

The Boundaries of the Church - Dr. J. Faber

Editorial note: Dr. J. Faber delivered this speech to the congregation of Burlington West on February 19, 1987. The speaking style of this address has been maintained. The subheadings are from the editors of the Clarion.

Taken from the Clarion (1988) Vol.37, No 9 -10

Introduction

The topic for tonight does not speak about the geographical boundaries of the church. Nevertheless, you will understand that the image - for there is an image in that title - is taken from geographical boundaries or limits. So, if you speak about the boundaries or the limits of the church, you are more or less dealing with the question who is in and who is out. Who is within the boundaries and who is outside the boundaries?

And if we speak about that topic of "The Boundaries of the Church" then we have to do basically with two situations. You have to do with the situations of individuals, believers or nonbelievers and where are those believers. Are they inside the church or can there be believers outside the church? So, then you speak about individual believers.

You can also think of communities. Then you come into the topic of the distinction between the true and the false church. The boundaries of the church what do they mean for the topic of the true and the false church?

I come back to that distinction between individuals and communities. But let me immediately say that basically that is the distinction that you find in our Belgic Confession in Article 29 when on p. 462 of our Book of Praise there is spoken about the marks of the true and the false church. Then the Confession says in line 5 from the bottom on p. 462:

"We are not speaking here of the hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church along with the good and yet are not part of the Church, although they are outwardly in it. We are speaking of the body and the communion of the true Church which must be distinguished from all sects that call themselves the Church."

You can say in that passage of our Confession you have a distinction between individuals and communities or bodies. So, that are already two aspects of our topic that we have to keep in mind.

Let me also immediately by way of introduction - I am still busy with introductory remarks - say to you that I do not think that you will get tonight all answers to all questions for basically when we are busy with the topic then we are busy with all kinds of aspects - the work of Christ, the actions of man, the church in the eyes of God and the church in the eyes of man. But we are also busy with the factor of sin in human life and as soon as sin comes into the picture you will never be able to build up a complete harmonious system in which you have answered all questions. That is the destructive power of sin - there is so much sin also with respect to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sin also of the children of God. We all have only a small beginning of the perfect obedience. We also have only a small beginning of the perfect obedience with respect to the church. We should be aware of the fact that because of that factor of sin we cannot exhaustively answer all questions.

That work, let me mention a topic, if you speak about the question whether the baptism of a person who has been baptized outside the church is a valid baptism or not - a well-known question and a very practical question. Then if you study that question then you can try to give an answer to all kinds of questions. I tried to give an answer. [1] But I am aware of the fact that also in that respect you always come into contact with sin which makes it impossible to give a completely harmonious answer, for the situation it's not harmonious. The situation is a situation that has been caused by sin in human life.

And then you will understand that there is another introductory question. You will understand that the question about the boundaries of the church basically is answered by the deeper question about the church itself. What is the church of God? Now I will not repeat what I, for instance, have published in *Clarion* about the Church and the Reformed Confessions. [2] Although also tonight we will touch something of it, but I would like to begin with an historical part in order to show you something of the fact how in the history of the church - in the broadest sense in the history of Christianity there has been much discussion about the topic that we discuss tonight. Then I would like to make some systematic remarks about the topic.

The Donatist heresy

If we speak about the history of this question about the boundaries of the church then I would like to take you back to the struggle against the Donatists. You may ask, who are those Donatists? In what time period are we when we speak about the struggle against the Donatists? Well, we are in the fourth century after Christ. And if we speak about the struggle against the Donatists we speak especially about our brother Augustine who has taken part in that struggle against the Donatists in his own manner. What was the situation? Well, the situation was this - that in 305 there was a very great persecution of the church in the Roman Empire. It was the last persecution but it was certainly not the least persecution and during that persecution of the church in North Africa there had been what we would call ministers who had not been completely faithful. When there was the obligation to hand in Bibles, then some did so. And after that persecution, the question came up - who was good and who was wrong during that persecution? What do we do with ministers of the Word who have been wrong during that persecution? I tell it now in my own words what was the case.

There was in North Africa a man who was ordained to be a minister of the Word or episcopus, overseer of whom some rumoured that he had not been faithful during the persecution. Then there was a group, a staunch group of North African Christians who later received a leader with the name Donatus (therefore they are called Donatists) and that group of staunch North African fiery Christians said - If you have an overseer, a minister of the Word, a bishop who has been wrong during the persecution then he is an unholy man and then the sacraments that he administers are not true sacraments. So the validity of the sacraments was, as it were, combined with, coupled to the holiness of the one who administered the sacraments. Then they placed themselves apart from the Catholic Church.

