Biblical viewpoint must certainly comply, not just legally, but for conscience sake (Rom. 13:5).

However, since this law is a more recent enactment, and since the indications of child abuse can be overlooked, scenarios such as the following exist. A Christian sister confides in a friend that a Christian brother has sexually assaulted her, long ago, or just recently. What should the friend recommend to the victim? (Although there are both male and female offenders; we use a scenario of the predominant forms of this sin or crime.)

In light of Matthew 18, the victim should talk to the perpetrator (with an escort if need be). Hopefully the accused will not bear false witness. If he does admit to his sins, accompany him to the police so that he may make a statement; if he, however, denies the allegations, the victim should take an office bearer with her; if he still maintains his innocence, a report should be filed with the police by the victim. If the assault was facilitated by the accuser's position of authority or by the job he held, then he should hand in a temporary resignation, until he is exonerated, or until the judge gives sentence on whether the accused may or may not continue in the position which he previously held.

Some will ask, but why should we expose the perpetrator to the government for punishment? God chooses to punish people through various means. Sometimes He will apply a specific punishment to a specific sin in order to discipline His child. An example is the case of King David and Bathsheba; for David's murder of Uriah, and for his sexual sin with Bathsheba, the Lord took their first child to Himself (2 Sam. 12). This is not the usual discipline that God demands for these sins.

God also chooses to punish people by "connecting" (or associating) a certain punishment to a certain sin. A present day example of this is AIDS; promiscuity may lead to AIDS or other diseases (Rom. 1:27) [Caution: the reverse is not true; not every one who has AIDS is being punished]. Another example is suffering the spiritual, mental and physical effects that having an abortion naturally leads to.

A third way in which God chooses to discipline us (which concerns the topic at hand) is punishment through the civil authorities. We see this repeatedly in the Old Testament, with individuals like Achan who stole from the items devoted to God; we see this of the Judges who maintained peace by punishing the guilty and protecting the innocent; this pattern continues with the wisdom of Solomon in determining which woman the child belonged to (1 Kings 3:16ff). The New Testament illustrates that there is to be a civil government (separate from church) to which we must submit (Rom. 13:1-7). In the Old Testament the judges were charged to "Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the Lord; He is with you in giving judgment" (2 Chron. 19:6). This continues in the

New Testament when Paul states "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom. 13:1&2). We must submit to the government, not as a necessary evil, but with all honor due that high office. As Solomon writes, "My son, fear the Lord and me king, and do not disobey either of them" (Proverbs 24:21); Peter adds to this "Fear God. Honor the emperor." (1 Pet. 2:17); and finally Paul states, "Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience" (Rom. 13:5) All this indicates that the Lord uses the government as a means of disciplining his children (as well as unbelievers), and that we should not prevent God from using this tool as He intended.

Another reason that we should expose our brother to the authorities is that although punishment is a negative consequence (by definition) it is used by God to our benefit. Therefore, we should not despise God's discipline (Proverbs 3:11), even though it doesn't seem pleasant at the time (Heb.

12:11); remember, God disciplines those whom He loves (Heb. 12:6; Rev.3:19), and those whom He disciplines He is treating as His sons (Heb.12:7&8). Further, the Lord disciplines us so that we will not stray, but that eventually we will share in His holiness (Heb. 12:10); this is a privilege!

Objection 1: Some will reply to this, "We can't take our brother to court; the Bible says that we must love him." This is true, but the love spoken of here is different than the Biblical Love. The perfect Love of God (which we must strive for) is one of mercy and justice (Heidelberg Catechism LD 4, Q/A 11). The love which would have us refrain from seeing our brother receive his due punishment is only mercy, and not justice. Although it may appear that it would be better for our brother if he wasn't punished, it would be resisting God's method of disciplining him, and it would play a negative role in the long-term well-being of our brother. The statement in Proverbs 23:13-14, "Do not withhold discipline from a child....If you beat him with a rod you will save his life from Sheol" can be used as an analogy to God's necessary discipline on us, His children. Further, God warns us that our sinful nature may well wish for things that are not beneficial to us, such as avoiding punishment. In Galatians 5:17 (NIV) we are told, "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." It should also be noted that it is sinful to expose our brother with such incorrect attitudes as hatred or revenge. These motivations may cause a positive deed to occur (i.e. our brother receives the Lord's discipline) but the manner which it is carried out is repulsive to the Lord (Lev.19:17, 18).

