

Lecture 33 – “Floods Upon the Dry Ground”: Nineteenth Century Europe

“There is a blessing in hearing others tell how they sought and found the Lord. Reading what certain great spirits have written about their nearness to God can edify us inwardly. It surely can. The humblest poet can learn from Bilderdijk and Shakespeare. The humblest artist can profit by the works of Rubens and Rembrandt.” Abraham Kuyper

“For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.” Isaiah 44:3, 4

Background Reading

Gonzalez, ch. 26, pp. 262-71 and ch. 28, pp. 289-91

Prayer

From the Christian Reformed Church *Psalter Hymnal*

“May the world be filled with Thy knowledge;
 May those ignorant of Thy truth be converted,
 And the weak strengthened.
 May everyone by word and deed magnify Thy holy name.
 To this end send forth faithful servants into Thy harvest,
 And qualify them in such a manner
 That they may faithfully perform their duties. Amen.”

“Floods Upon the Dry Ground”: Nineteenth Century Europe

I. Revival (*Le Réveil*) in French-speaking Europe

A. The Swiss revival

1. Background

a. Turretins

2. Robert Haldane (1764-1842)—*Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*

3. Merle d’Aubigne (*History of the Reformation*) and Louis Gaussen (*Theopneustia*)

4. In 1849 d’Aubigne and others left the state church of Geneva; similar movements in Vaud (1845) and Neuchatel (1873) under Vinet and Godet

B. New life in France

1. Background

2. Frederic and Adolphe Monod

3. The Free Reformed Church (1849)

II. Renewal in the Netherlands

A. Revolutionary (Enlightenment) thought

“In conversation and in writing the dominant note [of the Enlightenment] is that heaven reaches no farther than the stars, that death ends all, and that life without God thrives as well, if not better, than life in the fear of the Lord” (Abraham Kuyper, *To Be Near Unto God*, 25).

B. Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk)

C. Willem Bilderdijk (1756-1831) and “Christian Friends”

D. Groen van Prinsterer (1801-76) and the Anti-Revolutionary movement

E. “The Secession” (Afscheiding) of 1834—Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk)

“Only the Dutch can understand it: the distinction between the two words *gereformeerde* and *hervormd*. For English or German-speaking people it’s very confusing: they only have one word, *reformed*, or, in German, *reformiert*. The two Dutch words have exactly the same

meaning, i.e. reformed. Why are those Dutchmen making things more complicated than necessary?" (Evert Overeem)

"The secession of 1834 may well be called another reformation in the church. Yes, it was small in its beginnings but its influence was indeed great and broad. It came from an unlikely corner of the world [Ulrum in Groningen]. It was not initiated by one who was famous in his own land for his great ability but it was started by a man, a godly minister, who knew that he had to be obedient to his sender and his calling" [Hendrik de Cock (1801-42)] (Henry Vander Kam).

Act of Secession or Return: "We the undersigned, overseers and members of the Reformed congregation of Jesus Christ at Ulrum, having for a long time taken notice of the corruption in the Netherlands Reformed Church, both in the mutilation or denial of the doctrine of our fathers based on God's Word, in the degeneration of the administration of the holy sacraments according to the institution of Christ in His Word, and in almost complete neglect of ecclesiastical discipline..."

"The Secession people were valiant contenders for the faith. They were also often contentious and disagreeable....They made many mistakes. Yet the word of God as understood by these sturdy Dutch Calvinists laid upon them a solemn task to reform church life, home life, educational life" (Mark Vander Hart).

F. *Doleantie* ("the weeping") of 1886

1. The churches of the *Doleantie* merged with most of the secession churches in 1892 to form the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (*Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*)

2. Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

a. Pastor, newspaper editor, and political leader (Prime Minister of the Netherlands)

b. Educator: Free University in Amsterdam (1880)

c. Theologian: Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary (1898)

"He stood before us as a modern Rembrandt's master surgeon, laying bare before his delighted class, the great ligaments and nerve centers of Calvinism as a life-and-world view" (Henry Beets).

"When [Kuyper] came, the preaching of the old religion was largely restricted to the Free-Churches [Secession of 1834], and even there it was often a one-sided Gospel, not calculated to meet the needs of the times. But when he passed away, in almost every part of the Protestant Netherlands the true Gospel was heard, revived and invigorated, and meeting the problems of daily life" (Jan Van Lonkhuyzen, *Princeton Theological Review* 19 (1921): 132-33).

d. Neo-Calvinism

III. New Light in Germany

A. State of Christianity and theological study

Description of theological study in Germany in the 1890s: "Along with the New Testament we read...Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the latest literature...Often enough our faith was like a city under siege by the enemy skepticism" (Theodor Oestreicher).