Basically there in North Africa they established their own schismatic groups and they proclaimed - we are the true church. The Catholic Church is the false church. We are the true church. They built up a whole system and within that system they also took up the idea that only baptism within the true church is true baptism. Therefore if someone joined the sect of the Donatists then he had to be baptized. We would say he had to be rebaptized. But they said he had to be baptized. And they spoke about the church - the true church - as a very closed concrete but also closed, positive entity. And that church was the church of the Donatists in North Africa.

Augustine's response

Then Augustine wrote his books and his pamphlets against those Donatists. And Augustine brought forth all kinds of arguments in connection with the sacraments. I will not go into that now but the main point is that Augustine dealt with the topic of the church and the concept of the church. He made some distinctions. Augustine said to those Donatists - in the first place - you have to distinguish between the church as it is now and the church as it will be after the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those Donatists took the text from Ephesians 5 about the bride of Christ, that the bride of Christ is without spot or wrinkle and they said, - and that was combined with the idea of the purity of the church and the purity of the offices of the church - they said, the bride of Christ is without spot or wrinkle! Then Augustine said, wait a moment, for we are not yet on the new earth! You must make a distinction between the church as it is *now* and the church as it will be after the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, sure, the Lord Jesus Christ will present to the Father His Bride as a Bride without spot or wrinkle. But that is an eschatological promise. That is no reality yet. You have to take that into consideration.

And the following point that Augustine brought forward over against those Donatists is this that he said you speak about the church in a kind of positivistic manner; for you the boundaries of the church are completely clear. He who belongs to the Donatists in North Africa is within the church. And he who does not belong to the Donatists in North Africa is without the church - outside the church. But then Augustine said, but you should refine your speaking about the church. And he took some texts from Scripture in order to explain that.

He took the text from II Timothy 2 where we read in verses 19 and 20:

"God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and 'Let every one who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.' In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble." Now Augustine took that passage of Paul to Timothy and he strongly stressed, the Lord knows who are His. As you know, Augustine was the one who later brought forward, also in the beginning of the fifth century, God's eternal decree over against the Pelagians. The Lord knows who are His. And Augustine said, in that great house of God there are different vessels, not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware. And he said, therefore within the church, within the house of God you must make a distinction. You must know of a distinction. You must know of those who are by the electing grace of God true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and those who although they are in the church are not true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Lord knows who are His.

And then he took another passage from Scripture: I John 2. The apostle John writes the antichrist has come therefore we know that it is the last hour. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that it might be plain that they all are not of us." Then Augustine says, you see here the apostle John makes a distinction between those who were in us and with us, but who were not of us and they have gone out because they were not of us. They were *in* the house but they were not of the house. They seemed to be inside but in reality they were outside. And then Augustine made the distinction between the communion of saints and the communion of the sacraments. That communion of the sacraments is a very large communion. All those who participate of the sacraments. But that communion of the saints is within that communion of the sacraments and that is the communion of the true believers in Jesus Christ. God knows who are His. So he made a distinction between the communion of the saints and the communion of the sacraments.

Augustine also wrote about that there can be wolves within the sheepfold and there can be sheep without the sheepfold. In his book on baptism against the Donatists he said there are some who as yet live wickedly or even lie in heresies or the superstition of the Gentiles and yet even then the Lord knows those who are His. For in that unspeakable foreknowledge of God many who seem to be without are in reality within. And many who seem to be within are really without. You will understand

that this is important for the so-called topic of the boundaries of the church. Augustine says you should speak in a spiritual manner. You can have people who seem to be outside who are in reality within - namely, according to that foreknowledge of God. God knows who are His. And there are people who seem to be inside - think of the hypocrites but in reality they are outside. That was the way in which Augustine tried to overcome that church concept of the Donatists which I call a positivistic church concept.

In that evaluation of the divergence's between the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Canadian Reformed Churches the deputies also have quoted from Augustine, and they have quoted from Augustine because Augustine precisely in that point speaks about the church which is the church in the eyes of God. And you may say that in a certain way when Calvin speaks about the church. (We will come back to this.)

Developments in Rome

if we now go further in the history of the doctrine about the church for a moment, then I must say that that which Augustine had taught did not completely stay within the church. Especially in the Middle Ages and in the time of the Counter-reformation, the Roman Catholic Church came to a rigid position - a rigid position in this respect that only those people are really members of the church who have been baptized and who give themselves obediently to the government of the hierarchy especially of the Pope of Rome.