Objection 2: Some will also say, "We can't take our brother to court; the Bible says that we must forgive him." This is true! We must forgive, regardless of how difficult it may be for our sinful nature. But our forgiving does not exclude God's punishment because when we do something wrong, it is God Whom we are sinning against; and it is He Who is exacting the punishment and discipline (Gen. 13:13, 20:6,39:9, 2Sam.12:13). Consider the time when Aaron made the golden calf, and the Lord punished them in spite of the fact that He forgave them, and continued to lead them into the land of Canaan (Ex. 32-34). Again we can look at the murder of Uriah, and see that the perpetrator (King David) is forgiven but still is punished by the Lord (2 Sam.12:11-14).

Objection 3: Others will say, "But consider 1 Corinthians 6. Isn't it quite clear that we should avoid going to the government?" But when we look at the letter to the Corinthians we find, first of all, that Paul is addressing frivolous matters being taken to court; in fact, that the Corinthians were looking for the opportunity to take their brother to court for their gain (1 Cor. 6:8). Concerning this, John Calvin writes, "It may easily be understood from [Paul's] words, that a rage for litigation prevailed in the church of Corinth... [f]or so far were they from bearing injury from another, that they greedily coveted each other's effects, and voluntarily provoked and injured them."¹ Second of all, I Cor. 6 is addressing property disputes; this is implied at verse 7 with the words "why not rather be defrauded?" [Or "cheated" in the NIV.] In Canada this is part of the law referred to as private law, it encompasses those areas of law where our legal system must resolve essentially private disputes; this includes tort law, property law and contract law.² However, Romans 13 refers to criminal law, which is concerned with the rights and duties enjoyed by the subject in connection

with the state.³ So we can see that they are not contradictory, the letter to the Corinthians speaks of the excessive use of private law, and the letter to the Romans speaks of the necessary use of criminal law.

Objection 4: It may happen that although we don't see anything wrong with the above arguments, we find that we cannot accept them. Some may think that since it has been such a long time since the crimes were committed (10 years or more), that the victim shouldn't go through the government because of all the turmoil it will cause.

This is the incorrect way of looking at the problem. Rather, the perpetrator has had 10 years to confess and avoid the extent of the turmoil which he will now face. It is the fault of the accused that the turmoil will be greater than in the past. Nor should we undermine the turmoil of the victim in the past number of years and which likely still is affecting her. Some might suggest that we should not expose the perpetrator because of the negative light it will put the church in, and due to the scorn it will receive from outsiders. This is not a legitimate argument, because we are not perfect, and we do not claim to be perfect. It would be hypocritical to put on a false front of being perfect. If one thinks that it has been such a long time ago, and therefore the perpetrator should receive a very light sentence – or perhaps no sentence at all – they should consider this: should a murderer receive less than the death sentence, even though it has been 30 years since he committed the murder? (Cf. Gen. 9:6; Lev. 24:17ff; etc.)

The Offender! When these types of cases appear in the church, people get very emotional - understandably. Unfortunately, unbiblical attitudes are displayed, not only in "the heat of the moment", but continuously afterwards. These attitudes can include refusing to have anything to do with the offender, to such an extent that, if he has a family, both he and his family are shunned. Why are we so cruel to our neighbor, in spite of such commands as: "...any... commandment [is] summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

A well known parable of our Saviour is brought to mind. A man owed a certain king millions of dollars⁴ When the king called him in to pay his debt, he begged for mercy, he was pardoned, and his debt was completely cancelled - millions of dollars in his loan had been forgiven. As the parable goes, this same man meets a person who owes him ten thousand dollars⁵, but he is unable to pay the money to him, and begs for some more time. But the thankless man has his debtor thrown into prison. (Matt. 18:21ff). We are the same way. We forget how fortunate we are in that Christ paid for our sins and saved us from an infinite punishment (Eph.4:32: Col.3:13). We forget that we are no different than the perpetrator in that we also sin; in fact "even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin." [Heidelberg Catechism, LD 24, Q/A 62] One of the first steps in forgiving the perpetrator is to remember our position in regards to the Lord. This will help us in having a Christian and Biblical view of other sinners. It may be that their sins had more or less severe consequences than ours, but it is no more a sin than ours; and all sins (except the sin against the Holy Spirit) are forgivable.

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1. Institutes of die Christian Religion, Book IV, Chapter 20, and Subsection 21.
2. Gall G. The Canadian Legal System, rd ed. 1990, Carswell. p 26, 27
3. Ibid., p30
4. NIV text note: Matt. 18:34
5. Based on a denarius approximately equal to a days wages (Matt. 20: 1-16).

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