

Developments in North America

Since the Christian Reformed Church has its spiritual roots in The Netherlands, we should discuss whether or not the antithesis left its imprint in North America. Since the early CRC settlers were mainly the children of the Secession of 1834, they were not too inclined to follow Abraham Kuyper. Their Calvinism was an orthodoxy of Reformed doctrine mixed with a strong blend of pietism rather than a Calvinism as a world and life view. The post World War II immigrants brought a new interest in the cultural mandate. Separate Christian organizations were founded. The nature of Christian education was thoroughly debated, and concerted Christian social and political action called for.

Cornelius Van Til

Cornelius Van Til, outstanding scholar, and philosopher, for years associated with Westminster Theological Seminary, has stimulated many young Christians in their search for a radical biblical Christianity. He strongly influenced Dr. F. Schaeffer and Dr. E. Runner. However, his position has not been widely accepted.

Van Til draws the lines between two sets of people, the elect and the reprobates. He argues that all knowledge is interpreted by a world and life view. There are no brute facts. The non-Christian uses the gifts of scholarship in an apostate way. Christians and non-Christians understand the world in a radically different way.

R.B. Kuiper

Dr. R.B. Kuiper, former professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, warned against the watering down of the Christian faith. He believed that it must "cling tooth and nail to its Reformed patrimony and must refuse steadfastly to sell even a portion of its Reformed birthright."

Regeneration was Kuiper's basis for the antithesis. And since the Lord and He alone makes dead and alive, it is clear that God is the author of the antithesis. Natural man hates God. His father is the devil (John 8:44). Only he who receives the Savior has power to become the son of God. Kuiper didn't rule out Christians being members in the same organization with unbelievers. But he did say that believers have no place in an organization which, either in its constitution or in its persistent practice, defies the truth of God and His laws. According to him, this principle conceivably rules out "membership of our Christian Reformed people in some labor unions and-who knows-in some associations of employers."

N. Evan Runner

Dr. Evan Runner, an American of Scotch-Irish-Welsh descent, studied at Westminster Theological Seminary, at the Theological School in Kampen with Dr. K. Schilder, at Harvard University and at the Free University with Dr. D.H.Th. Vollenhoven. The latter's influence was decisive. Through his contact with the Philosophy of the Cosmological Idea,

Dr. Runner came to see the importance of the "religious dimension of the heart and the covenant of God and that all the various aspects of life are embraced in that." Dr. Runner defines the antithesis as "the difference of response to the Word of God, which, coming into the world as a revealing light for our life (Ps. 119:105), effectuates with the sovereignty of its Divine Author an abiding line of division between ways obedient and disobedient" (cf. Ps. 1: Prov. 1, 2). The Word of God is the power "that liberates us from the Darkness of the Lie that has darkened the insight of our race (see Job) and sets us in the Light of Truth." The Word of God is the only power that can redirect man's way to blessedness and to covenantal fellowship with God.

Through his enthusiastic and visionary lectures and presentations, Dr. Runner was specially influential among the young Dutch immigrants of the late 1950s and early 1960s, who studied at Calvin College. (Readers who wish to study more about this phenomenon should consult Dr. H. Evan Runner, *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*, and especially Dr. Bernard Zylstra's introductory chapter.)

Dr. Runner is a strong supporter of H. Evan Runner Christian organizations. He encouraged fledgling young institutions and movements when the going was tough and direction was needed.

N. Stob

Dr. Henry Stob, professor emeritus of philosophical and moral theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, and founder of the *Reformed Journal*, developed a view of the antithesis that differs in theory and practice from the Reformed thinkers we have discussed. He writes, "that until in repentance, conversion, and profession intimations are given of its occurrence, we do not know who is regenerate and who is not, we cannot tell with whom we have to do." He believes that it is better to say that the antithesis is between believer and unbeliever, between those who have and those who have not responded to the Gospel. When this is done, the doctrine of the antithesis is made concrete and existential. Underlying the antithesis, and making it possible, is a common stance by all. Mankind shares common human interests, such as a concern for development of agriculture, medicine, architecture, which can be approached from different personal perspectives and motivations. Mankind also shares reason, which .makes it possible for Christians and non-Christians to engage each other in intelligible address, and to conduct meaningful, dialogues and debates."

May a Christian join a neutral or only a Christian organization? Dr. Stob writes that organizations "can be, and in the West usually are, neutral with respect to religious commitments. Most of them are nonideological constructs established to achieve generally human goals. They are indeed not specially Christian, but neither are they anti-Christian; they are simply non-Christian." Labor unions and political parties can be neutral. Within these structures both Christians and non-Christians can and sometimes should cooperate to achieve common goals.

No wonder that Dr. Stob's views have drawn strong reaction from the Kuyperians within the CRC, who strongly and sacrificially support separate Christian organizations. Reformed thinkers have not been consistent. Dr. Runner once said, "The future of Canada and of the North American continent lies in the decision of our hearts." I don't believe it matters, whether the starting point of the antithesis is regeneration, the heart or the covenant. Its practical infiltration of life and thought should be a matter of earnest prayer and utmost concern.

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