

**PENTECOST 2009**



**“SINCERE AND WILLING”:  
REFLECTIONS ON CALVIN AND  
THE HOLY SPIRIT**

## CONTENTS

- 1. Reflecting on Calvin and the Holy Spirit** – Dr Gideon van der Watt (DRC Free State – Mission Secretary)
- 2. Calvin and spirituality** – Prof Rian Venter (DRC – Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State)
- 3. Holy Trinity, Christ and Spirit – John 16:5-15, 33** – Rev Molefi Lenkoane (DRCA Botshabelo)
- 4. Christ gave his Spirit and quenched our deepest thirst – John 19:28-30** – Dr Charles Mitchell (DRC Heuwelkruin)
- 5. “Unique is eccentric” – created by the Spirit of God – Genesis 1:1-2; 2:7** – Rev Martin Laubscher (DRC Heuwelsig)
- 6. The Holy Spirit and our holiness – Romans 8:1-17** – Rev Tsheliso Monyatsi (URCSA Botshabelo)
- 7. Church as temple of the Holy Spirit – 1 Corinthians 3:16** – Rev Maniraj Sukdaven (RCA – Faculty of Theology, UFS)
- 8. Holy Spirit, truth and reconciliation - John 14:15-27** – Rev Joseph Pali (DRCA – Faculty of Theology, UFS)
- 9. The Holy Spirit and the unity of the church – Ephesians 4:3-4** – Dr Dawid Kuyler (Chaplain, URCSA Free State)
- 10. “Being dictated to us by the Spirit”: John Calvin on prayer and Romans 8:26** – Rev Jan Lubbe (DRC Berg en Dal)
- 11. The Holy Spirit and our witness – Acts 4:23-31 [31]** – Prof Pieter Verster (DRC – Faculty of Theology, UFS)
- 12. The Holy Spirit: Future, hope and joy – Ephesians 1:13-14** – Rev Deborah Murley (St James Church of England in SA)

## 1. REFLECTING ON CALVIN AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. Pentecost is the season of 50 days, stretching from Easter Sunday to the Sunday of Pentecost. During this time we not only celebrate the resurrection of Christ, but we also celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit, accomplishing within our lives the work of Christ, his salvation, his victory over death and his resurrection. It is the Spirit that is mediating the salvation in Christ. It is the Spirit that is enabling us to accept, in faith, the salvation in Christ. And it is the Spirit that is equipping us and guiding us in carrying this salvation into the world. In this way the Spirit is transforming us into the body of Christ and enabling us to partake in the continuation of Christ's work here on earth, until Christ's consummation of everything through his Spirit.

As is the case with Passover, Pentecost has originally also been a Jewish feast: the feast of weeks, where the "gift of the first harvest" was brought in and "offered to the Lord" (Lev 23:15-21). This feast was also linked to the reception of the Torah (the Law) at Mount Sinai. In similar way the Spirit was received at Pentecost, as first gift of the harvest, as the One who would lead us in all truth – the truth of Scripture. This Spirit, who came to dwell within us, is simultaneously the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9).

In this year of the 500<sup>th</sup> commemoration of Calvin's birth, our aim is to reflect anew on Calvin as the theologian who particularly focussed on the work of the Holy Spirit. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we are brought to the acceptance of our calling in this world – "sincere and willing", as was his slogan regarding his calling. We want to reflect on this, especially with a time like ours in sight.

2. When reflecting on the Holy Spirit, Calvin obviously did so in terms of the confession on the Trinity. His concern was that people should in no way understand the Trinity as three separate persons – a tritheism. Although he accepted the formulation "three persons, one Being", he has been hesitant to

conceptualise it as three separate, almost independent “persons”. To him the Holy Spirit was rather the *power* of God, and thus the acting God himself. In the Holy Spirit we encounter the living and acting God himself. The source of the entire work of God lies with the Father, but He does it through the Word (Christ) and through the mediation of the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Spirit do nothing if it is not done through the Spirit. The entirety of the work of the Father and the Son, in creation, in the renewal of creation (re-creation) and in the consummation, is applied and accomplished through the work of the Spirit. It may seem as if this is only ascribing a minor role to the Spirit, as if the Spirit has no role of its own, but in reality it allocates a major task to the Spirit – everything is actually done by the Spirit! It goes much further than just the mediation and reception of salvation within each individual. The Spirit has a cosmic work, in creation and re-creation, in nature and in culture, in politics and in history. Therefore the largest part of Calvin’s theological reflection is actually focussing on the work of the Holy Spirit (Calvin’s *Institution* Book 1, Chapter xiii).

3. Although we should have been able to know God from his works, our sinful eyes and hearts are too obscured and darkened to actually accomplish that. We are thus only enabled to know God by his revelation – through his revealed Word. This Word was written down under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; it was inspired by the Spirit. And it is only the Holy Spirit that can convince us of the authority of Scripture, that can turn it into a living Word and that can seal it onto our hearts (Inst. Book 1, Chap xiii). The Spirit thus creates the possibility to know God, in an intimate and direct relationship. But it happens through the Word. There is an inextricable bond between the work of the Spirit and the Word of God. What the Spirit does, what the Spirit is promising us, all of that happens only through the Word. It is the Spirit that is mediating the communion with God within the worship service, but it is done through the Word. The Word is therefore occupying central place in our worship services and makes it possible to experience an intimate unity and communion with God as we worship.

Through the Word the Spirit consoles us, guides us, equips us, gives us power and healing, peace and joy, real hope and genuine rest.

What the Word reveals and what is mediated to us and sealed within our hearts by the Spirit, is sufficient. That is the full salvation. In the hands of the Spirit the Word is made into a means of salvation. Exactly this is why the work of the Spirit is of such importance, because it is through the Word that it is irresistibly calling us to salvation, that it is opening our hearts for this salvation, that it is establishing faith within our hearts and then creating us into new beings, pardoned, sanctified, justified, reconciled with God.

4. The Holy Spirit is however not only active regarding the mediation and reception of salvation within individual persons. There is also a cosmic dimension to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is also the Creator Spirit. Already in the beginning, when all things were created, the Spirit has been actively present. In the beginning the Spirit of God hovered above the "abysmal" and "amorphous" nature of the non-existence, "nourishing" this formless dust, transforming and creating it into the "beauty" of existence. And it is only through the power of the Spirit of God that this "beauty" is maintained and sustained, despite the destructive effects man's fall has on it. It is by the power of the Spirit that everything is sustained, the conscious and unconscious life, in heaven and on earth. There are no boundaries to the work of the Spirit, because by "... pouring out" its power "...into everything, and blowing life and energy into all beings – something which is totally God's work" all things in creation are sustained and carried to consummation (Institution, Book 1, Chapter xiii).

5. By mediating the salvation of Christ, the Holy Spirit is transforming us into the temple of God, a temple in which the Spirit is dwelling. It is through the actions of the Spirit that the church is assembled and built. To the church the Spirit is giving abundant gifts, means of salvation, the Word and the sacraments, but the Spirit is also equipping the church with officials (ministers and ministries), the

church order and the discipline of Christ's governance. Through all of this the Spirit is creating unity, under the one Head, which is Jesus Christ: "becoming one in truth, a communion of those united, in one faith, one love, one Spirit, called to the one inheritance of eternal life and communion with the one God in Christ (Institution, Book 4, Chapter i). Guided by the Holy Spirit his one catholic church is called to witness openly to Christ, in the world, but before all the authorities and powers that are active in this world. Of this, the ministry of John Calvin, the pastor of the congregation of homeless refugees and who has been so concerned about the need of the poor and the social injustices of his day, was a clear example.

6. With these selected themes for this Pentecost-series, we want to join reformed churches all over the world in further reflection on the legacy of Calvin, specifically on his own thoughts on the work of the Holy Spirit. This Pentecost-series is linked to the series for the Week of Prayer which was used earlier this year. With this series we hope to stimulate ministers for further reflection on the Holy Spirit in their preparation for Pentecost. Would it not be good if ministers of the different churches can join hands in preparing for Pentecost? With this as our aim we have asked representatives of the different sister churches – who all have ties to the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Free State – to prepare the sermons, each with an own approach and style. It will therefore be possible, we hope, for all of us to benefit from something in this range of articles and sermons.

*(Dr Gideon van der Watt –*

*Task Group of United Ministry for Service and Witness)*

## 2. CALVIN AND SPIRITUALITY

The theological contribution by John Calvin can never be appreciated without considering the spiritual and pastoral context of his work. He was determined to do theology within the limits of piety. *Pietas*, as the right attitude of man towards God, is one of the major themes of his theology. The entire Christian life should be one of godliness and the goal is the glory of God. God himself is the focal point of the Christian life. This is a spirituality characterised by a numinous awe of God's transcendence and power. Knowledge of God was, however, always practical for Calvin.

Today there is wide agreement that the *mystical union with Christ* is central in his theology and his spirituality. Communion with Christ implies participation in his benefits for the believers. The union with Christ is realised through faith which the *Spirit and the Word* wrought in people's lives. Through the Spirit and Word the believer is justified and through sanctification there is increasing conformity to Christ. Exactly these emphases underline the experiential dimension of this piety.

Spirituality is never an individualistic experience by the believer. It happens through the *church* who is the mother and the nourisher of the believer. This is crucial. Piety is strengthened by the communion of saints.

True piety is dialogical: the believer responds to God. The *law* in its three-fold sense plays an important role in this regard. It restrains sin, guides us to Christ, but also becomes a guide for the Christian life. The law is an expression of God's will for the believer. Spirituality and ethos in Calvin's thought cannot be separated. *Obedience* to God's will is central in this piety. Action is the final expression of the spiritual life.

Calvinistic spirituality is also a spirituality of the *sacraments*. Christ is communicated in a different mode and the believers are nourished through reminders of the promises of God. Several important motifs crystallise here which constitute Calvinistic piety: promises, confidence, grace and gratitude.

The *Book of Psalms* plays a prominent role in this spirituality. As canonical “manual of piety” it covers the full range of spiritual experiences. The desire for God, the divine remedy for human needs, the depth of God-man-communion cannot escape the attentive reader. The singing of the Psalter should be appreciated in this context. Within the liturgical context, which is crucial for this spirituality, believers are formed by the preaching of the Word, the administering of the sacraments and the singing of Psalms. Life and liturgy are integrated.

*Prayer* is the main exercise of Calvinistic piety. Prayer diminishes self-centredness and increases dependence on God. Prayer should be guided by reverence for God, a sense of repentance, and confident hope.

*Repentance, self-denial* and *cross-bearing* are critical elements of a life before God. Piety is a life-long response to God. The deep focus on Christ requires these sacrificial elements of piety. Christian moderation, that is modesty, prudence and avoidance of display, has become a hallmark of this spirituality. Self-examination plays a central exercise in this piety.

*Piety in a Calvinistic sense does not accept a duality between ordinary life and spiritual life. This is an integrated spirituality. The impact of piety on the community, both secular and sacred, was important for Calvin. His spirituality was social and inclusive.*

*(Prof Rian Venter – Faculty of Theology, UFS)*

### 3. HOLY TRINITY, CHRIST AND SPIRIT

John 16:5-15, 33

#### Introduction

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Matthew 3:16). For Calvin the three persons are in such a close relationship that they are almost not to be differentiated in three separate, independent persons. He therefore calls the Holy Spirit the "Power of God" or the "Spirit of the Son". From the very beginning the Spirit is only applying what the Father and the Son are doing in creation and recreation. The Spirit has no separate, independent task. The Spirit does (effectuate) what the Triune God does. There is nothing in the creation, in the recreation or renewal of everything and the eventual consummation or final destiny of everything that is not done by the Spirit.

The Bible starts with the announcement of the Spirit's role in creation: *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters* (Genesis 1:2) and it ends with the Spirit's role in the consummation of everything: *The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come"; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life* (Revelation 22:17). Calvin thus gives tremendous attention to the work of the Spirit; he is actually called the "theologian of the Holy Spirit".