B. Awakening (*Erweckung*)

C. Leaders of Awakening

1. J. A. W. Neander (1789-1850) and E. W. Hengstenberg (1802-69) at Berlin

2. Friedrich August Tholuck (1799-1877) at Halle

3. Adolf Schlatter (1852-1938) at Tübingen

Schlatter was far too conservative in his approach to the New Testament, and to Christian theology in general, to win a reputation in the university world in which he labored so earnestly. Yet he was also far too scholarly in his approach to problems of theological method and far too willing to engage the leading thinkers of his day to

make much of an impact on the popular pietism of the German-speaking world with which he shared so much” (Mark Noll).

IV. A Lonely Voice in Denmark

A. Sören Kierkegaard (1813-1855)—“The Melancholy Dane”

B. The radical reformer

1. “The religious situation in our country is: Christianity does not exist” (1855).
2. The delusion of the modern, optimistic systems of thought
3. The “otherness of God”

C. The first existentialist

1. Radical separation between God and man
2. The leap of faith
3. Irrationalism (“faith in faith”) or intensity?

D. The triumph of grace?

For Further Study

A. Read the sixth and last of Abraham Kuyper’s famous Stone Lectures on “Calvinism,” delivered at Princeton Seminary in 1898, from *Calvinism: Six Stone Foundation Lectures* by Abraham Kuyper (Eerdmans, 1943), 258-92.

- *What is the theme of his lectures as Kuyper presents it at the beginning of “Calvinism and the Future”?
 - *How does Kuyper’s “prospect of the future” (of a hundred years ago) look today?
 - *Kuyper includes a perceptive review of western thought since the Enlightenment. Why does he describe the French Revolution as “an imitation of Calvinism”? How was the French Revolution in direct opposition to the principles of Calvinism? How did German 19th century philosophical thought differ from French thought?
 - *Notice the striking summary of modern life: “Thus people live in time and for temporal things, and shut their ears to the tolling of the bells of eternity” (169-70).
 - *What, according to Kuyper, has been the major influence of Darwinism?
 - *How did the Kantians try to escape from “the fatal consequences of their principle”?
 - *Notice Kuyper’s sweeping judgment upon the liberalism of the late 19th century—“a quasi-religion utterly powerless to restore our sadly tottering moral life to even a temporary footing” (274).
 - *What was Kuyper’s opinion of the Roman Catholic Church? Why did he think that our hope for the future cannot be “placed in Rome’s endeavour”? Is his judgment valid? Does it still apply?
 - *How do you react to the statement that Protestantism succeeded Catholicism and “hence occupies a spiritually higher standpoint”? Why could one not go one to say that “after Protestantism came modernism” and so modernism represents an even higher belief? Why does Kuyper say that “what modernism offers us is not modern, but rather very antique” (280)?
 - *What two Protestant “tendencies” will fail to promote “a successful advance” against modern criticism? Why do they fail?
 - *Why does Abraham Kuyper believe that Calvinism alone can successfully confront modernism?
- Be encouraged by the statement: “Albeit the Churches reformed in bone and marrow may be small and few in numbers, as Churches they will always prove indispensable for Calvinism; and here also the smallness of the seed need not disturb us, if only that seed be sound and whole, instinct with generative and irrepressible life” (292).

B. Read the sermon, “The Testimony of Jesus: ‘My Kingdom is not of this World’” by Friedrich August Tholuck in *Light from the Cross* by Friedrich August Tholuck (Moody, 1952), 163-75.

- *What is the “burden” of Tholuck’s sermon? How can you apply it to our present-day situation?
- *What is “that blessing which every one of your children must ‘take by force’”?
- *What do you think of Tholuck’s description of the church as a net (on page 171)?
- *In what ways, according to Tholuck, has the kingdom “come”?

C. Read “Attack Upon ‘Christendom’” from *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Random House, 1946), 436-40. A constant refrain in Soren Kierkegaard’s writings is the claim that the contemporary (19th century) church was not a fair example of Christianity but a compromise with worldliness.

- *Do you think that he is too harsh in his criticism of the religious situation in Denmark in his own time?
- *How would you sum up the religious situation in the United States today (or that of your own country)?
- *Is the modern church guilty of “playing Christianity”? Or is it worse?

D. Many of Soren Kierkegaard’s ideas appear in his book *Training in Christianity* (Princeton) which is based on the text “Come hither, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, I will give you rest.” Read pages 9-15. Kierkegaard maintained that it was necessary for the Christian to be “contemporary with [Christ’s] presence on earth as were those [first] contemporaries.” What do think he meant by this?

- *In what ways does does Kierkegaard present the invitation of Christ?
- *What do you think of his presentation of the Gospel message?
- *How does it relate to the theme of his prayer in the following reading?

E. Read the “Prayer for Lovers—and Simple Christians” by Soren Kierkegaard from *Christianity Today*, April 19, 1985.

- *What is the theme of this prayer?
- *How would you describe the theology reflected in this prayer?
- *What part of the prayer is most relevant to your life right now?