

ontvang het, moet ook die sonde wat sy naaste teen hom begaan het, kan vergewe.

Die tienduisendsyfer van die gelykenis, waarop 'n mens se gedagtes onwillekeurig gerig word deur die tweemaal tienduisend van die lastersaak, herinner aan die sondaar se onbetaalbare skuld voor God waarin ons almal op gelyke voet staan. Prof. Pont se twee skuldeisers het geen ander keuse, wat in verantwoordelikheid voor God, gedoen kan word, as om hom te vergewe nie. Wát hulle hom moet vergewe, is nie in die eerste instansie die tweemaal tienduisend rand (ten opsigte waarvan sy aanmoedigers by hom sowel as by die eisers onder 'n morele verpligting staan nie) maar die onbetaalbare skuld wat nóg hy nóg sy mede-verantwoordelikes met 'n geldbedrag kan uitwis. Per slot van sake lê dit ook nie in die eisers se mag om 'n sonde te vergewe waarvan in die grond van die saak bely moet word: „Teen U alleen . . . “ nie (Ps. 51:6). Maar terwyl albei partye, met 'n onbetaalbare skuld aan beide kante, in die waarheid van die goddelike vergiffenis gestel is, behoort die geldelike

skuldbedrag waaroor die eisers beheer het, die tweemaal tienduisend wat prof. Pont klaarblyklik nie het nie, kwytsgekeld te word by wyse van 'n geloofs-demonstrasie dat skuld wat in terme van geld in elk geval onbetaalbaar is, nie onvergeeflik is nie, nie by God nie en daarom ook nie by die mense nie.

Dit is hartverblydend dat die twee belasterde skuldeisers hulle reeds in die openbaar bereid verklaar het om hulle, met hulle eis teen prof. Pont en sáám met hom, te stel onder die veroortmoedigende vergiffenis waaruit hulleself en hy en ons almal lewe. En nou wag hulle op prof. Pont om hulle dáár te ontmoet, voor die aangesig van dié God wat dié gebroke en verslae hart nie verag nie. Dáár alleen en in dié gesindheid alleen kan daar onder mede-sondaars iets sigbaar word van wat voor God gebeur met almal wat opreg hulle sondes bely. En dit spreek vanself dat prof. Pont nie siel-alleen, sonder hulle wat agter en rondom hom gestaan het, tot so 'n ontmoeting behoort toe te tree nie.

Editorial:

Unpayable Debt

The financial debt of Dr. A. D. Pont, the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk professor in Church History at the University of Pretoria, is unpayable as far as his own means are concerned. He has been ordered by the court to pay damages of ten thousand Rands each to the two "fellow-theologians" libelled by him, apart from their legal costs which amount to thirty-eight thousand Rands.

It now proves that Prof. Pont, although he was probably conscious of what it can cost one if one slanders the good name of an honourable fellow-man, and although he knew the value of every hour and minute in terms of money while he was delivering his protracted discourses in the witness box, has practically nothing with which to pay up. The financial debt which he brought upon himself will either have to be paid for him by someone else or it will have to be written off.

Prof. Pont stands relatively alone in this matter and, as far as this debt in which he has landed himself is concerned, most people can regard him from a distance and reach either a sympathetic or an indignant and astonished or a contemptuous or — and even this is actually proving to be the case! — an admiring judgment concerning the history he himself has "made" on this occasion.

But Prof. Pont's real debt in this matter cannot be calculated in terms of money. The fact that he cannot pay his debt in Rands and cents is somehow symbolical of the unpayability of the debt he owes two fellow-men for that of which he robbed them in reality. And in this respect neither he nor the two fellow theologians towards whom he stands in debt stand alone as parties. For these two fellow-theologians were picked in his campaign of libel as representatives of a particular school of thought

which is determining the course along which the Church of Christ is progressing in the world at present. We might well delineate it as the course on which the Church is headed in the realisation of its ecumenical vocation and along which it is advancing in an increasing awareness of its solidarity with the world also in its political, social and economic need. It is from this wide context of the Church of Christ as it sees itself at present standing in the world in the execution of its vocation that Prof. Pont picked out two fellow-theologians to serve as the victims of the whiplashes of his unprecedented libel, with the obvious approval and acclamation of some.

In this action Prof. Pont truly did not stand alone in his heroic struggle against those whom he had set up as enemies for himself. Far rather, he was the **enfant terrible** of a somewhat more subtle but equally calculated and merciless campaign of libel which was waged (and is still being waged) by a wide circle of men against the cause against which, and against the representatives of which, he took up the arms of dishonour. For even in spite of the protective and threatening function of the libel laws obtaining in our country, those who are clever enough not to be caught out by the law can essentially still say exactly what Prof. Pont said and achieve the same purpose as he achieved without necessarily landing in the dilemma in which he landed. Prof. Pont was — even though it sounds almost blasphemous to put it thus — surrounded by a host of witnesses. He — very figuratively speaking — had his "Aarons" and his "Hurs" holding high his hands.