In the Counter-reformation Roman

Catholics spoke about the church as a visible entity as visible, one wrote, as the Kingdom of Venice or as the Republic of Rome. So visible is the church of God. It has visibility and you can precisely say who are members of that body and who are not members of that body and that body of the Roman Catholic Church is the one holy catholic and apostolic church of the creed.

Now you will understand that that rigid Roman Catholic position could not be completely maintained. Therefore you find in Roman Catholicism all kinds of attempts in order to give opening to the idea that there are believers outside the Roman Catholic Church, while nevertheless the Roman Catholic Church is the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

One of the attempts that the Roman Catholics have undertaken is the attempt of the desire of the church. The Roman Catholic theologians said that baptism is necessary for salvation but they also said that in the case of, e.g., the murderer on the cross there was no possibility for baptism anymore. Nevertheless, the murderer on the cross did not get lost, he entered paradise. Why? Because in his speaking he showed a desire for baptism. That desire for baptism takes in that situation the place of baptism itself. And so they said, if there is a person who lives outside the Roman Catholic Church but he wants to do what is good in the eyes of God then implicitly he has the desire of being a member of the Roman Catholic Church. For that is good in the eyes of God. So there is a desire of the church and that desire of the church gives believers outside the church a certain relationship to the church.

Also, in that Roman Catholic way of thinking, especially about baptism, everyone who is baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit basically has a relationship to the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church is the only true church and the sacrament is the sacrament of the church. So if you are baptized then, whether you know it or not, because of that fact of baptism you basically are under the jurisdiction of the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. For that baptism has an indelible character; it makes a mark that cannot be erased.

Or they came up with the construction of the body of Christ and then they said with a human person you have a body and a soul. Now they said, so it is with the church as the body of Christ. You can make a distinction between the body of the church and the soul of the church. And someone can belong to the soul of the church without belonging to the body of the church. Someone can belong to the body of the church without belonging to the soul of the church. That is one of the ways in which the Roman Catholic doctrine has tried to find an answer to the question about the boundaries of the church.

The Second Vatican Council that was held from 1962 to 1965 made a whole statement about the church and they said there can be elements of the catholic church outside the catholic church and because of those elements of the catholic church outside the catholic church there is a direction towards the catholic church. They then made a whole circle as it were of all kinds of relations to the Roman Catholic Church. Relation of those who are in the Roman Catholic Church and who are true believers. Relation of those who are in the Roman Catholic Church and are not true believers. The relation of those who have been baptized outside the Roman Catholic Church and who nevertheless have a relation to the Roman Catholic Church. That is the way in which Roman Catholicism has tried to answer the questions that arose from their own church concept.

Now over against that Roman Catholic concept of the church as an entity that is there, a positive entity of which the boundaries can completely be sketched, you can say that the Reformers, Luther and Calvin, basically went back in many respects to Augustine. Luther and Calvin had to answer the question where the church was in the Middle Ages. Under the yoke of the pope the church was there, for because of the faithfulness of God the church will always be there. But where was the church in the tenth century - in that dark century of the Middle Ages? Then Luther and Calvin said, if you speak about the church you should not speak about that pompous institution as such. If you speak about the church, you should speak about the church in the eyes of God. God knows who are His and in the same way as in the time of Ahab there were 7,000 who did not bow their knees before Baal, so God in His faithfulness reserved for Himself a people, a remnant according to His electing love. And that remnant according to His electing love was the church. For the church is not qualified by something external. But the church is qualified by something that you cannot see and that is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Calvin

And therefore that especially Calvin in the beginning of his work, wrote about the church as the number of the elect. He does so, for instance, in his first catechism in 1536, but also in his catechism of 1545 (his second catechism). You see that Calvin makes a distinction, in a similar manner as Augustine. In that catechism (1545) Calvin asks the question, "What is meant by the word Catholic or Universal? It is meant to signify, that as there is only one Head of the faithful, so they must all be united in one body, so that there are not several churches but only one, which is extended throughout the whole world." He says, "in what sense do you call the church holy? All whom God has chosen He justifies, and reforms to holiness and innocence, that His glory may be reflected in them. And so Jesus Christ sanctified the church which He redeemed, that it might be glorious and without blemish." And then he asks this question, "Can this church be known in any other way than by believing in her? There is indeed the visible church of God, for the recognition of which He has certain signs, but here (in the Apostles' Creed) we speak properly of the fellowship of those whom He has elected to salvation which cannot be seen plainly by the eye." So Calvin says in his catechism, you must make a distinction between the church in the eyes of God and the church in the eyes of man. He says, "we speak properly of the fellowship of those whom He has elected to salvation which cannot be seen plainly by the eye."

