

ESSENTIAL TRUTHS

In the Heart of a Christian



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In the Heart of a Christian

Wilhelmus Schortinghuis



Translated by Harry Boonstra
and Gerrit Sheeres

Edited by James A. DeJong



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Series Preface



The *Nadere Reformatie* (a term translated into English as either the “Dutch Second Reformation” or the “Further Reformation”) paralleled the historical and spiritual development of English Puritanism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From its teachers came the watchword of post-Reformation piety: *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* (“The church always being reformed”).

Proponents of the *Nadere Reformatie* used that phrase to indicate their commitment to the doctrinal and ecclesiological reforms of the Reformation of the sixteenth century as well as to the ongoing reformation of the church. Their intent was not to alter Reformed doctrine. Rather, they proposed the development of a life of piety based on that doctrine within Reformed churches that, in turn, would impact all spheres of life.

Dutch scholars responsible for a periodical on the *Nadere Reformatie* recently formulated the following definition of the movement:

The Dutch Second (or “Further”) Reformation is that movement within the Dutch Reformed Church during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which, as a reaction to the declension or absence of a living faith, made both the personal experience of faith and godliness matters of central

importance. From that perspective the movement formulated substantial and procedural reformation initiatives, submitting them to the proper ecclesiastical, political, and social agencies, and pursued those initiatives through a further reformation of the church, society, and state in both word and deed.¹

To further their program of active personal, spiritual, ecclesiastical, and social reformation, the writers of the *Nadere Reformatie* produced some of the finest, most profound literature in the Protestant tradition. Furthermore, because the Dutch Reformed piety of the seventeenth century grew out of Reformed orthodoxy and included among its founders and exponents several erudite orthodox theologians—such as Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Johannes Hoornbeeck—the works of the *Nadere Reformatie* do not give evidence of the kind of antagonism between theology and piety that belonged to the Pietist phase of German Lutheranism. Rather, the proponents of the *Nadere Reformatie* offered a balance of doctrine and piety as well as theology and life that has seldom been equaled in church history.

The *Nadere Reformatie* has generally been overlooked in English-speaking circles due to the lack of primary sources in English. The numerous works of famous dogmaticians such as Voetius and Hoornbeeck or of pastors such as Theodorus à Brakel, Jodocus van Lodenstein, and Godefridus Udemans have remained untranslated until now. Exceptions are Alexander Comrie's *ABC of Faith*, first published in English in 1978; Wilhelmus à Brakel's *Christian's Reasonable Service*, translated into English and published in four volumes in 1992–1995; and those volumes published in this present series.

The present series addresses the need for further translation of these “old writers,” as they are affectionately called by those who know them in Dutch. It also contributes significant biblical and historical insights to the contemporary emphasis on discipleship and spirituality.

In this series, the editors and translators present a representative sampling of the writings of this vibrant movement, along with introductions that open both the texts and the lives of the various authors to the modern reader. The series is intended for the lay reader as well as for pastors and scholars, all of whom should benefit from

1. *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 19 (1995): 108.

this introduction to the literature of the *Nadere Reformatie* movement, much as the Dutch have benefited from the translation of numerous English Puritan works into their language.

On behalf of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society,
Joel Beeke
James A. De Jong
Richard Muller
Eugene Osterhaven

Introduction

Wilhelmus Schortinghuis



Place in the Dutch Further Reformation Movement

The author of the short instruction manual on the Christian faith translated and presented here represents the twilight of the Further Reformation. Jean Taffin, often acknowledged as the forerunner of the movement, made his contributions to Dutch Reformed literature on discipleship in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Willem Teellinck, widely considered to be the father of the movement and a strong link to the English Puritan devotional material, wrote in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Gisbertus Voetius, distinguished for his academic stature and breadth as a professor in Utrecht, articulated major themes of the Further Reformation in the mid-seventeenth century. His many students disseminated and embellished these themes and gave the movement a clearly defined shape in its maturity; they articulated a sharp and distinct alternative to the cultural indulgence of the so-called golden age of the Dutch Republic, making their mark in the second half of that century. Wilhelmus Schortinghuis reflects the twilight of the Further Reformation in the Netherlands, with many of the afflictions common to that stage in life. By 1750, the year of his death, the movement was virtually comatose as a force in Dutch national life.