The Holy Spirit is called the "Comforter", Paraclete, meaning the same as an advocate. While Christ the High Priest intercedes for us at the throne of the Father, the Spirit speaks to us within our hearts, creating faith within us, guiding us through God's Word and comforting us.

The intention with this sermon is to once again learn where the Spirit comes from and for what purpose it was sent.

### **Sermon: John 16:5-15, 33**

Before Jesus Christ was crucified, He promised that He and the Father would send to his disciples *"another Helper"* (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). This Spirit is self-active: He comes (Luke 1:35), He abides (John 14:17), He testifies (John 15:26), He reproves (John 16:8), He teaches and brings to remembrance (John 14:26), He prays for us and within us (Rom 8:26).

There are three things we can learn about the Spirit in the selected passage from John's Gospel:

#### **(1) Christ's departure was absolutely necessary for the Comforter's coming**

Christ announced this with more than ordinary solemnity: "I tell you the truth". It is expedient (beneficial) that I go away, Christ said, not only for Me, but for you as well. Jesus did what was most beneficial for us, even if we are hesitant to accept it as such. He knows what is good for us. The sending of the Spirit would be the fruit of his departure to his Father's heavenly home. For that He gave his life on the cross. He departed so that the Spirit could be present within his church. The presence of the Holy Spirit within the church would be so much more desirable than Christ's bodily presence within it. *"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you ..."* (verse 7). Although the news of Jesus' departure disturbed the disciples, it was necessary if they were to enjoy the permanent presence of the comforting Spirit.

#### **(2) The sending of the Spirit was absolutely necessary for the carrying on of Christ's work on earth**

The Spirit would continue to make effective the salvation which Jesus earned through his cross and resurrection. The Holy Spirit will convince the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement. Without the work of the Spirit, the people of this world will not be able to understand that they are sinful,

that unrighteousness is prevailing everywhere and that all stand to be judged. Without being convinced of this reality, the people of this world will not be able to receive the salvation in Christ. There will be no need for it. Therefore, to prepare people for the acceptance of the salvation work of Christ, the coming and the work of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary.

To achieve this goal of effectuating the salvation work of Christ and to convince the world that it is actually the prince of this world that stands to be condemned, the Holy Spirit is given the Word of God by the Father and the Son. It is by mediating the Word that the Spirit will continue Christ's work. He will guide the church in the truth of the Word. He will only speak the Word, which He received from the Father and the Son. He will make it known to the church. The salvation in Christ is mediated by the Holy Spirit, through the guidance in the truth of the Word of God. Through the Word the Spirit shall put to silence the adversaries of Christ and his cause. He shall give the world the most powerful means of conviction, the gospel, fully proved. The Holy Spirit will not only make known the truth of the Gospel; He will convince people, change them, opening their hearts for the acceptance of the Gospel of salvation. He will "create" faith in Christ and therefore "recreate" people in this broken world. And in doing this, the Spirit glorifies Jesus Christ in this world.

### **(3) The coming of the Spirit would be of unspeakable advantage to the disciples themselves**

It is made clear in this passage of John that the work of the Spirit is expedient for the disciples. The Spirit came to guide us in all truth. The Spirit came to reveal everything about God to us. The Spirit came to be with us and within us. The Holy Spirit came to be our Comforter and Counsellor. He came to open our hearts for the Gospel message and to convince us of the salvation in Christ. The Spirit guided those who wrote down God's revelation in the Old Testament and the New Testament. He gave us the Bible.

But the Holy Spirit is also working in the healing and renewal of God's fallen creation. The Spirit makes us new, heals us, renews the image of God within us, guides us, empowers us and gives us hope. It is through the power of the Spirit that we as church can remain faithful witnesses in the world. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we will eventually overcome this world full of troubles and suffering. The Holy Spirit of Christ will finally conclude the victorious work of Jesus Christ in the world: *I have told you these things, so that you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world* (John 16:33).

So we as Christians are very lucky to have such a Gift from God. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, to control our lives, to show us the way. Only by the power of the Spirit of God can we pray, proclaim the Word, do good things and overcome the powers of this world. That is why the Holy Spirit is also called the Comforter, our Counsellor.

Let us pray for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the world.

*(Rev Molefi Lenkoane – DRCA Botshabelo)*

## **4. CHRIST GAVE HIS SPIRIT AND QUENCHED OUR DEEPEST THIRST**

**John 19:28-30**

### **Introduction**

In this year of celebrating Calvin, it makes sense to take a new look at the way in which Calvin understood the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ himself. In his *Institution (III: i. 1)*, in the scope of the consecration of the faithful, he mentions that the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ efficaciously unites us to himself. In Calvin's *Geneva Catechism (II:50)* he said that the gifts that Christ offers are to be received through the agency or work of the Holy Spirit. In his commentary on *1 Corinthians 6:11* he says that Christ is the source of all blessings to us, but He communicates it to us through the Spirit. These gifts are the direct fruit of the resurrection of Christ (*Acts 2:38*), but we may only partake in Christ's blessings through the Spirit of Christ.

### **Sermon: John 19:28-30**

#### **Introduction**

A minister visited a difficult man in hospital and at one stage asked if he could do a prayer for the sick man. After an uncomfortable silence he gave permission. After the prayer the man said: "You gave water to a very thirsty sheep today." In our passage it is said that Jesus was very thirsty, and the people who gave Him something to drink, didn't know how thirsty they themselves have been. Jesus was thirsty of something that we all seek, which was so well described by St Augustine: *Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee, o Lord.*

**Theme: Jesus quenches our thirst by giving us his Spirit**

### **(1) Jesus thirsts for what is right**

Jesus knew that He was at the end of his earthly road. With these words: "*I am thirsty*", He knew that the price was paid to redeem sinners from the grip of sin. The price was negotiated with the Father and the full ransom was now being paid. The word teleos (*teleo'ò* in Greek) literally meant that the toll fee was paid, and here it meant that the fee to get to the Father was paid for sinners by Jesus dying on the cross. It is a pity to know that not all sinners make use of this offer.

Jesus teaches in *Matthew 5:6* that the faithful must desire (thirst) to do what God desires. Jesus now thirsts to do what his Father wants Him to do. He is ready to pay the full price in order to redeem others (*Matthew 20: 28*). Jesus who Himself was the Living Water, now thirsts to do what his Father desires for humanity. A scream of victory echoes from the cross, a scream from someone who empties the cup of God's furious anger. *He learnt through his sufferings to be obedient (Hebrews 5:8)*.

In *1 Corinthians 13:6* one reads that love is never happy with evil (iniquity) but is happy with truth. We must fight against unrighteousness as we fight against an illness. When we are sick, we tend to think about the times when we will be healthy again. We must see in our imagination how great the world will be tomorrow if we fight for what is right today. Luther said that if you cannot change the whole world, then at least do what you can. Don't just replace one evil thing with another, but stay in the truth of God's Word in order to have a better tomorrow. God doesn't thirst like humans. His thirst has to do with what is right and that helps us to keep on hoping.

### **(2) Jesus thirsts for holy separateness**

The prophet Isaiah describes in his calling vision (*6:7*) that God sends a seraphim (a holy being) with a burning coal to touch his lips in order to be clean and speak on God's behalf. In *John 19* the soldiers took some hyssop and gave

to Him some soldier's wine to quench his thirst. It is as if God Himself sanctified his Son the Lamb, just before He was to die for the sins of the world. Hyssop at the Passover was used to paint the door-posts with the blood of the slaughtered lamb. This year though, the Lamb of God dies just when the Jewish families prepared the Passover. With the branch of the hyssop, Jesus was sanctified when his blood was used to turn away the anger of God against the sin of all humanity. God made Him sin so that in union with Him, we might share the righteousness of God (*2 Cor 5:21*).

He doesn't die quietly. He dies with a loud cry, yes with words of righteousness on his lips. He now declares that his work was finished. His earthly dwelling ended here and his glorified work will continue from the right hand of his Father.

In this passage God sanctifies his Son, makes Him holy in order to be put aside for his service. He did so in order to reconcile the world with Him. God used his Son in order to get humankind close to Him. Jesus will lead the faithful through the Most Holy Place until they stand close to God the Father without fear. From now on we are called children of God (*John 1:12*). We are sanctified and are now far from the world's way of thinking but closer to God. Jesus accomplished it on the cross. But do we want to be holy and sanctified and separate from worldly doings? What is our response to this sanctification? By saying *yes* we decide to hate sin (*1 John 3:9*). Then we will experience God very close to us. By saying *no* we crucify Jesus again and expose Him to public shame (*Hebrews 6:6*). We are called to carry our crosses for his sake (*Luke 9:23*). Are we willing to do it? The prize in the end – the further from sin, the closer to God.

### **(3) Jesus thirsts for handing over the Spirit**

John as evangelist often speaks in symbols. Here again he does it by saying that when Jesus died, "*He handed over his Spirit.*" The way he says it means handing the Spirit over to the people at the foot of the cross. The only spirit Jesus could

have was the Holy Spirit and no other spirit. John wants to emphasise that the only way in which one could receive the Holy Spirit, was through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Hereby Jesus did what He was called to do and voluntarily gave up his life.

Humanity was in need for someone who could bring an accepted offering to the Father for the sake of reconciling sinners with Him. Humankind also thirsts for something that could fill up the emptiness and barrenness that sin brings to one's life. He was to fill humankind with something totally new and it has all to do with the work of Jesus Christ. With the death of Jesus the Spirit was given even though nobody asked for Him. But remember that it was not Pentecost yet for it was still to come in (20:22). There He breathed on the disciples and said: "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" But in our passage the gift of the Spirit of Jesus was given to the onlookers at the cross. He gives thirsty sheep water. He was indeed the Good Shepherd. Through his death new life occurred (1 Pet 2:24).

In *John 7:38* Jesus says that streams of life-giving water will pour out from believers' hearts, but immediately afterwards in verse 39 He says that the Spirit has not yet been given. It only means that He was to die first before the Spirit could be given to the faithful. We can only be blessed by the death of Jesus. We must first believe in Him and only then we will never be thirsty again (4:13-14). The Spirit alone will quench our thirst. The question – do we have the urgency to receive and pass this water on? We can only give if we received something. Once we received the Spirit through the death of Jesus, we can pass it on.

When one says in Afrikaans that something "gee die gees" (gave up its spirit) we mean that it is irreparable. When Jesus says it, it means that things will start to really happen now, a revival, a new kind of living stands before hand. When Jesus dies, we start to live, when He gives his Spirit, our spirits start to liven up.

## **Conclusion**

There are many people that are thirsty, difficult people who are waiting for the living waters that could only come from Jesus and his Spirit. During this year's Pentecost we must remember three important things:

- that we must thirst for what is right in the eyes of the Lord. We can only quench our thirst if Jesus Himself takes this thirst away – when He is satisfied we will be satisfied;
- that the Spirit wants to put us aside as a holy people so that we can live close to God and at the same time live as God would prefer us living in the world;
- that the church and every person for that matter, could only receive the Spirit when we wholly accept Jesus' death on the cross. Only after He dies and my old nature dies with Him, only then the work of the Spirit will be seen clearly in the actions of the church.

*(Dr Charles Mitchell – DRC Heuwelsig)*

## 5. "UNIQUE IS ECCENTRIC" – CREATED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

### Genesis 1:1-2 and 2:7

#### Introduction

Any sermon presupposes a lot of blood and sweat. Before I will give you mine, I would like to take you on a behind the scenes tour and show you some of the interesting, as well as relevant work that lies behind the scenes of this sermon. We will divide our tour according to the three different stages we went through in producing our sermon.

