

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).