And in his Institutes, Calvin in the same manner writes in Book IV, that you must speak about the church in a twofold manner. He says in Book IV, Chapter 1, section 7:

How we are to judge the church visible, which fails within our knowledge, is, I believe, already evident from the above discussion. For we have said that Holy Scripture speaks of the church in two ways. Sometimes by the term "church" it means that which is actually in God's presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Then, indeed, the church includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world. Often, however, the name "church" designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ. By baptism we are initiated into faith in him; by partaking in the Lord's Supper we attest our unity in true doctrine and love; in the Word of the Lord we have agreement, and for the preaching of the Word the ministry instituted by Christ is preserved. In this church are mingled many hypocrites who have nothing of Christ but the name and outward appearance Just as we must believe, therefore, that the former church, invisible to us, is visible to the eyes of God alone, so we are commanded to revere and keep communion with the latter, which is called "church" in respect to men.

[Trans. F.L. Battles.]

So Calvin makes a distinction between the church in the eyes of God and the church in respect to man. It is one church. He does not speak about two churches. It is one church but he speaks about the one church in a twofold manner. And I hear in that speaking of Calvin in his catechism and in his Institutes the influence of Augustine. Now that influence of Augustine and of Calvin is to be seen in our Belgic Confession, for instance, and in our Heidelberg Catechism.

Let me immediately take up the point more systematically now about the question what is the church and what can we say about the boundaries of the church.

I believe . . .

Now, first of all, I think that we should always start with a point which my teacher, Dr. Klaas Schilder always started. That is this point. Schilder said, we speak, I believe. In the Apostles' Creed, in the original text the church said, I believe a holy catholic church, And in the Nicene Creed we say, we believe one holy catholic and apostolic church. But Schilder underlined then that word, we believe. And he said, you can never approach speaking about the church from what you see before your eyes. You can never approach speaking about the church from your experience. We do not do so with other articles of faith either. You can only speak about the church in faith. And that faith means that you respond to the Word of God, the revelation of God in Scripture. We believe the church and that means you can also say what Scriptures says about faith is a thing by which you grasp what you do not see. But you believe on the basis of God's promise. That is also true with respect to the church.

Let me put it very concretely. Can I see that here is the congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ of Burlington West, by experience. Could not someone who came into your congregational meeting tonight say those people are speaking about the building in the same manner as, let me say, another organization of Protestants speaks about their building; let me say, the Lodge could speak about their building, that they should have a steeple or not, etc. How do I know that you are busy with matters of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? I can only say that by faith, so that should always be our beginning -that we do not build it up by experience, we do not build it up from the visibility of the church. We build it up from what God reveals about the church in His Word.

Then you can say that the Word of God speaks about the church in manifold images and illustrations. But I always take three of those words of Scripture because I recognize in those three words the doctrine of the Trinity of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The church is the church of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. You can say the church is the assembly of the people of God. Then I think especially of the Father. The assembly of the people of God the Father.

You can say the church is the body of Christ. And you can say the church is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The assembly of the people of God, the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The assembly

When I take now that word assembly, then I take a word that you will find in Scripture time and again in the Old Testament, the assembly of the people of God at Zion, for instance, already in the Book of Deuteronomy. But you can also think of the word that is used in Scripture for the church that really means, "the called together assembly." It was even a word that was used in civil life for the assembly of the citizens of a Greek polis, a Greek city. And so the New Testament uses a word for the church - ekklesia that indicates that character of assembly.

Now, Schilder has in connection with that word assembly brought forward this idea that in the French and the Latin translations of the Belgic Confession there are two words used for assembly.

The one word is the word, "congregatio" or "congregation" and the other word is the word, "coetus" or "coming together." And Schilder then said, there you have the two aspects of the church.

First of all, you should see the church as the congregation, the bringing together of the sheep by Christ, the Great Shepherd. And you know that our Heidelberg Catechism in answer to the question, what do you believe concerning the holy catholic church of Christ, that the Heidelberg Catechism speaks about the Son of God who from the beginning of the world till the end gathers for Himself a congregation and defends that congregation and preserves it.