Movements of any sort, religious or otherwise, wax and wane. They are sparked by living issues for which they pose contemporary answers. Taffin was a Reformed francophone pastor in modern Bel-

gium when it reverted to Roman Catholicism under Spanish military coercion. Persecuted and a refugee, he counted the cost of discipleship and wrote eloquently about the blessings of keeping the faith under severe duress. As court chaplain to William the Silent, the Dutch liberator, he was instrumental in shaping the emerging Reformed church. Similarly, Willem Teellinck was embroiled in the struggle for a pure, true church at exactly the time when powerful forces compelled the Dutch Reformed Church and the Anglican communion during the reigns of James I and Charles I to be accommodating, tolerant, and inclusive religious establishments. And Voetius, the dominant figure at a leading university in the Netherlands, directed his considerable intellectual prowess toward a wide range of theological, pastoral, and church organizational issues on a much wider agenda than Teellinck's; that he did so with evangelical warmth and genuineness only enhanced rather than detracted from his relevance.

Fred A. van Lieburg, a longtime and broadly informed student of the Further Reformation, contends that as the movement matured it became increasingly culturally disengaged, moralistic, introspective, and rigid.² It not only criticized religious formalism, doctrinal indifference, neglect of prayer and church attendance, and doctrinal ignorance. It lamented that the church widely neglected discipline of those only nominally religious who led morally dissolute lives. Leaders in the movement condemned theater attendance, dancing, pursuit of luxuries, and ostentatious displays of wealth and success. In time, adherents of the movement adopted a distinct style of dress, plain and dark, that distinguished them from the cultural mainstream. Preoccupation with correct behavior led to their being identified as "legalists," "precisianists," "puritans," "bigots," "fanatics," and "pharisees." Often they even adopted an affected style of speech that set them apart from their neighbors. Even the style of preaching became highly stylized, distinguishing various categories of church attenders (the unconverted, the careless, the head-knowledge Christians, the practicing Christians, those with little faith, the anxious, the self-deceived, the grace-filled believers, etc.) and pointedly analyzing and

2. One of his best, most accessible essays in English on the subject remains Fred A. van Lieburg, "From Pure Church to Pious Culture: The Further Reformation in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic," *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham, vol. 23, *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* (Kirksville, MO: Northeast Missouri State University, 1994), 409–430.

addressing each category in sermons.³ Preoccupation with subjective religious experience as an indication of one's spiritual condition characterized the movement throughout its history.⁴

By Schortinghuis's day, several thousand Further Reformation titles had appeared in print, fully a third of them translations of Puritan works. The most popular titles went through numerous editions. The greatest proportion of this material consisted of indictments of spiritual deficiencies in personal and public life, as well as prescribed corrections. Another subset of material was designed as devotional, catechetical, and practical guides for individual and family spiritual growth. Then, more comprehensive statements of Christian doctrine and practice as well as monographs on specific religious issues and topics rounded out Further Reformation material.⁵ Schortinghuis's little catechism, here translated into English for the first time, represents the second category. Wilhelmus à Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, which first appeared in 1700, reflects the third category and is undoubtedly the most comprehensive and durable presentation of Further Reformation spirituality and theology.⁶ It was widely circulated and read by Dutch-reading descendants of the movement into the twentieth century—one of the favorites and most balanced among the “old writers.” Schortinghuis, however, belonged to the second or third tier of the several dozen most prominent names associated with the Further Reformation.

3. T. Brien, *De Prediking van de Nadere Reformatie*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1981), remains an exhaustive analysis of the preaching of the Further Reformation. Categories of attenders evolved and varied with representatives of the movement. Similar classification is found in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, a work translated into Dutch and widely read in Further Reformation circles.

4. David J. Engelsma, “The Gift of Assurance: The Spirit of Christ and Assurance of Salvation,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, 42, 2 (April 2009): 3–46, argues exegetically that the doctrine of assurance that is related to subjective experience and that dominates Puritan and Further Reformation literature is a regression from rather than an advance of Reformation theology. A treatment that sees continuity between Calvin's thought and these movements on the matter of assurance is Joel Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

5. Van Lieburg, 424–25.

6. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1997–99).