So, for example, a well-known minister of the Ned. Geref. Kerk, who is also one of the trustees of the fund established to assure Prof. Pont of legal

assistance, came to thank him one day after a session of the court for what he was "doing for us here". And apart from the direct pact of confederacy within which Prof. Pont stood, his actions cannot be regarded in isolation from those of quite a number of political newspapers and ecclesiastical journals over the years.

One would have expected these persons and institutions now to regard themselves as morally honour-bound to bear the financial burden to the last cent with or on behalf of their loquacious spokesman, whose incurring this debt upon himself would have been quite inconceivable without their direct or indirect encouragement. Far be it from us, despite the most extreme provocation, to suspect them of such a measure of infamy that they have no wish to do what has remained undone. The alternative is that they **cannot** do it. Now Prof. Pont is struck with all the shame and damages. And this very aloneness of his in the hour of financial need is most strikingly symbolical of the real unpayable debt with which he is confronted, while his host of witnesses are most intimately tied up with him in this matter. Even though they were to have the Rands and cents to deliver Prof. Pont from his financial distress, the real debt which they share in common with him must, like his financial debt, either remain debited to them or must be written off. Neither they nor Prof. Pont can ever liquidate it themselves.

Prof. Pont stands confronted by the two creditors with their ten thousand Rands each. Although undoubtedly not deliberately thus decreed by the judge and upheld by the judges of the appeal court, this figure of ten thousand leads one's thoughts straight to the gospel. Somewhere in a parable of Jesus we see a debtor falling to the feet of his creditor and pleading with him to display clemency with regard to his debt of ten thousand talents — a figure in this case deliberately selected by Jesus to indicate the unpayable debt of the sinner towards God (Mt. 18:24f). And yet a complete remission takes place. And in this parable the light of the eternal gospel dawns for all who thus genuinely confess their sins . . . But — and this, too, is inherent

in the parable -- whosoever has received such a complete remission from God must also be able to forgive the sin perpetrated against himself by his neighbour.

The figure of ten thousand in the parable, to which one's thoughts are involuntarily directed by the twice ten thousand in the libel case, reminds us of the sinner's unpayable debt towards God in which all of us have an equal share. Prof. Pont's two creditors have no other choice responsibly to be made before God than to forgive him. What they have to forgive him is not in the first place his indebtedness of twice ten thousand Rands (with regard to which those who incited him are morally indebted to him as well as to the creditors), but the unpayable debt which neither he nor those co-responsible can liquidate with a mere sum of money. In the final analysis, it also does not lie within the power of the creditors to forgive a sin concerning which the confession basically has to be made: "Against thee, thee only . . ." (Ps. 51:4). But since both parties, with an unpayable debt on both sides, are placed in the truth of divine forgiveness the financial sum in debt over which the creditors have control the twice ten thousand which Prof. Pont obviously does not possess, should be written off by way of a demonstration of faith, that a debt which is unpayable in terms of money in any event is not unforgiveable, neither with God and therefore not with men.

It is extremely heartening that the two slandered creditors have already publicly declared themselves prepared, in their claim against Prof. Pont, to place themselves together with him under the humbling forgiveness to which both they and he and all of us owe our lives. And now they wait upon Prof. Pont to meet them **there**, before the countenance of that God who does not despise the broken and penitent heart. Only there and in this spirit alone something can become visible amongst fellow-sinners of what happens before God with all who genuinely confess their sins. And it is self-evident that Prof. Pont should not enter such an encounter alone and all by himself, without those who stood behind and around him.

VERSOENING

Die versoening het buite ons en vir ons geskied sonder enige medewerking van ons kant. Deur die Heilige Gees word hierdie heil gebring in die denke, die hart en die handele van mense wat tot 'n „gemeente” versamel is, en daardeur ook in die denke, die hart en die handele van die afsonderlike mense. Hierdie Gees bring ons te binne, maak ons indagtig alles wat Jesus Christus gesê en gedoen het. In die prediking word ons deur Hom aangesê: „Laat

julle met God versoen”. Van binne uit laat Hy ons dit aanvaar dat die oordeel van God oor ons lewe waar is en oortuig Hy ons van sonde. Hy leer ons om in die geloof ons toevlug te neem tot hierdie Heer. Hy bring ons tot die lofprysing vanweë die versoening met God en met onself, tot getuienis en gemeenskap vanweë die versoening ook met die ander en met alle dinge. Hy laat die versoening

hom verwerklik in: gehoorsaamheid, diensbetoon, heiliging, stryd vir geregtigheid, bevordering van die versoening tussen mense en volke. Hy laat ons lewe uit die hoop op die volcinding, te wete die verwagting van 'n nuwe hemel en 'n nuwe aarde.
(Uit: **De Tussenmuur Weggebroken**, Herderlijke Brief van de generale synode van de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk over de prediking van de Verzoening, 1967).