#### (1) Exegetical remarks

- a) The first question that comes to mind is: Why the pairing of these two specific verses? This is an important question, especially if one keeps in mind that they belong to two different sets of narratives or units. Although we will later explore the reason more thoroughly, I can state shortly that it is very important to see human beings as part of creation. Or to put it slightly different: The God who made heaven and earth (the entire universe), is also the God who made human beings, who made us. We need to understand the one in light of the other, therefore the interesting pairing of these two verses.
- b) However, one could still ask why is it necessary to choose 2:7 instead of 1:26-28, which is after all part of the narrative unit of 1:1. The reason for this is quite simple: We are especially interested in the relationship that exists between human beings as being part of creation and filled with the breath of God (Holy Spirit) (2:7) – instead of the *imago Dei* phrase of 1:26-28 – and their place and role within the universe (1:1).
- c) To make the same point again, just from another angle, we need to see our words "in the beginning" within the story of the entire book. Genesis is not only about "the beginning" or "the origin", but rather about "the beginnings" or "the origins". The book is in fact about two distinct origins: on the one hand, that of Israel (Gen 12 – 50) and, on the other, that of the entire

universe (especially chapter 1; and chapters 2 – 11, found between the creation account and the calling of Abraham, which fulfils a preparatory to the Abraham stories in the narrative). While distinct, these two origins or beginnings are depicted as being closely interrelated. To grasp the message of the opening chapter of Genesis (and especially the opening words of 1:1), therefore, one must understand that the story of the origin of the universe recounted here is told from the perspective of the story of the origin of Israel found in the later chapters.

- d) Although we know Genesis is about “the beginning” of the universe, human beings and Israel, we know for sure that it was not written *at* the beginning! Not only does this knowledge have huge implications for how we classify the genre of the text – as it not being a scientific report on creation, but a theological declaration of faith in God our Creator – but it also reveals the text’s inclusive and holistic take on reality. Against the backdrop of oppression – exile in Babylon – it tells the story of creation in a universal sense that would also include these other people. God’s involvement is not only with us (Israel or the church), but with all of creation. God’s involvement did not start with Abraham, or Israel or the church, but is literally from the beginning.
- e) Further, it is interesting to note that before God was Israel’s Creator, He was their Saviour. The first thing they believed and confessed was that He saved and delivered them from slavery in Egypt, and only since being confronted with strange creation narratives while they were in exile in Babylon, they started anew to confess that this God who is their Saviour, is also their Creator. In sum, creation and salvation and vocation all belong very closely together; reflection upon one of them will evidently imply understanding of the other.
- f) And lastly, we read Genesis 1 – 3 not as *scientific and historical reports* in the sense of *how* it all came to be, but as *theological texts* that reveals *who* created and *for what* specific purposes.

## **(2) Hermeneutical remarks**

- a) We can describe our context (time and place) as one that is known by very high levels of individualism, materialism, crime, poverty and prosperity gospel. We live in a time where life itself is threatened by individuals who do not see themselves as a human being through others (*ubuntu*) and that life can only be lived in community. Many people are brought up in this world without belonging to a community (broken homes and families), and where they eventually find it, it is often violent and destructive (gangs). Not only is there often no base-community from the start, but people in our world are also "educated" from a young age that real freedom and life lies within self-realisation and not self-sacrificing. We live in South Africa with the ideology that it is wealth that we need to share, while it is in fact poverty that we are really called to share with one another. The state of the nation affirms the need for an off-centre (eccentric) life, which is characterised by simplicity, solidarity and interdependence upon one another.
- b) In fact, it is not only the state of our nation, but it is the state of our creation! Discussions on global warming and ecological intelligence are shaping our future. Fortunately there is among more people the growing awareness that *we* are not God's creation, but only *a part* of it, and in fact absolutely dependent on the existence of the rest of God's creation. The Inconvenient Truth (see Al Gore's movie) is that it is we that need them, and not they that need us. In fact, the *global warning* for our time is that it is not about us and them, but us all living in good living and giving relationships with one another.

## **(3) Homiletical suggestion: *Unique is eccentric***

What makes us unique? What defines our humanity? What makes us different and unique within God's creation? In short: What makes us alive?

Some would say: "O, that is not difficult to answer. It's easy. It is the fact that we have a soul. It is our soul that makes us different and unique. It is

because *the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being*" (Gen 2:7). Yes, that is correct, but we still need to interpret this. This is not *the* answer, but only the beginning to a bigger, more comprehensive answer.

I will never forget the first lecture I received as theological student from the now retired Stellenbosch pastoral theologian Daniel Louw. He began the lecture that morning in the same trend by asking the intriguing question: *What is a soul?* Each one in the class had to answer the question and in the end no one got it right. How he answered the question and taught us that day, somehow not only helped me to understand Genesis 2:7 more thoroughly, but also that which defines our humanity and makes us really unique. I remember his words "We don't *have* a soul, but we *are* our souls" very clearly. The words that "Our souls' quality is determined by the quality of our relationships" stuck since then.

Genesis 2:7 is an important and indeed a classical text for developing a Biblical anthropology. Unfortunately however, this verse was used in the past to divide the human being into separate categories of body and soul, dust and spirit, and eventually ending up by giving priority to the soul over against the body, and the spirit over against the dust. Following this, what really mattered for believers, was not this life, but the life hereafter, not the body, but the soul, not the material things, but the spiritual things, and not earth, but heaven. Thinking in such dualistic terms, the focus of Christian theology was not all-inclusive, but very much limited in scope and radically exclusive. In short, understanding our souls as something we have, as being some part of us, eventually led that Christian faith not to have real interest in this life; it really became some pie in the sky religion.

Today we are challenged to deal with the consequences of this particular line of thought. Not only did it eventually lead to a kind of schizophrenic existence where spiritual and material matters were totally separated from one another, but it also appears more and more that people in South Africa today are living as if all they have is the material, and even worse, that the material

becomes the spiritual for them. We live in a time and place that preaches to people that material possessions, young sexy tattooed bodies, specific brand names and labels, are what really define you as a unique human being.

In Genesis 2:7 it is not a case of *what* is told, but really about what it is told *for*! Our uniqueness does not lie within one of these things, the dust or the spirit, the material or the breath, or even all of these things taken together, but in what it was destined and meant for. Our uniqueness is not ontological, but missiological! What makes us really human, and thus really unique, is that we were created for a specific *task* and with specific *responsibilities*, and doing all of this in community and through our *relationship* with the other human beings. Without any knowledge of what is said before and after this specific verse, it is really not that unique. Our uniqueness lies within understanding this within the bigger story of the Bible.

We err if we think that the title *Genesis* (which literally means “the beginning” or “origin”) refers only to Genesis 1:1, because it is also about the beginning and the origin of Israel which we find in Genesis 12 – 50. While distinct, these two origins or beginnings are depicted as being closely interrelated. To grasp the message of the opening chapters of Genesis, one must understand that the story of the origin of the universe recounted there is told from the perspective of the story of the origin of Israel found in the later chapters. The creation narratives were never intended to tell us *how* the world or we came to be, but rather about *who* created everything and *for what* specific purposes. The One who *called* us, is the One who *created* everything.

Therefore we should read Genesis 2:7 together with Genesis 1:1. Not only does it stress the all-inclusive creation of God – heaven *and* earth; dust *and* breath – but it also helps us to understand that we need to see ourselves within the bigger picture of being created within God’s creation of heaven and earth. If we do not relate ourselves to the rest of creation, we miss the point. The pairing of Genesis 1:1 and 2:7, pairing the two together and seeing the one against the backdrop of the other, is what it is all about. It is this interrelating with

everything else that makes human beings and the story of creation really unique. This interrelating is also the main point of the first creation narrative. In Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a the climax is not that which happened late on the 6<sup>th</sup> day, but the 7<sup>th</sup> day's rest when everything that God created was living in interrelated harmony and peace and rest with one another. We err if we think our creation on the 6<sup>th</sup> day was the highlight of that story. In fact, the idea of structuring the creation narrative within the sequence of a week is to stress the inter-dependence upon one another. And may I just say: Notice that humanity is sincerely dependent on the life of the rest of creation, because we can only exist after they were created, and not the other way around. They are not that dependent upon us – it is we that need them! In short: Our souls were created green (pun intended)!

To live this life, we need to find our place within God's creation. This life in the Spirit is not to be found in some spiritual part of us (spiritualism), or within the thing (materialism) itself, but precisely there where we live with good interdependent relationships among the rest of creation. Being unique, being true to the way God created us, means to understand this life within the great and wide horizon which God created. Being unique was never about being *egocentric*, asking "What's in it for me?" (that which in a sense led to the fall), but from the very beginning intended to be a life off-centre, being in a relationship with your partner and fellow human being, and obedient to the command and will of God, and thus *eccentric*. Life is surely not in ourselves, but out there where we relate to the width and depth of God's creation.

*Unique is eccentric* we find being a chorus throughout everything we believe to be true about the life in faith. The first thing we believe and confess about God is that God is *Triune*, being in an ever interdependent relationship with Himself. It's never about the One person Himself, but about the Other(s), about actually being in communion with Himself. The Spirit binds Father and Son together from "the beginning", so that our Creator may also be our Saviour, and vice versa. God revealed to us in all of this, shows with all respect, that it was never about his own Ego, but about life out there eccentric with and for the

other(s). We know that the wonder of the *Christmas* and the *Incarnation* was not just about God becoming Man (living as we do), but Him becoming this particular Man who gave up his ego, to live off-centre, and share his life with others. We remember from the *Epiphany* that He was guided in the Spirit by the Father's will to come and declare his solidarity with all and everything. In *Lent* we reflected that it was all about giving it up and existing not for Himself, but for others. At *Easter* we celebrated that this eccentric way of life, did not end there at the cross, but led to an abundant everlasting resurrected life! In the time awaiting the outpouring of his Spirit, we proclaimed that it was precisely *the crucified lord that rose* from the grave! And with Pentecost we received none other but *his* Spirit. So that in *baptism* we may die to ourselves, and receive his life, and belong to a *community of faith* that lives as his body, and celebrates in *holy communion* that this particular food and manner of life keeps us truly alive. Therefore, being true to the way we were created, to the way He was revealed to us through his cross and resurrection, we live in and through his Spirit *unique eccentric* life's!

*(Rev Martin Laubscher – DRC Heuwelsig)*

## 6. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND OUR HOLINESS

### Romans 8:1-17

**Theme: What believers cannot achieve by themselves, becomes possible through the work of the Holy Spirit.**

The Jews in the Old Testament and in the New Testament have judged themselves by seeing the Torah as the reminder of everything they have ever done wrong. When Jesus came, He explained the true purpose of the Torah. He explained that what God wants is not keeping a legalistic code, but for us to strive our best to live lives of trust in and love for God. Knowing that, we should feel happy in our relationship with God, and we should rejoice in being forgiven. Our mistakes are gone, for God sees them no more.

#### **(1) The Holy Spirit liberates believers**

In Paul's explanation, it is the mind which is able to recognise the difference between a learning tool and a legal code. With his mind, Paul knows what the Torah really is and teaches. The un-spiritual, physical nature (flesh) is what leads toward the "legal code" idea, but if he rejects those un-spiritual ideas, he feels "no condemnation". Where did that condemnation come from? **From his own un-spiritual human nature.** Relief from that self-condemnation comes from Jesus, who brought a completely different attitude: "the spirit of life". Jesus' way of thinking is the attitude of life, but the Code of Sin (legalism) is the attitude of death. Thanks to the explanations sent by God through Jesus, neither Paul nor the Roman Christians need to have such an unfruitful attitude of self-condemnation. They can live their lives feeling forgiven, and so can we.

What was the Torah "unable" to do? To remove guilt. Not that it really *couldn't* remove guilt, but the attitude of self-condemnation and reminder of sin made it impossible for the guilty feelings to go away. Jesus came just like us – with a weak physical body, but he "condemned sin in the flesh". This is usually

taken to mean that he refused to sin, even though he had a physical human nature to sin. It can also mean that he condemned the attitude called the "Code of Sin". Both were certainly true of Jesus. The result of Jesus' life was that his followers could see that although it was virtually impossible to fulfil the Torah as a legal code (i.e., while viewing it "according to flesh"), it is possible to fulfil the actual intent of the Torah, i.e., when viewing it spiritually. This is the distinction between "walking according to flesh" (legalistically) and "walking according to spirit" – recognising the Torah as pointing to trust and love rather than to specific acts of wrongdoing.