His Life

Wilhelmus Schortinghuis was born on February 23, 1700, in the village of Winschoten, located in the Province of Groningen, the Netherlands. His father and mother were devout Reformed Christians who belonged to the burger class. His father, Jurgen Willems Schortinghuis, was a baker by trade. His mother, Trijntje Sikkes Schildkamp, died when Wilhelmus was only four years old. Wilhelmus showed an early interest in education, and at age eleven his father enrolled him in the local Latin school. When his father died a year later, however, it became financially impossible for him to continue his studies there, and he became an apprentice to a silversmith. After five years in that trade, and with great determination and sacrifice, he continued his education. At age nineteen Schortinghuis enrolled at the University of Groningen to study theology.

At Groningen, Schortinghuis studied under Otto Verbrugge and Anthonius Driessen, neither of whom was especially noteworthy. Both had been recently appointed (in 1717). Mild-mannered Verbrugge was a Voetian who taught biblical languages and avoided theological conflict. Driessen was a professor of theology and chaplain at the academy. He was a follower of Cocceius, although by this time most of the antagonism between the two theological parties had dissipated.

Driessen was intrigued by mystical spirituality and familiarized his students with the various profiles or types of Christians discussed in that era. He later had a conversion experience along pietistic lines. Over the years a genuine spiritual kinship developed between Schortinghuis and Driessen, who by the 1740s defended the immediate working of the Holy Spirit and the possibility of extraordinary revelation. Alexander Comrie (1706–1774), another representative of the Further Reformation, was also one of Driessen's students and wrote about the professor's conversion. Both students eclipsed their teacher in influence.

Four years after matriculating, Schortinghuis passed his ministerial candidacy examination. He accepted the call to become a minister of the Word in Weener. Weener is a town in Lower Saxony, Germany, on the Ems River, just east of the Dutch border and twenty miles south of the port of Emden. The city is in what is known as East Friesland, part of the northern coastal territory in the modern Netherlands and Germany occupied initially by the Germanic tribe called the Friesians. Since the earliest days of the Reformation and right up to Schortinghuis's day, East Friesland was a center of Reformed



Map of the East Friesland region in which Schortinghuis served only two churches, Weener in present-day Germany and Midwolde, a Dutch village just across the border.

Christianity. Before assuming the Weener pastorate, Schortinghuis married Aletta Busz, daughter of a Reformed minister.

Schortinghuis succeeded Rev. Eduard Meiners, a well-known pastor who subsequently wrote a church history of the area (*Oostvrieschlands Kerkelyke Geschiednisse*, two volumes, published in Groningen in 1738 and 1739). The position he accepted was a second pastorate. The senior position was held by an older, devout pastor named Henricus Klugkist, who was distinguished by godliness and his fruitful Christian life. Schortinghuis drew encouragement from

CHAPTER

1

About the Knowledge of God from Nature

- Q. 1. What is theology or the knowledge of God?
- A. A word or explanation of God, from God, before God, and to God; or knowledge of truth according to godliness (1 Peter 4:11; Rom. 3:2; Rom. 11:36; Titus 1:1).
- Q. 2. What is the knowledge of God about?
- A. About God's being, attributes, works in nature and in the grace of Christ; and therefore it is more excellent than all other knowledge (Prov. 4:7).
- Q. 3. In whom is the knowledge of God found fully, to a greater or lesser degree?
- A. In God Himself (1 Cor. 2:7), in Christ (Matt. 11:27), in the holy angels (Matt. 18:10), in the believer in heaven (2 Cor. 5:7), and on earth (2 Cor. 5:7).
- Q. 4. How do you divide the knowledge of God?
- A. Among other ways, in a searching (Heb. 11:6) and an effective (1 John 3:23) manner, in a natural and a revealed manner (Matt. 16:17).
- Q. 5. Is there a naturally created and a received knowledge of God in man?
- A. The created knowledge is undoubtedly clear to the ungodly

(Rom. 1:19; Rom. 2:14) and from the common agreement of all people. The received [knowledge] is evident in three ways: (1) from observing myself and all creatures (Ps. 19:2; Job 12:9); (2) more clearly from God's Word; and (3) from the light of grace (Gen. 15:1).