The Son of God gathers a congregation and then again you should see [and I follow now again the teaching of Dr. Schilder in this respect]. You should see that the Catechism speaks then about an ongoing activity of the Son of God. The Son of God gathers His congregation. So by faith I see in this world the Son of God exalted at the right hand of God; by faith I see Jesus at the right hand of God crowned with glory and honour and I see the Lord Jesus gathering His church out of all tribes and tongues and nations. That is His activity. And He is still busy with that activity. That activity will be finished when He comes back in glory. When the last elect will have been brought to faith. And when the Lord Jesus Christ appears, then that activity of the Son of God who gathers His congregation from the beginning of the world to the end is finished.

Christ's work and boundaries

But if I now stress that aspect and, if you now ask me the question about the boundaries of the church, then I say, what boundaries? There is an ongoing activity of the Lord Jesus Christ that is not finished yet. If I speak about the boundaries of the church and if I think then of an area, geographical boundaries, then I can precisely say, there lies the boundary of the church of Burlington West and the church of Burlington South. But if there is an ongoing activity of the risen Lord Jesus Christ who will describe the boundaries of that activity? I cannot! That is a question we cannot answer!

That is the sovereign work of the Shepherd, who said to His disciples, I have other sheep who also have to hear My voice. It shall become one Shepherd, one flock. He is still busy gathering His sheep! Do you know what the Lord Jesus Christ does in Turkey, or in Iran, or in Pakistan? I just yesterday received a letter from a former student, [not of our college but from another college] whom I had taught. He is at the moment a missionary in Pakistan and he writes about how he is learning the language and he is trying to spread the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I heard in Edinburgh a minister sing in Urdu one of the 42 Psalms that have been translated in Urdu, one of the languages of India and then you might face, you might see something and hear something of that ongoing activity of the Lord Jesus Christ who gathers His catholic church out of all the tribes and tongues and nations.

That church, according to our confession, is not bound to one place or bound to certain persons, but is united and dispersed throughout the whole world, but nevertheless, united in one spirit. Do not say to me, you are certainly speaking only about the Reformed churches. No, I am not only speaking about the Reformed churches! I am speaking about the church of God. That church of God that He knows in His eternal decree. That church that will be gathered out of all tribes and tongues and nations. By faith I see the walls of the church building in which I may preach the Word of God, as it were, wider and wider and wider. And I know that by faith I may be a member of that catholic church that the Lord Jesus Christ is busy to gather out of all tribes and tongues and nations. So let us not speak too statically about the boundaries of the church, for at least if you use the image of boundaries then you must say those are boundaries that are continually expanding until the knowledge of the Lord will fill the whole earth as God has promised through the prophet Isaiah.

But probably you will say to me, yes, but that activity of the Lord Jesus Christ also has a preliminary result and that is true. By faith I may see something of that preliminary result of the gathering of the people of God. And then I may indeed say, by faith, that the congregation of which I am a member is an assembly of the people of God. By faith I may say that that congregation of which I am a member is a body of Christ. And I, by grace, may be a member of that body of Christ and may function within that body of Christ. By faith I may say that that congregation is a temple of the Holy Spirit. That is true.

Believers outside

What then about believers outside that congregation? Must I take a very positivist, a rigid position as the Rev. Hoorn did in the Netherlands? The Rev. Hoorn took his confession and he said, Article 27: "We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit." And he looked into the Latin translation by Vestus Hommius of that confession written in French and translated into Dutch. The Latin says even a little stronger yet, the church which is a holy congregation and assembly of all true Christian believers. So he said, the church is an assembly of all Christian believers - that is the church. And he identified that with the congregation of which he was a minister and he said, that is the catholic church. That is the church of all the believers. Then he encountered a little bit, you will understand that, a little bit of difficulty with Article 28: "We believe, since this holy assembly and congregation is the assembly of the redeemed and there is no salvation outside of it, that no one ought to withdraw from it." Yes, he could understand that - no one has to withdraw but it says then: "But all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church." Then he said, that simply means that the members of the congregation on Sunday must faithfully join the congregation of which they are a member. That it means. You cannot say that there are believers outside the church, for the church is the congregation, the assembly of the true believers.

Or there can be another minister probably not in the Netherlands, but for instance, in the Canadian Reformed Churches, who takes that expression of Article 27 and says, the church is a holy congregation, an assembly of all true Christian believers. Now you do not want to say that there are no true Christian believers outside the Canadian Reformed Churches, do you? So the church is the assembly of all God's elect. He took that same question, that same expression and interpreted it basically in the same manner - only he went to the other side. Is that the way in which you have to read what Guido de Brès writes?