**(2) There is vast difference between those people who are led by the Spirit and those who are controlled by their sinful flesh (5-13)**

The Jews wanted to bind the physical rituals of Judaism on all Christians. This would have compelled them to view the Torah as a set of physical rituals and sacrifices rather than as a spiritual teaching tool. They would have had their minds set not on the principles of trust and love but on the physical things, but people who are able to see the true nature of the Torah are able to put their minds not on those reminders of sin but on the more important spiritual matters.

Those who are unable to attain to the spiritual, following instead the attitude of the flesh, wind up spiritually dead, constantly self-condemning and unable to attain perfection. That attitude is the very opposite of the peaceful recognition of forgiveness that God wants us to have. By setting their minds only on the unimportant physical things, people who "are fleshly" are not able to "please God". This comes because God has always desired mercy and not sacrifice, faithfulness rather than offerings.

"You are not fleshly but spiritual" – that is, the envoys have taught the Roman Christians the full explanation given by Jesus. They know the true nature of the Torah and should be completely free of the legalistic notions of the Jews. Why? Because God's Spirit – here, his attitude or way of thinking – is with them.

Anyone who doesn't "have the Anointed One's spirit" – that is, anyone who doesn't have the same attitude that he had toward the Torah – that person "is not his". The only real followers of the Messiah are those who follow his core teachings. If the Jews presume to be Christians and legalists, then they are one but not the other.

Being a follower of Jesus does not mean that one becomes sinless, incapable of wrongdoing. By no means. But while the body is still "dead on account of sin", the attitude of forgiveness and loyalty toward God (in trust and love) brings life (inner peace). Why? "On account of justification" – because it focuses on justification rather than guilt. Anyone who has this attitude will be "alive" spiritually because of that attitude – the same positive attitude that Paul recognises in the Romans.

"We are not debtors to the flesh." – While we owe everything to God for giving us the wonderful Torah, we owe nothing to that wrong way of interpreting the Torah, even if we inherited that way of thinking along with the Torah. We owe nothing to it because it brings death.

The positive attitude taught by Jesus brings life, and all who follow God's own attitude are his sons (for sons take after their father). The attitude that Paul has labeled "spiritual" is also the attitude that is like God's, and therefore it is the attitude of sonship. Rather than living in fear, those who reject legalism in favour of full, free lives confidently and lovingly call out to God their Father.

### **(3) People who are controlled by the Holy Spirit live their lives as the children of God (14-17)**

Therefore God's own attitude toward the Torah testified along with the same attitude in the Romans that they were indeed God's children, for they were following God. From here, Paul connects the notion of sonship with the concept of being an heir, for in common law every legitimate son was an heir. Those who have God's attitude become heirs of everything, just as the Messiah was heir to everything, but they must continue to follow Jesus in his sonship. Just as he was

persecuted by his people for teaching a way of thinking toward the Torah that was regarded as foreign, so also the Roman Christians will suffer. Then they would also follow Jesus on to glorification by God.

The spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father (8:15). (The Apostle means to say): You have become free from fear and have received the Spirit of adoption by which you trust in God. This trust he shows, he shows very clearly by the words: "whereby we cry, Abba, Father." This is the cry of a heart which is full of childlike trust and knows no fear. This is clear from Galatians 4:6-7: "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir." Whoever believes with a firm faith and hope that he is a child of God, is a child of God, for that (to believe) no one can go without the Holy Spirit. This witness of the spirit is the factual trust of our heart in God. St Bernard in the first chapter of his sermon on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Mary comments on this verse: "I believe that this witness consists of three things: First, believe that you can have forgiveness of sins only through the gracious favour of God. Secondly, do not call a single work your own, unless He has given it to you. Finally, believe that you cannot earn eternal salvation by any good works, for also this salvation is given to you out of pure grace." This however, does not quite suffice, but it must be regarded as the beginning and so to speak, as the foundation of faith. This is his witness: "Your sins are forgiven". This man and this is the meaning of the Apostle – is justified solely by faith.

*(Rev Tsheliso Monyatsi – URCSA Bothabelo)*

## 7. CHURCH AS TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 1 Corinthians 3:16

#### Introduction

It would be appropriate to begin our discussion on “The Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit” by introducing the thoughts of John Calvin and his understanding of the “Holy Catholic Church”. The “Institutes of the Christian religion”, an *opus magnum* of Christian Theology, by John Calvin remains an excellent reference for the foundation of this discussion. Of such importance was the nature of the church to Calvin that he dedicates almost a third of his “Institutes” to this discussion. The intention in this introduction is not so much to exhaust Calvin’s understanding of the church, but rather to link some of this understanding with the text in question (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Calvin, in his “Institutes” (Inst.) follows the theme of the “Apostles’ Creed”. In Book I he deals with God the Creator, Book II deals with God the Redeemer, Book III deals with God the Sanctifier and Book IV deals with the Church and the Communion of Saints. It is here in Book IV that we have a good grasp of Calvin’s understanding of the church.

The very first point that Calvin makes in Book IV, the first chapter on the church in his “Institutes”, is that the effectual preaching of the Gospel has been given to the church through which “faith may be begotten in us” (Inst.IV,i,1). His line of thinking does not provide for the church to be understood as a hierarchical body possessed of priests, bishops and a pope; but rather as an “organic” and “mystical” union, body, God’s elect people. Further to this Calvin also says that God was pleased to place his children within the bosom of the church to be nurtured to perfect faith.

To Calvin the pure ministry of the Word and the celebration and ministry of the sacraments should be recognised in a church and that although defects may creep into the administration of the Word and sacraments, one should not remove oneself from its participation (Inst.IV,i, 12). Calvin, in saying this, tries to

emphasise that one should not on account of every minute difference abandon the church. Calvin uses the example of the members in the Corinthian church to drive home this point (Inst.IV,i,14). He says that the Corinthian church was not only corrupt in manners, but also in doctrine, that in this congregation there were both carnal and upright people. He goes so far as to declare that it was not a few that erred, but "almost the whole body had become tainted" and that some of the errors were of the most execrable crimes (Inst.IV,i,15) and that one should not remove oneself from the church on account of carnal people. It is in light of this that Calvin refers to Paul's remark of each person having to examine themselves and not others or "that everyone should examine the church" (Inst.IV,i,15) which determines the participation in the Word and sacraments. He quotes Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:27: "If anyone eats the LORD's bread and drinks from his cup in a way that dishonours Him, he or she is guilty of sin against the LORD's body and blood." Calvin's understanding is that "it is in vain to look for a church altogether free from blemish" (Inst.IV,i,13).

Does the aforementioned discussion therefore consider the church to be unholy? Calvin is of the opinion that the holiness here described is a holiness that is "not yet perfect" but one that makes daily progress in that the LORD is "daily soothing its wrinkles and wiping away its spots" (Inst.IV,i,17).

Another valuable contribution by Calvin is the distinction and understanding of the "visible" and "invisible" church. To Calvin the church is a spiritual entity, based upon and effectuated by God's sovereign decree of eternal election. This is what has been called since the Reformation "the church invisible". While this appellation has no doubt been misrepresented and abused, yet it is important in that it emphasises Calvin's insistence on the fact that the church is fundamentally inward. It is not something which exists primarily in outward forms and fashion. It is a spiritual fellowship of the elect "bound together by the one doctrine and the one Spirit of Christ".

At the same time he points out that the church "visible" is "the whole multitude, dispersed all over the world, who profess to worship one God and

Jesus Christ ..." (Inst.IV,i,7). It is the body of all those who profess to be in the church in its true and spiritual character including the persecuted church.

Calvin recognised that this profession might be false. Hence he points out that false profession is common, and that the church itself cannot determine infallibly who are and who are not in the church invisible. If one makes a credible profession, lives an exemplary life, and partakes of the sacraments, he is to be regarded as a true Christian. Thus the church visible is made up of all those who make a *credible profession* of faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord.

It is with this background knowledge of Calvin and his views on the church that the text before us (1 Corinthians 3:16) will be analysed.

### **Sermon: 1 Corinthians 3:16**

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God dwells in you?*

#### **(1) Text within context**

Calvin, when referring to 1 Cor 3:16, places this verse within the context of verses 1-15. In verses 1-4 Calvin says that Paul addresses the people about their carnality. In verses 5-9 Paul addresses how ministers of the Word should be regarded and reiterates the purpose why these ministers have been set aside by God. In verses 10-15 Paul relates how each minister's intention and work will be tested (Calvin 1948:142).

The text before us should also similarly recognise the flow of thought of Paul from the previous verses (Verses 1-15).

The progression we see taking place here is that Paul moves from the carnality of the Corinthian people, to how they should esteem their ministers, to how the work of the ministers would be tested in order to establish whether the ministers had the right intention in building the church of God. This is how Calvin also sees this progression in Paul's thought.

It is from verse 16-23 that Calvin is of the opinion that Paul, after expressing the carnality of the people as well as reminding the ministers as to

their duty, which was that they were master builders of the house of God, now addresses the Corinthian people by saying, “you are the temple of God”.

## **(2) Who is Paul addressing?**

This question becomes relevant because it impacts our understanding of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the church. Usually such verses are regarded as to be referring to the individual Christian. The Greek word gives us an indication as to who Paul is addressing. The Greek word for “you” in the text is in the plural form meaning that Paul is addressing the whole community of believers of the church in Corinth. The image here therefore is of the Spirit dwelling not in the individual Christian, but in the gathered community of believers who is constituted of carnal and upright Christians. (See introduction on Calvin and the church above.) Paul is therefore saying to the church at Corinth that you (*plura*) are a separated people from the pagans around you and it is in you that the Spirit of God dwells. This is further strengthened by the correct understanding of how the word “temple” is used here.

## **(3) Correct understanding of temple**

The literal term for the Greek word used here is sanctuary. The Greek term can be explained clearly by saying that the reference here is not to the sacred enclosure, but “the holy place and the most holy place” of God. A good example is the Holy of Holies where God met with the High Priest. Paul says to the community of believers at Corinth that they are that most holy place of God. One has to keep in mind that the pagan temples in and around Corinth housed images of one or more deities that were worshipped. In contrast to this Paul says that God does not dwell in houses made by men (Acts 7:48). The Spirit of God can no longer be localised in a sacred building: it is to be found in the gathered community of God’s elect people. St. Matthew makes reference to this in Matt 18:20, “For where two or three have met together in *my name*, I am there among them.”

Therefore the correct understanding of the temple in this context is not a building or an individual but the community of believers. It is into this context that Paul says that the Holy Spirit dwells. One must always remember that this community where the Holy Spirit dwells was created by God himself. John Calvin uses terms such as "election", "predestination", "called", etc to emphasise that this community is gathered together by God, through the Holy Spirit, and therefore indwelt by God through his Spirit.

#### **(4) The relationship between the church (community of believers) and the Holy Spirit**

John Calvin seems to suggest that within the "visible" church we have the "invisible" church. The church "visible" is the body of all those who profess to be in the church in its true and spiritual character. As mentioned earlier Calvin recognised that some of this profession might be false and that the church itself cannot determine who are and who are not in the church invisible; only God knows. Notwithstanding these premises, Paul still reflects the church as the corporate place of God's dwelling. The Spirit is the key, the crucial reality ... and the Spirit alone marks them off as God's new people. It stands to reason therefore that the church should be a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led church, because it is as a result of the Spirit of God dwelling in the church that the church becomes the sanctuary of God and therefore holy.

One may consider how the church can be holy and yet one finds so much carnality present, like the church at Corinth. If it is the presence of the Holy Spirit that makes the church the temple of God, why is there so much hypocrisy, jealousy, strife, division, etc? How can a claim be made that "I believe in One **Holy** Catholic Church?"

Calvin addresses this issue in his "Institutes" and this is where we see the fundamental working of the Holy Spirit in the church. He makes reference to Eph 5:25-27 where Paul writes: "God also loved the church and gave himself up for

it, to consecrate it, cleansing it by water and word, so that he might present the church to himself all glorious and without blemish.”