Q. 6. Is the knowledge from nature opposed to that revealed in God's Word?

A. No, because light cannot be opposed to light, nor truth against truth, since they are grounded in the God of truth. Therefore, they are called pure milk and belong to true religion (1 Peter 2:2; Rom. 12:1).

Q. 7. Is the knowledge of God from nature sufficient unto salvation?

A. Even though it is necessary and useful, it is not sufficient for man's salvation, because it cannot teach Christ's imputed righteousness (John 14:6; Matt. 16:17; Phil. 3:9) and true faith (Heb. 11:6; Rom. 10:17).

Q. 8. What is the revealed knowledge of God?

A. That which is obtained through God's extraordinary revelation, through dreams (Gen. 37:5), visions (Ex. 3:2), appearances (Dan. 9:21), and God's speaking (Num. 12:8); through ordinary proclamation of the Word (Rom. 10:14); and through the light received from the Holy Spirit (Ps. 119:18).

Q. 9. Is it sufficient to have merely superficial knowledge of God?

A. If anyone is to be saved, he must know God in Christ, with all essential truths of the holy gospel— affectively, effectively, and experientially (Eph. 4:21; Job 24:13).

Q. 10. What, then, is the sum of all knowledge?

A. That one learn, from the written text and experientially, that as a sinful person one is rescued and saved through the crucified Christ to God's glory (1 Cor. 2:2; John 20:31).

CHAPTER 2

About Religion

- Q. 1. What is religion?
- A. Religion in whatever languages is a right way of knowing, acknowledging, and serving God in Christ according to His will, to the honor of God and to the salvation of the elect sinner (Titus 1:1–2; Ps. 25:8).
- Q. 2. Are there also false religions?
- A. Yes! (1) The religion of the heathens, (2) of today's Jews, (3) of the Turks, and (4) of apostate Christians.
- Q. 3. Can one be saved in all religions?
- A. Because there is only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Eph. 4:5), no one will be saved except he who is united with Christ, established according to the Word of God (John 14:6; Eph. 3:17).
- Q. 4. From what is true religion derived?
- A. From God's worthiness and supreme sovereignty (Jer. 10:6–7), from our dependence on Him, and from His ordinary and extraordinary blessings on us (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 6:20).
- Q. 5. What are the principal parts of religion God gives for our practice?
- A. These are (1) discovering the mysteries of faith (John 17:3);

- (2) advocating His promises in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20); and (3) keeping the commandments as required (Ps. 119:4).
- Q. 6. What are the parts that a believer from his side has to fulfill?
- A. These are: (1) developing true knowledge of God in Christ (John 17:3), and (2) sincerely doing and fulfilling what pleases God in Christ (John 13:17).
- Q. 7. What are the duties of religion?
- A. These are the duties growing directly from its nature and supported by God's command; or also, those that are a mixture of the internal and external aspects of religion (Ps. 38:10; Ps. 50:5; Luke 18:13).
- Q. 8. What are the basics that must be known for salvation?
- A. Although it is not completely necessary to determine their exact number or to embellish them too much, for salvation a pious person must have knowledge (1) of God (John 17:3), (2) of Christ the Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), and (3) of the way of faith. These are necessary in order to come to God through Christ (John 14:6).
- Q. 9. What is opposed to true religion?
- A. Godlessness, superstition, unbelief, heresy, apostasy, schism, and all kinds of errors in doctrine and life (Eph. 6:11; Ps. 125:5; Eph. 4:14).
- Q. 10. What are the marks of true religion?
- A. Ones that teach us (1) to revere God most highly (Ps. 115:1); (2) to humble ourselves completely (Matt. 16:24); and (3) to press earnestly toward pure, inner godliness (Titus 1:1).
- Q. 11. Where are all these marks found untainted?
- A. In the religion of true Reformed Christians who learn them all from God's Word and experience them through the Holy Spirit's leading. This produces religion in which God is everything and the creature is nothing (Ps. 115:1).
- Q. 12. How does religious doctrine help you?
- A. It helps me (1) learn to serve God in the Spirit by laying aside all false ideas and sources of support (John 4:24) and (2) confess His name and truth in Christ with my heart and my mouth (Rom. 10:10).