If I read, "the church is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers," then I say, yes, that is according to the Word of God; that is what we believe about the church. What is the church? The church is an assembly of what kind of people - of true Christian believers - true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

And if you do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you are not a member of that assembly. If you do not believe in the washing by the blood of Christ, and if you are not sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit then you are not a member of the congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ. You may be 100 times in a register of members of a church but you are nothing but a hypocrite. You are like a kidney stone that is in a human body but which does not belong to that human body. It is in that human body but does not belong to it. So a hypocrite is within the church but he does not belong to the church. To speak with Augustine, (and our confession speaks with Augustine), Augustine says you have to separate from those who do not belong to the church. Who are those who belong to the church? Those are the true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. They belong to the church. And we are speaking of the hypocrites, when Article 29 says, "who are mixed in the Church . . . and yet are not part of the Church." They are in the church but are not part of the church.

For the church is an assembly of true Christian believers washed by the blood of Christ, renewed by His Spirit. And you may say, that the confession now says if that is the church then every true believer does not, may not, ought not to keep by himself. He is to join that assembly to which he basically belongs. You see, we should not forget that we can use the words sometimes in a manner that is a little bit open to misunderstanding. If I say, do all true believers belong to the church then I can use that in the sense of "ought they to be within the assembly of God's people?" Then I say yes, all ought to be in the assembly of God's people. But are all true believers already within the assembly of God's people? Then I say no. Therefore I have to be obedient myself time and again, to call others to obedience in order that they join the true church of Christ. So, in Dutch, that "horen bij of behoren tot" can be taken in two ways. You can say, "horen alle gelovigen bij de kerk?" Yes sure, "die horen alien bij de kerk." They are to be there. "Behoren alle gelovigen tot de kerk?" Then you can say, some believers are disobedient. You have people who live by themselves and read their Bible and read all kinds of edifying words etc., but they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are disobedient children of God and God in His grace will deliver them also from their sin with respect to His church. When they die then all sin will be taken away, also the church sins. They will be on the new earth, but it is not only the question whether they will be on the new earth but for them and the way in which we have to speak to them, the question is are they obedient to God? Do they live as God wants them to live? And therefore in respect to this matter we cannot always answer all questions, we cannot bring it into system. We know one thing and that is, the Lord knows who are His but Paul writes in the same breath that those who call upon His name have to avoid going away from all iniquity. They have to go the right path of obedience. That is, you can say, our responsibility. Basically when I speak about the boundaries of the church then I touch also the topic of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. And we always say, the hidden things are of the Lord our God, the revealed things are for us and our children to do them. Also true with respect to the church.

Distinctions

Now I could say, I myself try to find a kind of a way of expressing things: Then I make this distinction. I say, the church is the assembly of the people of God. But someone can be a child of God and can therefore be a member of God's people without [and this is his sin], joining the assembly of the people of God. So I make the distinction between the people of God and the assembly of the people of God. The people of God ought to be in the assembly but they come not all who are within the people of God. They do not all come to the assembly.

Or I try to make a distinction with respect to the body of Christ. Then I say, if someone believes in the Lord Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, he becomes a member of Christ. Nobody will deny that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, have fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ; that the Lord Jesus Christ is their Head and that they are members of Christ. And as members of Christ they receive the gifts of righteousness and renewal. But not all the members of Christ join the body of Christ. So could we not make a distinction between being a member of Christ and being a member of Christ's body?

And with respect to the temple of the Holy Spirit could we not make a distinction between being in the congregation as a temple and being a temple of the Holy Spirit yourself, that the Holy Spirit dwells in you by His grace. And should we then not in the line of Augustine and in the line of Calvin as it were try to answer some of those questions.

Then with respect to the community, the second aspect that I wanted to speak about, you come to the whole topic of the true and the false church. There you can say our confession gives a demarcation between the true church and the false church and the marks of the true church as mentioned in Article 29 indicate the demarcation between the true and the false church. But also with respect to that topic about the true and the false church it should always be our desire to become obedient more and more ourselves and, if God gives it to us, to bring others more and more to the obedience of faith also with respect to the church.

J. FABER

[1] Dr. Faber dealt with this question in his dissertation, *Vestigium ecclesiae. De doop als 'spoor der kerk'*(Cyprianus, Optatus, Augustinus) 1969 (ed.)

[2] See J. Faber, "The Doctrine of the Church in the Reformed Confessions," *Clarion*, 35:2-4 (1986). [ed.]