The emphasis here is that the Holy Spirit is working in the church to perfect the church (community of believers who are called as a people to God) by cleansing it of all sin to be presented as the “Holy Catholic Church” before Him. Calvin says, “such then, is the holiness of the church: it makes daily progress, but is not yet perfect; it daily advances, but as yet has not reached the goal” (Inst.IV,i,17).

### **(5) Conclusion**

By virtue of the presence of God through His Holy Spirit in the church and the work that the Spirit of God is accomplishing in the church, by cleansing it of all unrighteousness, we are warned not to “destroy God’s temple” (1 Cor 3:17) because God will not allow his temple, which is holy to be destroyed. We are therefore called upon not to pollute the church with sin but to teach sound doctrines, through Word and sacraments, to live honourable and upright lives reflecting the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the temple of God.

In Calvin’s dynamic thinking, the Holy Spirit is inseparable in relation to the ministry of the Word and sacraments. It is this pure doctrinal acknowledgement that makes the church visible. The Word and the Holy Spirit builds the church. It does not matter in what condition the church is; God through the Holy Spirit is present. The church remains the temple of the Holy Spirit where Christ is preached and believed.

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## **8. HOLY SPIRIT, TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION**

### **John 14:15-27**

#### **Introduction**

When one reads about Calvin's understanding of war and its consequences, one realises that he was a peaceful man, devoted to the principles of the scripture. His ideas could be summarized as follows: Calvin understands war as one of the dreadful evils that can happen to any people. War can destroy life, property, leaving a trail of poverty, widowhood and orphanage and retard the progress of civilization. Since the entrance of sin into the world, two opposing forces existed, that is, God and the devil, or righteousness and wickedness. The influence of sin on humanity itself causes hatred and strife between the individuals and the nations. More than hundred million people have already died in wars and civil conflict. The most effective weapon to counteract war lies precisely in the Christian gospel. We should combat war not with the humanistic propaganda of the pacifist, but with the dissemination of the gospel.

In a recent publication of WARC on the legacy of Calvin, Calvin's ideas on war are summarised as follows: First, war is against God's will and usually people go to war to despise God (Deut 2:1-7). Secondly, war promotes the degradation of a human being due to the fact that in war no righteousness is observed and people become like ferocious beast. Thirdly, war is concomitant to persecution and persecution is the test of faith. As a result, as the church we must hope that after God has tested the church He will restrain the wraths of the tyrants. Lastly, the Christians that are involved in war must know that they are involved in the annihilation of the kindness that God poured on the human race. My understanding from the above argument is that war is evil, against the will of God, and its consequence culminates into hatred and depression. Again it involves misappropriation of truth and the longer war exists the more difficult is the process of reconciliation.

Coming to our context, when one looks at the magnificent landscape of South Africa, and the distinctive multiracial society of South Africa, the atrocious history of apartheid and fledgling democracy, one could see the good hand of God in the creation of our country and detect the hand of God guiding us through the stormy period of history to this calm and peaceful period in history. I say this period which God led us to was calm and peaceful because the whole world expected that South Africa would be engaged in civil war but through the grace of God we had a smooth transition to democracy. However, we avoided the civil war whereby it would have brought the destruction and annihilation of human life and property, but instead we are engaged in a tacit, hidden war like racism, tribalism, selfishness, corruption, crime, violence, etc. This is where I believe that we need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us to truth and true reconciliation.

### **(1) Love of Jesus and obedience to his commands (vv 15, 21, 23, 24)**

South Africa is assumed to be a Christian country, and this implies that the majority of the South Africans know about Jesus and they love him. But the question is do they obey his commands? What are his commands? The commands are a revelation from the Father, not necessarily ethical instructions (John 17:6). In my understanding I believe the commands of Jesus are all the utterances he made concerning God, our relation to our neighbour and cosmos. From the text and the above discussion the love we have for Jesus explicitly points that we should obey his commands so that we would stay in God's love and God would commune and be amidst our presence.

### **(2) Departure of Jesus (vv 18, 19)**

Many commentaries refer to this periscope as part of the farewell discourses. Jesus is about to leave his disciples to be glorified and exalted. But, he wants to prepare them for the departure so that they are not left desolate individuals (or orphans). When reading the text (v 18) we encounter a paradox, whereby Jesus

claims he will leave the disciples and at the same time he will come to them. The question stays, when will He come? It may imply that the coming that Jesus talks about will be during the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and not necessarily the Parousia. Again, in support of the above the departure of Jesus seems to be temporary (v 19), that is, although the world will not see him anymore, the disciples will see him again after a short while. The reappearance of Jesus will be after his resurrection, but this appearance will not be for long. The purpose of the reappearance is to reassure the orphaned disciples. Lastly, this reappearance will be a sure sign of life.

### **(3) Another Counsellor (vv 16, 17, 26)**

In the Gospel of John the names attributed to the Holy Spirit are Paraclete (translated Comforter, Counsellor or Advocate), Spirit of truth and Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father on behalf of the Son (v 26). Jesus calls the Holy Spirit "another Counsellor" meaning it is of the same kind as He. On the other hand Jesus implies that He is also the "Paraclete" (Counsellor). Jesus has performed the role of the Counsellor while on earth. In this text Jesus describes himself as the disciples' Counsellor. The above indicates that Jesus is a Counsellor of the same kind with the Holy Spirit, although He might be of a different function.

Jesus as incarnated cannot be there with the disciples forever (v 16), that is the reason He should leave them and come to them in the Holy Spirit (v18). The manner of the presence of the Holy Spirit is "within them" and "in them". This implies permanent presence of the Spirit with and in the disciples. This manner of the presence of the Holy Spirit is a lasting help to them in their self-assertion over the world. Again the indwelling of the Spirit implies a communion with Christ (v20) in which the Spirit who dwelt in Christ now dwells on and in believers. The above argument emphasises that the coming of the Spirit is the equivalent of the indwelling of Jesus in and with the disciples. Again, the coming

of the Spirit emphasises that there is a close union with Christ that he dwells in them not merely with them.

The function of the Spirit is of a reproductive nature, that is, it always has to do with the work of Christ, it holds the spotlight on Christ, glorifies Him. The spirit is to be the reminder (14:26) not the innovator. The function of the Holy Spirit is also to counsel, to direct the decision of disciples and to remain in them. Lastly, the function of the Spirit is to witness and advocate to Christ as Comforter. He is the chief witness of Christ because He was the intimate companion of Jesus throughout his ministry. Briefly, the function of the Holy Spirit as described from the text as to teach, that is, the Spirit can teach us a new understanding of Jesus' revelation but not necessarily a new revelation. Again, the Holy Spirit will remind us of all the teachings, all that Jesus has taught us.

#### **(4) Spirit and truth (v 17)**

The Holy Spirit in the fourth Gospel is known as the Spirit of Truth and this is a more precise definition, preferred by the Johannine community. Furthermore, this Holy Spirit bears witness to the truth (1 John 5:6), and guides the disciples into all the truth (16:13), and keeps them from error (1 John 4:6). The Spirit of Truth puts men in touch with the truth. The truth is coherence of a set of beliefs and practices. Truth may be the only justice the dead may have in the process of reconciliation.

#### **(5) Reconciliation (application of the Spirit in our life)**

In the introduction I mentioned that it is true that South Africa avoided the civil war but instead is engaged in tacit, hidden war against racism, tribalism, corruption and so on. This tacit hidden war we are engaged in is both the legacy of apartheid system and fruits of our democracy when the greedy people want to exploit our fledgling democracy. As a result, I believe that we are still suffering some consequence of a country engaged in civil war, for example, the abject

poverty, widowhood due to murder, poverty as a result of corruption, and so on. Consequently, the peace we are supposed to enjoy as referred to in the text is not there, but instead we have tension, anxiety and anger. Many people think that we have peace and they think that peace is an absence of war, but actually peace is a gift when one lives faithfully under God's covenant. Peace is general wellbeing, bodily health, good relations, prosperity as provided by God in all areas of life and the source is Yahweh alone. The above argument reflects very well that the peace we have in South Africa is an illusion; we still need the true peace of God. Peace is a special characteristic of the coming of the Spirit and the aim of the Johannine community was to be the centre and sign of true peace. In my understanding I believe that as South Africans we need peace as offered by Christ, not peace according to world standards. We need peace determined by the nature of Christ which is capable to exercise many spiritual effects like embracing life, reconciliation and peace.

In the Old Testament the ruach (spirit) of Yahweh in human beings, exercising unusual powers and exceptional human activities, is demonstrated. I believe one of the exceptional human activities is to achieve the true spiritual reconciliation. It is true because in the past many South African citizens suffered brutal imprisonment, torture, oppression and intimidation under the apartheid regime. As a result many are not yet healed emotionally to embrace life and its challenges. This is where reconciliation is not about erasure of memory but transformation and addressing the past adequately so that we can go forward.

There are three phases in a reconciliation process, and the third phase is a readjustment phase. This is the phase (I believe South Africa is in this third phase) where the programs of reconciliation are carried out. This phase is characterised with attempts to understand what happened in the past, a desire to go forward with life but finding it hard to do so. As a result there is a deep depression and resignation due to a lack of progress and a blurred picture of reconciliation. The practical example is an attempt of the UFS to integrate the hostels in their endeavour to engage in the process of reconciliation, which was

nearly thwarted by the Reitz racist incident and public outcry against the slow process of reconciliation in the UFS.

This is where I believe the help of the Holy Spirit comes in to teach us how to achieve this true reconciliation and reminds us how Christ did it when He reconciled us to God (Romans 5:10). Furthermore, reconciliation is not a human achievement but the work of God within us and again, it is the result of Christ's atoning death and justification by faith.

True reconciliation is an activity of Christ through the Holy Spirit; hence this makes reconciliation more of a spiritual activity than a strategy. It is spiritual activity because it is the experience of grace and it starts with a relationship with God. This means if South Africa is to experience true reconciliation, both the victims and evil doers need to have a good relationship with God and his Spirit. They will lead us to a desired true spiritual reconciliation. Secondly, true spiritual reconciliation creates a new humanity out of both victim and wrong doer. This new humanity can be achieved by addressing the past adequately so that we can go forward and the victims forgiving the wrong doers and the wrong doers on the other hand repenting from their evil acts. This reconciliation can be achieved with the help of the Spirit when it reminds us of the suffering and the humiliation that Christ had undergone and still be able to forgive.

Lastly, true reconciliation could be achieved with the complete consummation of the world by God in Christ. On the above we said the Spirit as Paraclete (the Comforter) is a Chief witness for Christ because He was the intimate companion of Jesus throughout his ministry. This means at the present moment the Spirit witnesses concerning Christ and as his followers we need also with the help of the Spirit to witness to the world for Christ. The above I understand to indicate that when the whole world accepts Jesus as its Saviour, that is when we will have the complete reconciliation.

## **(6) Conclusion**

In conclusion, the function of the Holy Spirit in the eschatological age should not be underestimated but highlighted and put to emphasis. This is because we need the guidance of the Holy Spirit urgently since we are awaiting the return of Christ, who will then come as Judge for the world. We should pray to God that He should provide us with this Holy Spirit, so that in the process of reconciliation we should look at the past with the purpose of addressing what went wrong, learning from what Christ achieved for us. Having learnt the truth we proceed forward with the aim of achieving true peace of mind and reconciliation.

*(Rev Joseph Pali, DRCA – Faculty of Theology, UFS)*

## 9. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

### Ephesians 4:3-4

*Try your best to let God's Spirit keep your hearts united. Do this by living in peace. All of you are part of the same body. There is only one Spirit of God, just as you were given one hope when you were chosen to be God's people. (CEV)*

Christians are people who are united by the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul and we are also aware that Christians are not living this unity. The church is characterised by divisions between churches and even in congregations. In our text Paul urges the Christians in Ephesus to try their best to let God's Spirit keep their hearts united. He urges them to live in peace with one another.

