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Keith C. Sewell

Dordt College

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In all Things, Hear the Word: A Response to Laurence Sibley



by Keith C. Sewell

It was kind of Laurence Sibley to reply (*Pro Rege*, March 2005) to my discussion of “Some Thoughts on ‘the Reformation’ as a Contemporary Icon” (*ibid*, September 2002). Space does not permit an extensive discussion of all the matters raised, but the clarification of some points would seem to be appropriate. I tried to inject some tentativity into my discussion because so-called “ideal types” hardly ever come to historical expression in what might be called “pure form.” I do accept that there is some post-reformation confluence between the Anabaptist traditions and those whom we might

Keith C. Sewell is Professor of History and Chair of the History Department at Dordt College.

call latter-day neo-Puritans. Perhaps this is why many of the latter (in the line of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1834-92) rejected paedobaptism. As to the noble John Hooper (martyred 1555), it seems to me to be just a little anachronistic to call him a “puritan” – he was a man who was deeply committed to seeing the English Church adopt the outlook of Zürich, hence his deep disagreement with Thomas Cranmer (martyred 1556). The term “puritan” only seems to have gained currency in England in the early/mid 1560s. It took a century of struggle by such Puritans before it became clear that the vision of Hooper for the Church of England was a lost cause. Also, the “regulative” and “directional” approaches have sometimes functioned within the same denominational setting. I certainly concur with the importance of Acts 2:42 in understanding the approach of the reformers towards public worship, and I, for one, would like to see more psalm singing amongst us. But here we get close to the key issue that I was seeking to raise. It seems to be that if we adopt the standpoint of the regulative outlook, we are liable to become bound to forms of fundamentalism. The literalism of the latter precludes our seeing the teaching of the scriptures as giving direction in circumstances unanticipated by the biblical writers themselves. As a result, we too easily lose sight of the truth that the call to discipleship extends to our lives as citizens, workers, thinkers, consumers, and so forth, and is not restricted to our lives as church-congregation members. The Psalms are important because they place us not only in a church institutional setting but also in the entire order of creation, within which all human culture is called to praise and honor the living God.