

NEWSLETTER

December 2019

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Teaching on church discipline in an evangelical church in the South of France



FOI & VIE RÉFORMÉES

“ AN UNDISCIPLINED CHURCH IS NOT FIT
TO MAKE DISCIPLES ”

A church disciplined, or ectoplasmic?

Dear friends,

In June 1559 John Calvin wrote a letter to the newly established Reformed churches in France - there were no less than 2150 in 1561! -, dealing with the necessary discipline which should be one of the marks of *une église dressée* (a church “standing”, or “set up”). In this remarkable letter, written amidst the severe persecution of Protestants launched by king Henry II, the said discipline concerned the life and doctrine of church members, as well as their access to the Lord’s Supper, all in a spirit of pastoral guidance and patience.

I kept Calvin’s exhortations in mind as I taught on a similar theme in an evangelical church in Orange (South of France) on December 1. This was the logical continuation of several seminars on the topic of sound church governance according to the New Testament, also presented there earlier this year. Evangelical churches are mushrooming in France, but they tend to remain very “ectoplasmic” in doctrine and discipline, in contrast to Paul’s description in Eph. 4:15-16 of *a whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, thus growing up in every way into him who is the head* (Christ). To make my point forcefully, I coined the expression *ecclesia ectoplasma*, which might one day enjoy wide recognition in Reformed theological circles... Evangelical churches desire to make more disciples, which is very commendable of course. The fact remains, though: a church which rejects the Biblical notion of discipline is an *undisciplined church*, and an *undisciplined church* is not fit to make *disciples*, that is, men, women and children trained in systematic obedience and discipline, as the Lord Jesus himself commands his disciples to go and make in Matthew 28:19: ... *teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you*.

Reflecting on the Great Commission of our Lord

Ever since I entered the ministry of the Word, particularly on the French mission field, the Lord’s command to his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20, grounded in his declaration of universal authority given to him by the Father, has been central to my personal meditation. It was therefore a privilege to see an article which I wrote on “Christ’s Fourfold Declaration of Authority” published as editorial in the October 2019 issue of *Unio cum Christo* (an international journal of Reformed theology)

and life). At about the same time, another article of mine appeared, this time in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, about the double knowledge which – according to Calvin at the very beginning of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* – makes the object of our true and sound wisdom: namely that *in knowing God, everyone should also know himself* (in the wording of the final edition of the *Institutes*, in 1560). This text was first presented as a lecture during a Calvin conference held in South Africa in 2016.

FROM JANUARY 2020
THE PODCASTS WILL
BE AIRED ONCE A
WEEK ON
RCF-VAUCLUSE

New openings on the radio front

The day after the seminars on church discipline, with Claude Maugeais (the current French chairman of *Foi et Vie Réformées*) we visited the Roman Catholic radio station RCF-Vaucluse covering this particular district of France and hosted in the archbishop's residence in Avignon. This beautiful city on the Rhône river was once the see of the popes (between 1309 and 1377) when the French kings forced them to reside in France in order to keep them under their control. At RCF-Vaucluse we were informed that the short podcasts I have produced over the years would be aired once a week, starting in January next year. After they were screened by a committee, they were deemed to be of good enough quality and edifying for the listeners of this radio, which for a while has been in search of more biblically oriented material.

We were also treated by the 74 y.o. archbishop with an excellent lunch in his own apartment, in a very congenial spirit. The Roman Catholic system of church governance may not be very biblical, but the food served at the archbishop's residence was certainly of good standard. In any event, it is definitely better to deal with Roman Catholics in France today, than under the reign of king Henry II... During the afternoon, I took part in the recording of a joint radio program with several participants, not only the archbishop, but a local Greek Orthodox priest and a few others. The theme was Matthew chapters 2 and 3, more specifically the visit of the wise men to Jesus in Bethlehem, and Jesus' baptism, and the significance of these events in the history of redemption. I had full latitude to express myself, and had the opportunity to experience the similarities but also the different approaches of the Biblical text brought forward by representatives of various traditions within Christendom.

As we prepare to our celebrate the wonder of the Incarnation of our Savior, let us remember that He who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was also anointed as the true Messiah by the same Spirit descending on him under the form of a dove at the time of his baptism in the Jordan river, that by the shedding of his precious blood we may be redeemed for a life of obedience and sanctification as his disciplined *disciples*.

Rev Eric Kayayan

Taking part in a radio program at
Radio RCF-Vaucluse in Avignon



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