During Pentecost we think about the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the life of the church. Since we are celebrating John Calvin's 500<sup>th</sup> birthday this year, we also ask what light does he give us on this topic.

#### **(1) The work of the Holy Spirit in and through the church**

**The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to Himself.**

When we read John Calvin's Institutes, we find that in Book 3 he deals with the way we receive the grace of Christ. Calvin says: "To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself" (538). Calvin continues by saying: "But faith is the principal work of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the terms commonly employed to express his power and working, in large measure, referred to it because by faith alone He leads us into the light of the gospel, as John teaches: to believers in Christ is given the privilege of becoming children of God, who are born not of flesh and blood, he declares it to be a supernatural gift that those who would otherwise remain in unbelief receive Christ by faith" (541).

**The Holy Spirit uses the church as a means to invite us into the society of Christ and to keep us in union with Christ – as a means of God’s grace.**

The Holy Spirit works the faith in us. During Pentecost we can celebrate the work of the Holy Spirit. John Calvin teaches us that the Holy Spirit uses the church as a means to invite us into the society of Christ and to keep us in union with Christ. = The church is a means of God’s grace. “... we need outward help to beget and increase faith within us, and advance it to it’s goal, God has also added these aids that He may provide for our weaknesses” (1011).

The following words of Calvin gives us an idea how he sees the church: “I shall start, then, with the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons, not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith. “For what God has joined together, it is not lawful to put asunder (Mark 10:9), so that, for those to whom he is Father the **church may also be Mother** (1012).

**The unity of the church is important**

This church according to Calvin is called “catholic” or “universal” – there could not be two or three churches because unless Christ be torn asunder – which cannot happen! But all the elect are so united in Christ that as they are dependent on one Head, they also grow together into one body, being joined and knit together as are the limbs of a body. They are made truly one since they live together in one faith, hope and love, and in the same Spirit of God” (1014).

The unity of the church is therefore of utmost importance to us all. On the one hand it testifies to the work of the Holy Spirit and on the other hand it is a means of God’s grace to keep us in union with Christ. Disunity in the church or disputes seriously attack the work of the Holy Spirit.

## **(2) Let God's Spirit keep our hearts united**

We don't always like to try things. I remember when my eldest son tried to ride a bicycle, he was not very successful. Every time he fell off it made it more difficult to try again, but luckily he had a mother who kept him going until he succeeded.

In our congregations we experience that there is a lot of disunity and struggles amongst Christians. A Lot of energy is spent in peacemaking and reconciliation. We do not always succeed and we can easily become tired. This can lead to a position where Christians just accept the reality of strife and disunity. We wash our hands and declare that we have tried.

Paul asks us that we should not try to get people to be united, but try to let God's Spirit do it. This is where the problem lies. The unity amongst Christians is something created by the Spirit and it is the Spirit of God that must keep that unity. What we do is to block and hinder that unity. It is so part of our nature to live in disharmony with others. We need to be aware of it so that we constantly can go against our nature to let God's Spirit create and sustain unity amongst us.

We should be actively involved to create opportunities for God's Spirit to foster the unity and peace amongst us as Christians.

We need to ask ourselves: What are our efforts to let God's Spirit keep our hearts united and to let us live in peace? It is easy to tell other people of the disunity amongst Christians, but what can we tell people about our efforts? What have we tried? How many times have we tried? Did we really try to succeed or did we only try with the hope that it would fail?

## **(3) South African context: let us try**

It is with sadness that we have to admit that the unity amongst Christians in South Africa is not what it should be. Christians were divided along racial lines and the legacy of apartheid is still evident. We are grateful for the signs of unity and peace amongst Christians, but should never be satisfied with our situation.

The unity that Paul writes about is not only a unity that should be understood in a spiritual way. The unity in heart is a unity of confessing Jesus as

Lord in all spheres of our lives. It is a unity and peace that affects our daily lives. A unity that in practice is seen in the fact that the walls that separated us are broken down (Ephesians 2:11-22). Paul reminds the congregation that the Jews and the Gentiles that became part of the church must act now as God's new creation. It is in their nature to still act as Jews and Gentiles with their different cultures but being part of the grace of God has put a new task to them. Through Christ they have received God's grace through the work of the Holy Spirit and have been made part of his church. This one Spirit has created a unity amongst them and therefore they need to show the world the wonderful result of God's grace. Living the unity and peace is a sign to a world full of strife that miracles can happen. It is a sign that God is at work in this world.

Looking at the disunity amongst South African Christians is a serious charge against us that we are not trying enough to let God's Spirit create unity and peace amongst us. We will have to investigate our motives why we are complacent with the divisions and why we even try to keep the divisions.

Church unity is not a luxury, it is a command. It is a command within our local congregations but also a command to our churches that are still divided along racial and economic lines.

I would like to end with a quotation from Calvin in his commentary on this text: *"Oh, were this thought deeply impressed upon our minds, that we are subject to a law which no more permits the children of God to differ amongst themselves than the Kingdom of heaven to be divided, how earnestly should we cultivate brotherly kindness! How should we dread every kind of animosity, if we duly reflected that all who separate us from brethren estrange us from the kingdom of God. Let us learn from Paul, that none are at all fit for that inheritance who are not one body and one spirit"* (Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians: Translated by William Pringle:268).

Let us try again. Let us endeavour in this venture. Let us let the Holy Spirit continue the work that He has started in us. Let us and let He.

*(Dr Dawid Kuyler – URCSA Bloemfontein)*

## **10. "BEING DICTATED TO US BY THE SPIRIT": JOHN CALVIN ON PRAYER AND ROMANS 8:26**

We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. Reflecting on this text – Romans 8:26 – Calvin in his 1539 Commentary on Romans, noted down some touching remarks on our prayers: through the same Spirit that enables us to address God as our Father (verse 15), we are taught how to pray. Whoever, in this time of Pentecost, will thus be reflecting on the work of the Holy Spirit, cannot but to also consider our prayer life. And especially so in this year of commemoration, following in the footsteps of our committed predecessor and exemplar in prayer: Calvin, the Reformer of Geneva.

### **1. Calvin in prayer**

The teachings and the life of John Calvin (1509-1564) are characterised by an inherent coherence and are supported by a warm, personal conviction of faith. This becomes particularly clear when the theme of prayer in his life, is considered.

For Calvin, *ora et labora* – pray and work – was much more than just a slogan. Early in the morning he started his day with prayer. At the breakfast table, before the meal, he prayed for God's blessing and after the meal he thanked God. He prayed before commencing with his daily task and in the evening before he went to bed. There ought to be a fixed regularity in our rhythm of prayer, he said. And concerning his work, the five markers of the Reformation – *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus* and *solus Deo gloria* (Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, the sovereignty of Christ and the glory of God) were integrated in *oratio*: prayer. But even more: mind and heart are not to be separated; wisdom and piety go inextricably together.

It would be obvious that, when the young Calvin wrote his *Institutions of the Christian Religion* in 1536, he would dedicate a separate chapter to prayer; in

the 1559 edition – a thorough systematic theology – the longest of all eighty chapters was published under the title: “Prayer, the most important exercise of our faith”; *exercitium pietatis* – the exercise of our piety. WH Neuser noted that Calvin’s exposition of the Our Father prayer (which he did in shorter or longer essays in eight different publications!) changed from an original dogmatically inclined emphasis on the content to eventually a deeper pastoral guidance of those who pray – the question of the disciples: “Lord, teach us how to pray” (Luke 11:1). Another good example of this connection between head and heart is the prayer with which he used to start his academic lectures:

*Let our growth in the knowledge of the heavenly mysteries; also be tied to a growth in godliness, to your glory and our edification.*

In short, what Calvin taught on prayer, grew from his own prayer life, and his own inner prayer room was informed and transformed by the Word of God. When he therefore wrote about prayer, it was not built on hearsay, but it came from within, from within someone who knew how the Spirit dictated prayer in his own inner room. That is where prayer begins, there, in the inner room. This is the “best rule” for our prayer life; it was given to us by Christ himself, Calvin wrote in his *Institution* and in his *Harmonie der Evangelien naar Mattheus, Markus en Lukas* (1555). Christ not only rejected the feigned prayers and “favour seeking pretence” on the street corners, but he deliberately called us aside:

*... to, with all our thoughts, descend into our hearts and to enter it, and He promised that God – our hearts ought to be also his temples – will be near to us in such a spiritual venture ... He showed that prayer is a mystery that is particularly imbedded in our hearts and that seeks rest in those things that are far apart from the disturbance of our troubles. From this it is already apparent that no voice or song that disturbs prayer, has any value ... except if it rises from the deep emotion of the heart ...*

It is therefore good if we believers could withdraw ourselves from the public hustle and bustle and the presence of others, in order to honestly and genuinely pour out our hearts before God; in the seclusion our innermost being is called back from the “dispersal” of daily life. In the same way Jesus sought the concealment of night on the mountain outside the city. Calvin himself followed this example; it was known that he sometimes isolated himself for a day or two at a place outside the city of Geneva. And there, he went as far as to say in his Catechism for the Church in Geneva (1545), words are not even required in my prayers, my tongue could keep silent, but without applying my “mind and deeper emotions”, no real prayer can be brought before God. Prayer is the innermost disposition of my heart. And particularly on this point, Calvin attached great value to our voices and our songs: it exercises our mind in a focused contemplation before God; our tongues are indeed created to tell and proclaim the praise of God. That is why he so strongly emphasised the congregational singing and especially the singing of young people – the Psalms deepen our worship, but it should also be sung in our homes and outside in the fields!

In addition to prayer in the inner room, Calvin also considered prayer in the worship service as essential. But he also emphasised: anyone who believes that God’s ear is closer at the church or in the temple or at some or other holy space, is falling into superstition and is forgetting the words of Jesus that God is to be worshipped in spirit and truth (John 4:5), everywhere and at all times. He remarked that to kneel down is a worthy praying position; it shows through my body’s position that my heart and my head are bowing before God. This should not only happen in my inner room, but also in public. In the worship services in the St Pierre Church in Geneva, the *vota* (hallowing or introduction) was immediately followed by a prayer consisting of a confession of sin:

*Lord God, eternal and almighty Farther, we openly confess before your holy Majesty, that we are poor sinners.*

The congregation bow before God. Knowledge of who God is and knowledge of who we are, establish our prayer; it lays the words on the lips of the congregation. Immediately after this prayer the reading of the Ten Commandments followed, with – between the two “tables” – a short prayer. Only then could the minister ascend the pulpit and lead in a prayer of *epiclesis* (opening), ending with the Our Father. After the sermon there was another prayer of thanksgiving and intercession for those in need. Then followed a closing song and the prayer of blessing (Numbers 6), bringing the meeting between God and the congregation to an end. With his arrival in Geneva, Calvin instituted Wednesday as the weekly day of prayer. From eight ‘o clock in the morning until 10 ‘o clock, the congregation assembled for prayer. In his *Institution* Calvin remarked that Paul’s instruction to pray without cessation (1 Tess 5:17), was not aimed at such public and joint prayer meetings, but at the personal prayer life of believers. The duration or times of our prayers were of no importance to God; it was the genuineness in our hearts that He was looking for. Without wasting words Jesus taught us: when a prayer is rising from the deepest disposition of our soul, the tongue would not walk on ahead of the heart – according to Calvin. It is therefore better that everything happens in orderly fashion (1 Cor 14:40). And practically, he added, above all comprehensible to everybody.

*... it is evident that our public prayers should not be cloaked in Greek if amongst Latin speakers or in Latin if amongst French or English speakers; it must be understood by the whole assembly. It must, however, contribute to the edification of the whole congregation; who does not reap any fruit from incomprehensible sounds ...*

That is why Calvin considered education in prayer so important. In his Catechism (1545) not least than sixty-two questions are about prayer: on what prayer is and how we should pray; on the two parts of prayer – thanksgiving and intercession – and on the Our Father, the prayer that Jesus taught us. To assist

the congregation in praying, he also included a few prayers in his Catechism (1545): a morning prayer, two table prayers, a prayer for the opening of school, a congregational prayer (the so called *oratio dominica*) and an evening prayer. In this way Calvin spent his days and weeks – 24/7 – praying and working. Even if your knees cannot bow, your heart is indeed capable of it. In awe before God, following the example of Christ, and dictated by the Spirit.

