

Perspectives on the Christian Reformed Church: Studies in Its History. Theology. Ecumenicity Presented in Honor of John Henry Kromminga at his retirement as President of Calvin Theological Seminary; Peter De Klerk and Richard R. DeRidder, editors; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1983; 404 pgs., cl. reviewed by Johan D. Tangelder

Theologians

Theological reflection has been suspect. Dr. Diedrich Kromminga, Professor of Historical Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary from 1928 to 1947, made this telling comment about his own position in the CRC: "I know from experience what it means, when for long years one is rather completely shut up with his own ideas without the opportunity of controlling them by discussion with others." In 1945 he published his study "The Millennium in the Church," which was an attempt to give a premillennial perspective on Reformed eschatology (the study of last things). Kromminga's study was questioned, debated-and shunted from one synodical committee to another. The CRC's development of eschatology suffered as she didn't enrich herself with his fascinating and profound vision. Good studies on eschatology are still a rarity in our circles.

The CRC has undergone a change in theological emphasis. Today we witness the influence of evangelicalism, fundamentalism and nee-Pentecostalism. The doctrine of the covenant, still one of the distinctives of the CRC, is no longer a vital issue as it once was. Dr. F. Klooster of Calvin Theological Seminary comments, "Fear of new divisions, embarrassment with past separations, and a general doctrinal lethargy appear to have contributed to the neglect of the covenant doctrines by many within the Reformed churches." Reformed leaders should once again focus on this rich doctrine with all its implications for family life and education. Only a return to a strong covenantal awareness combined with a Kingdom vision will prevent us from being swept away by evangelicalism and fundamentalism.

The Kingdom vision, a key component of Calvinism, has not fared well in the CRC. Our leaders have not been aroused by the Kingdom perspective. Dr. F. Klooster remarks, "The decade of the 1940's was the period of my college, seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary, and the Free University of Amsterdam from 1940 until 1951. Not one of those historic Reformed institutions conveyed a dynamic kingdom vision to me.

References to the kingdom were not absent, but they were not dominant; I was not molded by the kingdom perspective." The strife within the CRC about the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship, now the Institute of Christian Studies, greatly hindered the cause of the kingdom. The AACCS's kingdom perspectives were shared by many, but there was often disagreement on procedures and policies. There were personality clashes. Harsh words were said by all sides. Dialogue was difficult.

Has the time come for a renewal of dialogue? Will we be able to sit down together and discuss the kingdom vision within the framework of the infallible Scriptures and the Reformed confessions?

Harvey Smith records the lack of mission zeal in the CRC's early history. During the first 60 years of existence the church lived with the disquieting awareness that she was not adequately carrying out the Great Commission of our Lord. Smith attributes this lack of mission drive not so much to a lack of zeal, but to a misunderstanding of the full task of the church. "To be a true church meant to preserve correct teaching," writes Smith, "Witnessing to unbelievers, both near and far; was a far second to this task of selfmaintenance. It was such an understanding of the church and its mission task, rather than lack of zeal, that seems to have been the main deterrent to the CRC becoming more active in evangelistic outreach."

The antithesis, or principles that are, set over against each other, with its implications for politics, education and labor, has not made a strong impact. Dr. H. Stob says, "In the Christian Reformed Church the pietistically inclined children of the Afscheiding were generally disinclined to adopt Kuyper's method of articulating the antithesis, and those who had their roots in the Doleantie, after an abortive attempt to establish a Christian political party, were able to put into place no more than a small, weak and generally ineffective labor union." And Dr. Stob's own view is that organizations can be, and in the West usually are, neutral with respect to religious commitment. This assertion from a prominent CRC leader is a letdown for Reformed 'Christians involved in Christian organizations. We need a return to the antithesis principle, a Kuyperianism, with its rich Kingdom vision, its claim of Christ upon every area of life, its doctrinal sensitivity and genuine piety.

CRC honor your theologians! Encourage them to articulate their convictions within the framework of Scripture and the confessions. We cannot do without an informative and intelligible biblical-based theology. Without it, the CRC will not thrive.