That is why he once preached from Romans 8.

## **2. Thoughts on preaching on prayer during Pentecost – Romans 8:26**

Of all the Scripture texts on prayer, Romans 8:18-30 would be a very appropriate choice for Pentecost. The whole chapter 8 is actually about the life of believers, **“through the Spirit”** – an expression that occurs not least than seven times in this chapter. Calvin worked with the text of manuscripts where, from verse 1, it reads as follows: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation ... for those that walk according to the Spirit” They are not perfect or without any “desires of the flesh”, but they resist those and their lives show “the longing for godliness”, he wrote. Incidentally, in his commentary on Romans, Calvin dedicated more pages to this chapter 8 than to any other! Now, while it is apparent that the Spirit of God is the most important concept in Romans 8, the Trinitarian presence of God nowhere disappears from sight. In this vein Paul started at verse 1 with the reference to our “being in Christ Jesus”, our justification through faith in Him; and in similar way he ended with the ever consoling love of God “in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Verse 31). Nothing can separate us from this. Thus – a chapter on certainty. And in the heart of it sounds the thankful call from our hearts: “Abba! That means Father” (verse 15). It is the Spirit that is creating this relationship between God and mankind, his children; it is the Spirit that is confirming our being children of God; it is the Spirit that lives in us; it is the Spirit who creates an inner space where we may enter into communion with God; it is the Spirit that is transforming us to the image of Christ.

With what was said above as background, the preacher can now point to the character of verses 18 to 30. These verses are about **our pilgrimage from creation and the fall of man to salvation and consummation**. Because of the fall (verse 20), our pilgrimage through this world bears the blemishes of frailty; and not only us, but creation itself is given over to this painful decline, suffering and decay (verse 21). In a country afflicted by poverty, illnesses, crime, violence and mistrust; in a world caught in the grip of economic recession because of greed and superabundance; on a planet where the natural resources are under tremendous pressure and where we observe the extinction of so many species of plants and animals – it is not difficult to mention many examples – we, and creation, groan together! Calvin wrote: the creatures of creation – that have waited “so many centuries in their expectation” – have been joined to us “as our partners”. To quote him:

*For all the saints, salvation lies in hope; it is essentially hope that it is aimed at that which only awaits us in future, those matters that are now (still) absent; therefore the salvation of believers is hidden. Their hope cannot but be supported by patience; therefore the salvation of the believers cannot but be completed only through patience ... which shows that patience is the inseparable companion of faith, and (in this way) our experience of present sufferings is softened and tempered, so that it does not become too difficult to bear.*

What can we add to this remarkable explanation of Paul – our text (26:) **together with creation and with us, the Spirit of God is also groaning!** Calvin wrote: the Spirit therefore takes “a part of our burden, which is even adding weight upon our weakness, on Himself”. And this particularly difficult burden, pressurising and rubbing our shoulders in dark times, is the fact that we not even know what or how to pray. Here the preacher could consider recounting some personal examples of those who were burdened and went through deep afflictions – those times we sometimes call “the dark night of the

soul" – see also Psalm 88. The Spirit of God not only enables us to call onto the Father (verse 15), but the Spirit himself even calls on our behalf when our own stuttering words have become muted. In Calvin's own noteworthy explanation:

*... that we are taught by the same Spirit how to pray and what we should plead from God. And rather appropriately He connects these prayers to the anxious yearnings of the faithful ones ... so that by praying, they are released of these anxieties. It seems to me as if Paul simply wants to indicate that we are blind in our calling upon God, because while we experience the frailty within us, our own emotions are too disturbed and confused to be able to decide what would be proper to ask of God.*

Such a prayer cannot arise from within ourselves; in times like these we are, like those that are not believing, even tending to rattle off our prayers. Therefore, Calvin continued:

*... it is essential that the proper way of praying, is dictated to us by the Spirit.*

The Spirit of God is laying into our inner being the yearning for communion with our Father, as well as the proper attitude of a genuine heart and the language to express these yearnings. But even more, the fact that it is God's Spirit working within our inner room, gives us an assurance – a guarantee – that God will hear our prayers and answer them. And therefore the faithful may also proceed to even recite verse 28: "... in all things God works for the good ..." All by the grace of God:

*We are indeed commanded to knock, but nobody can, within his own power, even conceptualise one syllable if God is not, through the mysterious working of his Spirit, stirring that within us and opening up our hearts onto Him.*

It is remarkable that we – modern or even post-modern pilgrims on our way through the world – discover the same yearnings with which our predecessor Calvin, and before him Paul, had to learn to cope. The longing for the presence of a loving Father, who has compassion for us. Who will hear our call – when we call in the morning, or in the night, or amidst the hectic days. Alone or with others. In Romans 8 these voices merge: ours, those of the lost humanity and the groaning creation; those of Paul and Calvin. And then, when we stand aside, in the silence of our hearts, softly and full of compassion, we hear the voice of the Comforter who is calling on our behalf to God: *Kyrie eleison*. Lord, have mercy on us.

Pentecost is a time of longing, Dirkie Smit once remarked. Indeed. May our yearnings and prayers rise into God's ear. So help us, God's Spirit. Amen.

*(Rev Jan Lubbe – DRC Berg en Dal)*

## **11. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND OUR WITNESS**

**Acts 4:23-31 [31]**

### **Introduction:**

#### **The world that we live in**

The ancient world was in dire need. Evidence of great poverty and suffering because of illness can be found. Although the Roman empire limited feudal and communal wars, people still took part in various wars. People were uprooted. Communities were deprived of their freedom. In Palestine the Roman empire was viewed as brutal oppressors.

The world in the day of John Calvin was also in deep need. Superstition caused people to live in fear. The hold that the church had on the community led to fear of the church. There was a lot of uncertainty. People tried to please God through fasting, abstinence and good works, but they couldn't succeed in keeping it up. This led to renewed fear and anxiety. People acted cruelly against one another as is evidenced in the way that people were burnt on the stakes.

Today the world also experiences major crises. Poverty takes on different forms than in ancient times, but the economic decline leads to severe uncertainty for many. Infections like with the HI-virus that leads to Aids have lead to disaster for many. Projections are that 6 million people would have died in South Africa alone by 2010 through Aids. Scores of children are orphaned in the process. Wars destroy the livelihood of millions. Dictators and other undemocratic rulers deprive people of their free existence. Attacks on the Christian faith are on the rapid increase and people are humiliated because of their faith, as recently in the Orissa province in India.

#### **Witness to the world**

In such a world the gospel message is brought. In the world of the first century the message of the salvation of God through Jesus Christ came as a new wonder. The redemption in Jesus Christ through grace alone was a wonderful

message of assurance in poverty, healing from sickness and of the hope for life after death. There was the expectance of heavenly bliss after death but also of life with God in this world. This new expectancy gave hope to people who now no longer lived for themselves but for God.

During the Reformation the message that God's free grace is so encompassing that He forgives sin without any contribution from man's side through the salvation work of his Son Jesus Christ, created new hope. This new message was grounded in the age-old truth of the Gospel. It brought endless assurance and peace. Now it was no longer necessary to trust in the uncertainty of good works in fear that you will never do enough. Now you could lean on God's great love and free grace. Calvin emphasised that salvation came through the free grace of God alone.

A return to the wonder of salvation through the Anointed of God, Jesus Christ, is in the modern day more urgent than ever before. Jesus as Servant was anointed by God for his task. The central role that Jesus as Anointed One plays in the theology of Calvin and in the message for a world in dire need, must be acknowledged and reclaimed. This gives us greater boldness to call on his Name and to proclaim his message in the world. Such a bold proclamation of the Word in brokenness but also in hope for the salvation that God gives, is necessary. Calvin emphasised that the proclamation of the Word brings the message of salvation and hope.

**Sermon: Acts 4:23-31 [31]**

**Theme: After prayer Spirit-filled people proclaim with confidence that Jesus is Lord.**

To witness to the hope that lives inside us, becomes all the more important.

People ask serious questions and live in great anxiety. Illness comes over us. In spite of medical research there are sicknesses that there is no cure for. It seems as if there is no holds barred with Aids. Malaria kills thousands in Africa. Against all this we are called to witness to the hope in us.

Death stays a devastating threat. Modern day man has no answers to it. All the philosophical thoughts cannot help us against it.

Atheism and agnosticism seem to be on the rise. South Africa experiences a steep decline in faith. Buses in London proclaim that there is probably no God. People denounce God actively. People are like sheep with no shepherd. We want to call out: Will God hear us?

The apostles in their world experienced the rejection and persecution of people. Peter and John were even rejected by the Sanhedrin, the people whom should have known God's Word. Their own people. But they stuck to their guns. They kept on proclaiming the message that Jesus is Lord, even in the face of persecution. They regarded it as more important to fear God than man.

The world keep on fighting against God and his Anointed One and his followers. Psalm 2:1-2 explain how world leaders plan against God's children.

What did the apostles and the early church do? They prayed. Prayer was the cornerstone of their life. Peter and John were jailed and freed again. They prayed.

What did they pray for? They prayed for boldness, confidence. Calvin emphasised that the apostles didn't pray for the demise of their opponents. On the contrary, they prayed that there would be peace so that they could preach the Gospel. They prayed for confidence so that they could go out into the world and convey the message of salvation, peace and hope. They were willing to suffer for the Gospel.

The Sanhedrin threatened them. The world rejected them. But the apostles stayed true to their calling to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord through the Holy Spirit. They ministered healing to people and they performed great miracles in the name of Jesus. Jesus is the centre of their ministry. That shows the hearers a glimpse of the glory that Christ has prepared for them for the future.

But to be able to bring the message they have been fulfilled with the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that makes miracles happen. It is the Spirit that gives them confidence. The place where they pray is shaken, and they are filled with the

Spirit. Calvin realised what wonderful inspiration the Spirit gives to people so that they can reach the world.

The central message of the Bible is a message of great salvation and redemption for the whole world. That is why the church should be a blessing for the whole creation across all borders.

The boldness to proclaim Christ meant that someone like pastor Wurmbrand was prepared to suffer in prison while he kept on proclaiming Christ as the only Lord. Somebody like Corrie ten Boom saved the lives of many Jews in the Second World War and kept on proclaiming Christ, right up to the age of 80 when she travelled to Siberia to tell people about Jesus. Reverend Overduin was so weak in the Nazi concentration camps that people had to keep him upright, but he still witnessed his thanks to Christ.

The Book of Acts can be called the book of the Holy Spirit. Think about the way the Apostles kept preaching. Paul continued even when he gets beaten, thrown in jail and humiliated. The Holy Spirit renews and changes the community. The Good news is proclaimed further and further. All people must be reached with the message of salvation. Kuyper, in agreement with Calvin, teaches that everything in life must be done to glorify God. Calvin also emphasised the threefold calling of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King and our calling as his followers to be prophets, priests and kings in the same vein.

Through the power of the Spirit the apostles proclaimed the message. Calvin emphasised that God hears the prayers of the apostles who keep on preaching the message in boldness. Their prayers are answered when the Spirit fills them with confidence to proclaim the Gospel.

In a hostile world the church should keep on proclaiming the message of hope and new life and the expectancy of eternal life through the power of the Holy Spirit. That brings new life and new hope to the congregation and the community.

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## 12. THE HOLY SPIRIT: FUTURE, HOPE AND JOY

### Ephesians 1:13-14

#### Introduction

Calvin lived in a time when being a minister of the Gospel was a danger, when the faithful in Christ were threatened at every turn. The global celebration of 500 years of Calvin's theology is testimony to the fact that he, and many other reforming Christians, persevered in their proclamation of the truth. Perseverance speaks of hope. For Calvin, this hope in the face of trial was attended not by duty, but by joy. Christian hope and Christian joy are inextricably linked for Calvin, and both proceed from the same source: the Word of God, which seals the truth of God in our hearts. Says Calvin: "True it is that God stamps it on the heart of every believer by his Holy Spirit, and that is why He is named the Seal of the Gospel" (Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ: 243).

What then, is the truth which gladdens the Christian heart and gives rise to hope that cannot be overturned by trouble and trial? Wallace, in his survey of Calvin's works [*Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*], writes: "Happiness is a gift of the grace of God which itself is not known otherwise than through the Word and inward earnest (seal) of the Spirit. The Word is the continual and never-changing source of earthly happiness since it assures us that even in this life *that God will be our Father* – Calvin lays great stress on the comfort it brings to be assured in the midst of challenges of God's protection in this life. The basis of this joy is the assurance of forgiven sins and thus the knowledge that, in service of God, we do not labour in vain or without hope of recompense" (Wallace: 315).

This brings us to the future orientation of Christian joy, properly called hope: our adoption as sons of God means we share already in part, but eventually in full, in the inheritance of the Son of God. When we are "in Christ", his future is our future, and it is glorious.

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin writes (III.1.1) that the way we become possessed of the blessing which God has bestowed on his only

Son is that Christ must become ours and dwell in us. This union with Christ is effected by the Holy Spirit: "And although it is true that we obtain this (union) by faith, yet since we see that all do not indiscriminately embrace the offer of Christ which is made by the gospel, the very nature of the case teaches us to ascend higher, and inquire into the secret efficacy of the Spirit, to which it is owing that we enjoy Christ and all his blessings." (III.1.1)

Here then is the meeting point in Calvin's theology of future hope, present joy and the role of the Holy Spirit: "...Christ came provided with the Holy Spirit after a peculiar manner – namely, that He might separate us from the world, and unite us in the hope of an eternal inheritance. Hence the Spirit is called the Spirit of sanctification, because He quickens and cherishes us, not merely by general energy which is seen in the human race, as well as other animals, but because He is the seed and root of heavenly life in us." (III.2.2). Here we see the dual nature of the Christian experience: We are in the world but not of it, and thus while in it we will have trouble.

So how does this "hope of eternal inheritance", this "seed and root of heavenly life" bear fruit in us even now, on earth, in the midst of trial and hardship? It is the hope of the full flower of our inheritance in Christ that gives forth buds in the difficulties of Christian living now, because our Father "...is said to have 'sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts', because, as pilgrims in the world, and persons in a manner dead, He so quickens us from above as to assure us that our salvation is safe in the keeping of a faithful God." (III.1.3).

Our present satisfaction is therefore directly related to the glory of the life to come, because it is not based on the passing things of this present world, but is heavenly satisfaction in the midst of our earthly afflictions. Wallace notes that Calvin frequently reminds us that, while in the middle of suffering, only the certainty of the glorious and joyful end that awaits us in Christ can sweeten our present bitterness (Wallace: 316).

It is important, in conclusion, to note the practical application of such heavenly hope in the midst of earthly trial. To arrive at the application, we need to ask two questions: Firstly, what is the end of our heavenly hope, or, what is our inheritance? Secondly, how does this relate to our earthly trials?

Our inheritance is no less than the glory and life of Christ. We are being conformed into the likeness of Christ. That is the ultimate end of each Christian. We will be “exulted to share in his greatness” and be admitted to a “participation in his happiness” (III.9.6).

How does this glorious end relate to our present trials as believers? Calvin says in Book III.9.3: “And there is a much higher reason when we reflect that here we are in a manner prepared for the glory of the heavenly kingdom. For the Lord hath ordained, that those ultimately to be crowned in heaven must maintain a previous warfare on the earth, that they may not triumph before they have overcome the difficulties of war and obtained the victory.” Furthermore, this warfare is directed at conforming us into the likeness of Christ, and therefore our earthly trials actually bring about our glorious inheritance. Says Calvin: “Thus, indeed, it is; the whole body of the faithful, so long as they live on earth, must be like sheep for the slaughter, in order that they be conformed to Christ, their head (Rom viii 36)” (III.9.6).

In the light of our inheritance, and the purpose of our earthly trials, how are we to respond? Calvin (III.9.6) exhorts us to raise our minds to heaven, and become superior to all that is in the world, and thus to rise above the present events and circumstances – even while the evildoers seem to flourish and triumph, seemingly enjoying peace and prosperity and harassing those who belong to Christ with all kinds of evil. He says God’s people “... will have no difficulty in bearing up under these evils. They will turn their eyes to that day on which the Lord will receive his faithful servants, wipe away all tears from their eyes, clothe them in a robe of glory and joy, feed them with the ineffable sweetness of his pleasures, exalt them to share with Him in his greatness; in

fine, admit them to a participation in his happiness" (III.9.6). And all this is to the praise of his glory!

## **Sermon**

***Ephesians 1:13-14** <sup>13</sup> In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.*

## **Introduction**

We're all familiar with the story of the man who lives his life based on the apparent hope of an inheritance to come. He cashes in on it now by borrowing against a future sum of money. We might say that he is trustfully living his present in the light of the future. But is he? Is it not a *LACK* of trust in the inheritance that makes him borrow against it now? Is it not rather that he is unable to endure hardship now because he fears that the reward later might not materialise?

In a similar way, might we, as the church today, be fooling ourselves about the quality of our hope and the foundation of our joy? Is it possible that our hope and joy are as insubstantial as the passing pleasures of a dying world, rather than eternally secure – based on our sure and certain inheritance, promised in God's word?

We fool ourselves as to the real foundation of our hope, of our happiness, when we live our lives as if heaven should be on earth. We want our tears dried now – or even better – we don't want to shed them at all. We want all our trials to be quick and easy – or better still – we avoid them by looking for a short cut to easy street. We want to harvest without sowing, we want the medal without the race – we want the crown without the cross.

All this reveals at heart not the folly of self-indulgence, but a deep lack of trust in God and the promises in his Word: We don't believe there is an inheritance to receive, so we try to grasp all we can now.

This is the behaviour of thieves rather than heirs. Thieves rely on the works of their hands to get results – heirs patiently wait, trusting they will receive what is rightfully theirs. When we take matters into our own hands, we bankrupt our futures with present indulgences. As a corporate entity, as the church, when we do this, we hinder the display of God's manifold wisdom, and we start looking like the foolish, hopeless world. Let's examine this issue in the light of Ephesians 1:13-14:

### **1. We are sons of God if united with the Son of God**

Unless we are united with Christ, or "in Christ", as the apostle Paul so often writes, we are "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). But now, united with Christ, we see God's eternal plan on its way to consummation: the glorious communion of God with his children. What is God's appointed means of uniting us with Christ, of adopting us as sons of the heavenly Father? We were united with Him when, through the preaching of the gospel, we trust Christ, believing the word of truth, the good news of our salvation. Calvin, in his commentary on Ephesians, points out that Paul's use of two parallel ways of describing the gospel – the word of truth and the message of salvation – is a defense against our lack of belief in the efficacy of God's Word. Satan's strongest attack is to lead us to doubt or despise the gospel. But it is "the power of God to salvation to every one that believes" (Rom 1:16).

But we are a sinful people, prone to doubt and disbelief – and in God's kindness, He has provided a means by which we can remain steadfast in our faith. He gives us his Holy Spirit as surety. He does not prove that the gospel is the word of truth by the authority of men, but with the witness of the Spirit of God – who seals the truth in our hearts. So we see that both our salvation, as

well as the **proof** and **assurance** of our salvation, are wrought by the very hands of God. To the praise of the glory of his grace!

## **2. The Holy Spirit is our witness that we are heirs to an inheritance**

Romans 8:14-17 expresses in full the work of the Holy Spirit in sealing the truth in our hearts of what God has done for us:

*<sup>14</sup> For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.*

The metaphor of a seal in Ephesians 1:13 carried much weight in the ancient world. A seal on a document establishes its authorship and its validity. A seal serves to set apart that which is true and certain from that which is false and dubious. Calvin notes that the true conviction which believers have of the Word of God, and of our own salvation, does not proceed from the judgments of flesh, from fine philosophical arguments – but from the sealing of the Spirit which gives such unshakeable certainty to our conscience that all doubt is removed. The Holy Spirit therefore makes preaching effective as the instrument of faith. Having been made sons through faith in Jesus Christ, God's Word tells us that we are heirs also – co-heirs with Christ. We will consider in a while the nature of our inheritance.

## **3. The Holy Spirit is Himself a deposit of our inheritance**

We are sons of God now, while we sojourn on earth. And as such we are rightful, legal heirs of all that the Father gives us in Christ Jesus. However, the fullness of

our inheritance is as yet a future reality, grasped in the present by faith. But again, this faith is not a weak and wavering product of our own human reasoning; it is a gift of kindness from God. He gives us his Holy Spirit as the pledge, or deposit of our inheritance. This is cause for great hope and rejoicing. A pledge or deposit is never taken back. The deposit speaks of an action to be completed in the future – and in this case is the day of our inheritance. Notice the radical forward motion of God’s work in history and in our lives: the cross of Christ which points us toward our crown as sons and co-heirs, the Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance to come. This future orientation is spelled out HOPE in the present. We need hope because our present circumstances are still rooted in a fallen world, groaning until the day of redemption – “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13). So hope is vital because, as Calvin says in his Ephesians commentary, our Christian warfare in the present is sustained by future hope; the deposit is our hope and the receiving of our full inheritance is the fulfilment of that hope.

#### **4. The Son Himself is our inheritance**

What then, or who, is the inheritance we live in hope of? Paul’s letter to the Ephesians uses two striking metaphors to describe the future-oriented nature of our corporate union with Christ:

- We, the church, are his body – the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way (Eph 1:23).
- We, the church, are his bride – the covenantal one-flesh union of marriage points to the mystery of his bond with us (Eph 5:32).

While on earth though, we as his body are still growing in maturity, to the full measure of the stature of Christ: We are, together, growing up into our head. Before the new heaven and new earth we are still his betrothed – in the process

of being made spotless and without blemish, but not yet ready to be presented to our Groom.

The day of our inheritance is surely the day of Christ's return – when we attain fullness and completion in Him. Jesus Christ Himself is both the subject and object of our completion: Having become like Him in every way we will share completely in his glory. Being conformed to his image, we will recognise the totality of our satisfaction and joy in Him. What more glorious inheritance than He who is before all things and in whom all things hold together (Col 1:17)?

### **5. What does this mean for the church today?**

Paul spells out for us in Ephesians 4 and 5 the implications of our status as heirs. He calls us children of light, having been ransomed from the darkness. As heirs of Christ, as children of God, together we lay aside falsehood and anger, we stop stealing and share our goods instead. As the body of Christ, we build one another up with our words, and do not break each other down. As image-bearers of the one who has forgiven us, we forgive one another. We walk in love, we lay ourselves down for one another: in summary – we are to be imitators of Christ. All this is possible only if we live in the hope of a glorious inheritance. We give rather than take because we are children of the One who has given his all so that we may receive Life in Him. We can only live as heirs rather than thieves if we trust joyfully in our inheritance.

Jesus has told us that in this world we will have trouble. He has told us that we will suffer. As imitators of Christ, why would we try to avoid the cross, and demand our crown? Only if we suffer with Him will we be glorified with Him – with a glory that makes our present suffering not worth considering. If we believe Him we will follow Him. We will count everything as rubbish compared with all-surpassing joy of knowing Him.

Only if we are sons of God, and therefore co-heirs with Christ, can we live lives of soberness and godliness in an age of selfish excess and ungodly greed. We can live beneath the shadow of the cross, because we equally live in the light

of the crown to come. While sorrow and grief, hardship and persecution may be our lot now – and must be our lot if we belong to Christ – the resurrection joy that attends our certain hope in Him must also characterise the Lord's church. It is our calling to shine light in the darkness. Joy in a broken world speaks of hope. Hope in a despairing world speaks of God. And those who hear of Him may call upon the name of God and be saved. Let us live as heirs of glory for the sake of the lost living in darkness. To the praise of his glory!

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